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THE INTERPRETER FOUNDATION AND AN APOSTOLIC CHARGE

Daniel C. Peterson

Abstract: *In April 2006, Dallin H. Oaks, in unpublished remarks at the naming of the Neal A. Maxwell Institute for Religious Scholarship (as the successor to FARMS), reminded listeners that “this institute belongs to God.” On November 10, 2018, Elder Jeffrey R. Holland (also in unpublished remarks, titled “The Maxwell Legacy of the 21st Century”) renewed that commitment: the Institute should be “as faithful as eternal truth, and as bright as the light of truth that is in us.” This is, likewise, the vision of The Interpreter Foundation, in contrast to Latter-day Saint “academic ventures” at some universities. It should be “significantly different from the present national pattern,” Elder Holland emphasized. “There are times when our faith will require an explicit defense.” The Interpreter Foundation aspires to be in the fore of any such efforts.*

In unpublished remarks presented on 26 April 2006 at a relatively small dinner celebrating the naming of the Neal A. Maxwell Institute for Religious Scholarship, Elder Dallin H. Oaks, then of the Quorum of the Twelve Apostles of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints (and currently first counselor in the Church’s First Presidency), was forthright: “This institute belongs to God,” he said.

It must pursue an unconditional commitment to His cause, without any obsessions or any cultivation of cheering constituencies.

The work of the Neal A. Maxwell Institute for Religious Scholarship must be genuine and pervasive — as broad as the

spiritual interests of the children of God, as faithful as eternal truth, and as bright as the light of truth that is in us.¹

As one of the leaders of the Maxwell Institute (formerly known as the Foundation for Ancient Research and Mormon Studies, or FARMS) at that time, I was present for that memorable dinner, at which President Boyd K. Packer of the Twelve also spoke to us. (I hope that someday the texts of both speeches will be publicly available.) It was a thrilling evening and an inspiring one. Their vision of the work of the Maxwell Institute was also ours, and I hope and believe it is the vision of those of us involved today with The Interpreter Foundation. It was also an emotional evening for us as well as for others, including members of the Maxwell family who were in attendance. Elder Maxwell, who had died nearly two years before, on 21 July 2004, had been a beloved friend and an open, articulate, encouraging supporter of our efforts.

On Saturday evening, 10 November 2018, Elder Jeffrey R. Holland of the Council of the Twelve delivered the 2018 Neal A. Maxwell Lecture on the Provo, Utah, campus of Brigham Young University. His remarkable address, given under the auspices of the University's Neal A. Maxwell Institute for Religious Scholarship, was entitled "The Maxwell Legacy in the 21st Century."

"I am speaking only to the work of the Maxwell Institute tonight," Elder Holland said, "and not to the whole of BYU's academic effort." Still, he added, "I hope that much I say will apply across the entire campus and beyond" (1).

In my judgment, his remarks indeed apply beyond his immediate audience at the Maxwell Institute, and in what I hope is the spirit of 1 Nephi 19:23, I will make an effort here to begin to apply them to the work of The Interpreter Foundation, with which I have been associated since it was launched shortly after my departure from the Maxwell Institute in 2012: "I did liken all scriptures unto us," wrote Nephi, "that it might be for our profit and learning."

The 2018 Neal A. Maxwell Lecture offers us, along with those at the Maxwell Institute, an opportunity to evaluate what we're doing in the light of the teachings and priorities of those who have been divinely called to lead the Church at this time — and a chance to correct our course, if that should prove necessary. The Swiss Protestant theologian Karl Barth (1886–1968), borrowing a phrase associated with St. Augustine, famously insisted that the

1. Cited in Jeffrey R. Holland, "The Maxwell Legacy in the 21st Century" (unpublished remarks, Brigham Young University, Provo, UT, November 10, 2018), 9. The pagination is that of a copy of the text, in my possession, which — including endnotes — runs ten pages. Hereafter, page references to Elder Holland's speech are provided in the main text. I quote from his remarks with his express permission.

Christian church must be *semper reformanda*, “always reforming” or “always reformed.” I like the phrase and the sentiment behind it, and I believe it is true of all of us as individuals and of every organization.

Elder Holland’s speech had much to say about contemporary academia, which, in a sense, is extraneous to The Interpreter Foundation, since the Foundation operates independently, without academic-institutional support and without a campus base because many of those involved with it do not occupy academic positions. Still, many of us *are* professionally or peripherally involved with scholarship, more than a few of us were once deeply involved in the Maxwell Institute, and there is no question — whether the broader scholarly world agrees with us or not — that The Interpreter Foundation is deeply involved in a scholarly enterprise. Elder Holland’s expectation that the Maxwell Institute be “a faithful, rich, rewarding center of faith-promoting gospel scholarship enlivened by remarkable disciple-scholars” (3) is certainly our expectation or hope for ourselves. Scholarship is scarcely limited to college and university campuses; sometimes, in fact, especially when I observe American academic life in general, I worry that scholarship may face some of its most serious threats precisely there, among professors, administrators, and bureaucrats.

Himself a former dean and then, from 1980 to 1989, the ninth president of Brigham Young University as well as the former commissioner of the Church Educational System (1976–1980), Elder Holland (PhD, Yale University) left no doubt about the authority with which he spoke. “With the humility incumbent upon anyone making such an assertion,” he told his audience, “I come tonight in my true identity as an Apostle of the Lord Jesus Christ” (1).

Although I accept sole responsibility for all inadequacies, limitations, errors, and missed opportunities in this message, I am here with not only the blessing but also the rather explicit expectation of the officers of the university’s board of trustees, whose executive committee I currently chair. In that sense, I speak for all of your governing advisers — not just for myself. (1)

“I can think of few other entities on this campus,” he continued, that have received the attention from the General Officers of the Church that the Maxwell Institute has — at least lately. I offer my non-campuswide, non-Marriott Center appearance in this modest venue as evidence of that tonight. The Lord’s Prophet, who chairs your board, and his fellow Apostles, who sit with

him, sent me to you. We hope it is affirming to you to have their strong, active interest in you at a time when the direction and priorities of the Church are being discussed as almost never before. We hope you welcome such focused attention, as you are measured for your role in these developments. (3)

Elder Holland even quoted from an email sent to him by Russell M. Nelson, the president of the Church, on 25 October 2018, roughly two weeks before his lecture at BYU. “Part of the Maxwell Institute problem is its identity,” President Nelson wrote. He said Church leaders need to help Maxwell Institute leaders “know who they are and why they exist” (4).²

Within the first few minutes of his speech, Elder Holland referred to Joseph Smith’s First Vision, the reality of continuing revelation, the advent of the true King, and the significance of the “end times,” observing that at least some in his audience “must be thinking this opening a bit melodramatic for the purposes of this particular gathering.” However, he continued, “I prefer to see it as apostolic. These are the topics that absorb 15 of us who toss and turn when we would like to sleep and slumber” (3).

Elder Holland noted that “Mormon studies programs on other campuses are designed to be primarily academic ventures, not spiritual ones, which is perfectly understandable” (5). He cited three examples. The first is located at Utah State University, where it proclaims that it “does not promote or reject any particular religion.”³ The second, Claremont Mormon Studies in California, says it promotes understanding of the Church “without necessarily advancing (or disputing) the veracity of its faith claims.”⁴ The University of Virginia’s Mormon studies program

2. There is some small amount of ambiguity in the actual quote used by Elder Holland. He relayed this portion of the email from President Nelson in this manner, as quoted material: “[We] need to [help them] know who they are and why they exist.” The bracketed phrases are in Elder Holland’s remarks. In context, the predicate of “them” is clear — it is the Maxwell Institute. The ambiguity is in the predicate of “we.” It may apply to Church leaders “writ large” (i.e., the First Presidency and Quorum of the Twelve) or it may specifically apply to President Nelson and Elder Holland. Either way, it is evident that President Nelson sees it as a leadership responsibility to help the Maxwell Institute in fundamental, mission-specific ways.

3. “Religious Studies,” Utah State University, accessed December 4, 2018, <https://religiousstudies.usu.edu>.

4. “About Claremont Mormon Studies,” Claremont Graduate University, accessed December 4, 2018, <https://mormonstudies.cgu.edu>.

describes its work principally as engaging “Mormonism both as a significant cultural fact and as a research subject.”⁵

Remarked Elder Holland,

These programs are, for the most part, a way for other people to look at us, making no particular call upon one’s belief and having no particular covenantal consequence after the course is over or the essay is written or the seminar has ended. (5)

And, as he says, he is fine with that — for such non-Latter-day Saint campuses. However, he declares,

I would be the first to oppose such an effort on *this* campus if *all* it meant was a thoughtful exploration of our religion’s “richness” or its “intellectual substance” or its “historic resilience.” ... Certainly your trustees would find it troubling. (5, emphasis in original)

In the spirit of full disclosure, you should know that initially I was against any proposal to do at BYU what was called *Mormon studies* elsewhere because I knew what Mormon studies elsewhere usually meant. However, over time I have come to see merit in a Latter-day Saint studies effort at BYU *if you are willing to make it significantly different from the present national pattern*. If you are willing to be truly unique, I can certainly endorse the idea that BYU *should* have a hand on any academic tiller dealing with the Church, becoming a place to which other such programs and chairs and lectureships might look for leadership. (5, emphasis in original)

In other words, to the extent that “Mormon studies” (or whatever we eventually come to call it) is to be practiced at Brigham Young University, it can never be merely identical to what is done elsewhere. And faithful Latter-day Saint scholarship will always tend to be different: “Of necessity, we will often be ‘a peculiar people’ in the academy as well as other arenas of life” (5).

One way to maintain balance at the Maxwell Institute, Elder Holland suggested to his audience in November, would be to remember that, while the Maxwell Institute may *include* a Mormon studies component, “albeit one determinedly unique in its nature,” it cannot reduce itself to that alone.

5. “Mormon Studies,” University of Virginia, accessed December 4, 2018, <https://mormonstudies.as.virginia.edu>.

No, as disciple-scholars who invite others to study us even as we study ourselves and who speak to the faithful every bit as much as to the detached, you will have to be comfortable being true oddballs, in that you are going to speak to *both* groups. It will usually not be in the same documents, probably not with the same vocabulary, and seldom, I would guess, in the same venue — but both the believers and the merely curious need to be able to see you as a source for some of the answers to their questions, however different that source material may be.

By speaking to two audiences, I'm not suggesting you be two-faced. This is not a call to hypocrisy but precisely the opposite. When you're writing for the household of faith, you should never write anything that would give your doctoral advisor just cause to accuse you of dishonesty. Likewise, when you are writing for an academic journal, you should never write anything that would give your ministering companion just cause to accuse you of disloyalty. Your soul must be one — integrated, intact, and whole — even as your voice may speak in different languages to different audiences. (7, emphasis in original)

This was my own long-standing aspiration for the Maxwell Institute. In a sense, the position of The Interpreter Foundation — and, accordingly, the challenge that it faces — is somewhat different from that of the Maxwell Institute and somewhat simplified. Being academically unaffiliated, the Foundation is under no obligation ever even to *affect* neutrality on the subjects to which it devotes its attention. We are committed Latter-day Saints, and we don't pretend otherwise. That said, however, we are committed to the standards of sound scholarship, to rigorous canons of evidence and analysis. In the long term, testimonies will not be sustained or successfully defended by the abuse of evidence or by shoddy reasoning. Moreover, we aspire to create a body of work that, at least eventually, nobody will be able to ignore who is interested in the subjects that we treat and on which we publish.

As part of the background for his remarks which, he quipped, were very much like “quickly step[ping] from one land mine to another” (4), Elder Holland cited an unpublished December 2014 review of the

Maxwell Institute written by Terryl Givens,⁶ David Holland,⁷ and Reid Neilson.⁸ “The current culture at MI,” says their review, “may have lost some of the institute’s founding vision and original purpose” (4).⁹ The possibility of such drift had been a specific worry of Elder Maxwell himself, voiced (for example) to a 1991 gathering of what would, after his death, come to be known as the Maxwell Institute.¹⁰

Over the course of his public ministry, Neal A. Maxwell spoke often and eloquently about his ideal of “the disciple-scholar,” and Elder Holland, recalling that ideal, commented on “that hyphenated noun Elder Maxwell left us as part of his marvelous linguistic legacy.” “Not all truths are of equal importance,” observed Elder Holland, saying that, for Elder Maxwell, “the spiritual half of that union was always the more important.” (3) “Though I have spoken of the disciple-scholar,” Elder Maxwell himself wrote, “in the end all the hyphenated words come off. We are finally disciples — men and women of Christ” (3)¹¹

“But the wonderful thing with Neal (and the thing I want for us),” Elder Holland added,

is that it didn’t have to come down to a choice between intellect and spirit. In a consecrated soul — consecration being one of his favorite doctrinal concepts — they would be aligned beautifully, a perfect fit, a precise overlay. But *if it did* come down to a choice, it would be faith — the yearning, burning commitment of the soul — that would always matter most in the end. (3, emphasis in original)

To both Elder Maxwell and Elder Holland, apologetics — the word is somewhat foreign to ordinary Latter-day Saint usage, but in the context of

6. Professor of Literature and Religion and James A. Bostwick Professor of English at the University of Richmond.

7. Elder Holland’s son and John A. Bartlett Professor of New England Church History at Harvard Divinity School.

8. Managing Director of the Church History Department of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints.

9. Citing Terryl Givens, David Holland, and Reid Neilson, External Review of the Neal A. Maxwell Institute for Religious Scholarship (December 2014), 7.

10. For Elder Maxwell’s full remarks, see Daniel C. Peterson, “Elder Neal A. Maxwell on Consecration, Scholarship, and the Defense of the Kingdom,” *Interpreter: A Journal of Mormon Scripture* 7 (2013): vii–xix.

11. Quoting Neal A. Maxwell, “The Disciple-Scholar,” in Henry B. Eyring, ed., *On Becoming a Disciple-Scholar: Lectures Presented at the Brigham Young University Honors Program Discipline and Discipleship Lecture Series* (Salt Lake City, Bookcraft: 1995), 21.

the Restoration it refers, simply, to advocacy and defense of the claims of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints — describes, as appropriate, an important and even essential part of such disciple-scholarship:

Regarding that faith-filled scholarship of which Elder Maxwell speaks, may I note plainly one thing we expect you to do because it is central to your *raison d'être*. It is to undergird and inform the pledge Elder Maxwell made when he said of uncontested criticism, “No more slam dunks.” We ask you as part of a larger game plan to always keep a scholarly hand fully in the face of those who oppose us. As a ne’er-do-well athlete of yesteryear, I was always told you played offense for the crowd, but you played defense for the coach. Your coaches will be very happy to have you play both superbly well. (3–4)¹²

The mission of the Maxwell Institute, Elder Holland declared, extends well beyond a small, narrow, academic elite.¹³ Referring to the 2014 review compiled by Drs. Givens, Holland, and Neilson, Elder Holland commented that

Whatever else they had in mind, I thought it a marvelous understatement for them to have said, “There will be times

12. Elder Holland cites Neal A. Maxwell, “Blending Research and Revelation,” Brigham Young University President’s Leadership Council address (19 March 2004), 2. See also Neal A. Maxwell, in Bruce C. Hafen, *A Disciple’s Life: The Biography of Neal A. Maxwell* (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 2002), 509. I was present at that March 2004 address, one of his last public speeches. In it, among other things, he praised the work then being done by what would eventually become the Maxwell Institute, which The Interpreter Foundation now seeks to carry forward. On the idea of “no more slam dunks,” see Daniel Peterson, “Why Latter-day Saints Need to Defend Our Beliefs, Even as We Avoid Contention,” *Latter-day Saint Living* (1 November 2018), <http://www.ldsiving.com/Why-Latter-day-Saints-Need-to-Defend-Our-Beliefs-Even-as-We-Avoid-Contention/s/89635>. Elder Holland’s own deep personal interest in the scholarly advocacy and defense of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints was demonstrated earlier in the year by his appearance and unpublished comments at a March 14, 2018, Salt Lake City dinner on behalf of the newly formed (and soon to be renamed) organization *Mormon Voices*, a confederation formed by Book of Mormon Central, FairMormon, and The Interpreter Foundation in order to coordinate joint projects and fundraising.

13. My longtime friend and former FARMS and Maxwell Institute colleague John W. Welch has told me that, in the early days of FARMS, Elder Boyd K. Packer exhorted him to “never forget the Relief Society sister in Parowan” — by which he meant (with no offense to anybody living in Parowan) ordinary, mainstream, non-academic Latter-day Saints.

when our faith will require an explicit defense.” We want the Maxwell Institute and many others to contribute to that defense — with solid, reputable scholarship intended as much for everyday, garden-variety Latter-day Saints who want their faith bolstered, at least as much as it might be intended for disinterested academic colleagues across the country whose stated purpose will never be to “prove or disprove the truth claims of the Church.” (4)¹⁴

Ranking high among Elder Maxwell’s most beloved writers was the great English scholar and Christian apologist C. S. Lewis. And, in his turn, Lewis was vocal throughout the years after his adult conversion to Christianity about his admiration for, and his debt to, the Scottish clergyman and writer George MacDonald. It was entirely appropriate, therefore, that Elder Holland, too, quoted MacDonald in the context of his insistence on the vital need for apologetics.

“Is every Christian expected to bear witness?” asked MacDonald. And then he answered his own question:

A man content to bear no witness to the truth is not of the kingdom of heaven. One who believes must bear witness. One who sees the truth, must live witnessing to it. Is our life, then, a witnessing to the truth? Do we carry ourselves in [the] bank, on [the] farm, in [the] house or shop, in [the] study or chamber or workshop, as the Lord would, or as the Lord would not?

Are we careful to be true? ... When contempt is cast on the truth, do we smile? Wronged in our presence, do we make no sign that we hold by it? I do not say we are called upon to dispute, and defend with logic and argument, but we are called upon to show that we are on the other side. ...

The soul that loves the truth and tries to be true, will know when to speak and when to be silent; but the true man [or woman] will never look as if he [or she] did not care. We are not bound to say all we think, but we are bound not even to look [like] what we do not think. (8)¹⁵

14. Citing Givens, Holland, and Neilson, *External Review*, 7.

15. Citing George MacDonald, *Creation in Christ: Unspoken Sermons*, ed. Rolland Hein (Vancouver, BC: Regent College Publishing, 1976), 142. Bracketed insertions and ellipses in quotation provided by Elder Holland.

“I echo MacDonald’s insistence,” commented Elder Holland, “that while we are not obligated to declare everything we believe at any given time or in any one setting, we are also not even to look like what we do *not* believe” (8, emphasis in original).

In other words, although not every situation calls for testimony-bearing or explicit defense, faithful Latter-day Saint thinkers and scholars must never seem or pretend to be neutral with regard to the truth-claims of the Restoration and the Church.

We know you can’t be credible in every circle if you are seen as lacking scholarly substance and categorically defensive all the time. But neither can you afford ever to be perceived as failing to serve the larger, faith-oriented purposes of the Church. (7)

Any scholarly endeavor at BYU — and certainly anything coming under the rubric of the Maxwell Institute — must never be *principally* characterized by stowing one’s faith in a locker while we have a great exchange with those not of our faith. Neal Maxwell phrased it this way: “A few hold back a portion of themselves merely to please a particular gallery of peers. ... Some hold back by not appearing overly committed to the Kingdom, lest they incur the disapproval of particular peers who might disdain such consecration.” And some just hold back. Period. (5–6)¹⁶

Elder Holland even suggested some topics on which the Maxwell Institute and other Latter-day Saint scholars might have something unique to contribute to the broader scholarly world:

What about the current interest in “sacred space” generally? Might we have something to say to our colleagues that would let us elaborate on the significance of holy space in our history and thought?

And we have only begun to mine the wonders of the Joseph Smith Papers. How do we get those gems out to those not of our faith and get them out without compromising their unique Latter-day Saint characteristics? (7)

16. Elder Holland is citing Neal A. Maxwell, “Discipleship and Scholarship,” *BYU Studies* 32/3 (1992): 8, emphasis and ellipses in portion quoted by Elder Holland. See also Daniel Peterson, “William Law’s ‘serious call’ to holiness,” *Deseret News* (9 November 2018), <https://www.deseretnews.com/article/900041210/william-hamblin-and-daniel-peterson-william-laws-serious-call-to-holiness.html>.

I like to think that The Interpreter Foundation is well positioned to contribute to such discussions. We have, for example, convened several conferences devoted to study of the temple — most recently, the Temple on Mount Zion conference held at Brigham Young University on 10 November 2018, the very day of Elder Holland's evening remarks to the Maxwell Institute — and published three books on the topic.¹⁷ And, as resources permit, we intend to expand and deepen our commitment to temple studies.

With regard to Elder Holland's mention of the Joseph Smith Papers project, I hereby publicly confess that one of my dreams for The Interpreter Foundation is for it to organize and host a conference devoted to what that ongoing research, editing, and publishing effort is disclosing to us about the personality and moral character of the founding Prophet of the Restoration.

There remains much to be done, and much excitement to be had. Part of that excitement will come in doing whatever we can to fulfill the expectations and hopes shared, on behalf of his fellow living Apostles and prophets, by Elder Jeffrey R. Holland. I'm grateful for The Interpreter Foundation, and for all those who have made it possible. It is a genuinely marvelous vehicle — not, obviously, the only one, but a good one — for contributing to the Kingdom.

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

17. Matthew B. Brown, Jeffrey M. Bradshaw, Stephen D. Ricks, and John S. Thompson, eds., *Ancient Temple Worship* (Salt Lake City and Orem, UT: Eborn Books and The Interpreter Foundation, 2014); William J. Hamblin and David R. Seely, eds., *Temple Insights* (Salt Lake City and Orem, UT: Eborn Books and The Interpreter Foundation, 2014); and Stephen D. Ricks and Donald W. Parry, eds., *The Temple: Ancient & Restored* (Salt Lake City and Orem, UT: Eborn Books and The Interpreter Foundation, 2016). See <https://interpreterfoundation.org/books/> for these and other books published by The Interpreter Foundation.

AN ANCIENT SURVIVAL GUIDE: JOHN BYTHEWAY'S LOOK AT MORONI

Jared Riddick

Abstract: *Moroni's years of wandering alone after the battle of Cumorah have been often discussed, but not in the context of how they impacted his writing and editorial work. John Bytheway's latest offering provides us insight into the man Moroni and how his isolation impacted the material that he left for his latter-day readers.*

Review of John Bytheway, *Moroni's Guide to Surviving Turbulent Times*. (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 2017). 159 pp., \$11.99.

Some who pick up John Bytheway's newest book, *Moroni's Guide to Surviving Turbulent Times*, may not be sure what they are going to get. His often-humorous approach deters many serious scholars from engaging his work. While his typical approach extends to this new book, those who chose to read it will find themselves pleasantly surprised and quickly drawn in.

The book centers on Moroni the man, not the angel. I find the book valuable for this alone, as scriptural figures are often placed on pedestals that deny them their basic humanity. Throughout the book, readers will find themselves getting to know Moroni and empathizing with his struggles. Youth and single adults will have a special reason to pay attention to Moroni's words when Bytheway reminds his readers that "This may be a family church ... but it was restored through an unmarried teenager who was visited and tutored by an angel-who spent at least the last twenty years of his life as a single adult, alone and wandering for his own safety" (3). "Moroni," he continues, "is one of the symbols of our membership" and "[his] best work was done while he was a single adult" (3).

The book encompasses Mormon 7 to Moroni 10; the section over which Moroni had editorial oversight. Bytheway provides a number of interesting insights and personal applications — which he refers to as “Likening Moroni” — in special sections at the end of each chapter.

In addition to introducing readers to Moroni, Bytheway’s book discusses a number of doctrines at some depth. A full examination is beyond the purview of this short review. As an example, however, I will touch on Bytheway’s discussion of the gift of the Holy Ghost in Moroni 2 (one of the longer chapters, at about seventeen pages). This is a chapter which I believe to be “worth the price of admission” on its own.

In each of his analyses, Bytheway speculates on why Moroni left his readers with these specific teachings and doctrines. Several of Moroni’s chapters are exceptionally short, and Moroni 2 is no different. Readers are reminded that Moroni was alone when he wrote these chapters. “Thus,” Bytheway states, “the importance of the companionship of the Holy Ghost for the lone man Moroni cannot be overstated” (45). Bytheway goes on to point out various roles that the Spirit fulfills for us: “warning light” (45–47), “tutor” (47–50), “sword” (51–52), and “protector” (52–54). This was accompanied by interesting study results from Wendy Watson Nelson on the power of prayer in the recognition of the presence of the Holy Ghost during times of trial (54–56). Bytheway followed this with a conversation on the privilege of having the Holy Ghost with us at all times. Interestingly, he reminds us that Mormon — through a letter recorded by Moroni — described his people’s demise in terms of their relationship with the Holy Ghost (59).

In the closing pages of this chapter, Bytheway points out that “the gift of the Holy Ghost is a privilege...to live up to” (59), and hence “we have to desire it, to want it, and to let it in as we would receive a guest into our home.” Bytheway writes, “Moroni knew of the privilege of the Holy Ghost, and he felt it important enough to devote precious space on the plates to teach future generations” (59–60).

One of the best ways this book can be described is as a starting point. Bytheway has not written a scholarly book; instead, he has produced a short work intended to encourage genuine discipleship and the applicability of ancient scripture to modern situations. He acknowledges this at the end of the book: “Not everyone will liken scriptural stories in the same way, nor should they. ... In sharing these ideas, I am hoping others may find them helpful and have something to think about as they ponder their own ways to liken Moroni’s final words” (155).

The doctrines and principles that Moroni emphasizes in his closing section of the Book of Mormon are relatively simple. Bytheway's message reflects that simplicity by focusing on the Gospel of Jesus Christ as a sustaining force in times of adversity. Moroni may have been physically isolated, but he was never truly alone. Christ's gospel helped him to survive. Bytheway helps readers see how the Book of Mormon can be a survival guide for the latter days too.

This book is heartily recommended for both youth and adults finding their own way into the Book of Mormon, as well as to experienced readers looking for new insights that will make the scriptures come alive for them. Above all, John Bytheway's in-depth discussion of Moroni and the invaluable work he accomplished offers counsel, doctrinal insights, and hope for anyone who has ever felt alone.

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**“AND THE MEEK ALSO SHALL INCREASE”:
THE VERB YĀSAP IN ISAIAH 29
AND NEPHI’S PROPHETIC ALLUSIONS
TO THE NAME JOSEPH IN 2 NEPHI 25–30**

Matthew L. Bowen

ABSTRACT: *Beyond his autobiographic use of Joseph’s name and biography, Nephi also considered the name Joseph to have long-term prophetic value. As a Semitic/Hebrew name, Joseph derives from the verb yāsap (to “add,” “increase,” “proceed to do something,” “do something again,” and to “do something more”), thus meaning “may he [God] add,” “may he increase,” or “may he do more/again.” Several of the prophecies of Isaiah, in which Nephi’s soul delighted and for which he offers extensive interpretation, prominently employ forms of yāsap in describing iterative and restorative divine action (e.g., Isaiah 11:11; 26:15; 29:14; cf. 52:1). The prophecy of the coming forth of the sealed book in Isaiah 29 employs the latter verb three times (Isaiah 29:1, 14, and 19). Nephi’s extensive midrash of Isaiah 29 in 2 Nephi 25–30 (especially 2 Nephi 27) interpretively expands Isaiah’s use of the yāsap idiom(s). Time and again, Nephi returns to the language of Isaiah 29:14 (“I will proceed [yôšîp] to do a marvelous work”), along with a similar yāsap-idiom from Isaiah 11:11 (“the Lord shall set his hand again [yôšîp] ... to recover the remnant of his people”) to foretell the Latter-day forthcoming of the sealed book to fulfill the Lord’s ancient promises to the patriarch. Given Nephi’s earlier preservation of Joseph’s prophecies regarding a future seer named “Joseph,” we can reasonably see Nephi’s emphasis on iterative divine action in his appropriation of the Isaianic use of yāsap as a direct and thematic allusion to this latter-day “Joseph” and his role in bringing forth additional scripture. This additional scripture would enable the meek to “increase,” just as Isaiah and Nephi had prophesied.*

“May [God] Add”/“May He Increase”

The importance of the name *Joseph* to Lehi and Nephi and their successors as a prophetic name emerges in a dramatic way in a statement preserved by the patriarch Joseph on Nephi’s small plates. Nephi records that Lehi recounted Joseph’s prophecy to his son “Joseph” regarding a future seer named “Joseph”:

And thus prophesied **Joseph**, saying: Behold, that seer will the Lord bless; and they that seek to destroy him shall be confounded; for this promise, of¹ which I have obtained of the Lord, of the fruit of my loins, shall be fulfilled. Behold, I am sure of the fulfilling of this promise; **And his name [Joseph] shall be called after me; and it shall be after the name of his father.** And he shall be like unto me; for the thing, which the Lord shall bring forth by his hand, by the power of the Lord shall **bring my people unto salvation.**² (2 Nephi 3:14–15)

Nephi’s preservation of this text suggests that he considered the name Joseph, as borne by his family’s tribal ancestor³ and his youngest brother, a name of great significance. Abundant textual evidence in the body of Nephi’s writings corroborates this suggestion.

The Hebrew Bible offers an etiological explanation for the name Joseph (*yôseph*) in terms of two homonymous and (in some senses) antonymous verbal roots, *ʾāsap* (“to gather,” “take away”)⁴ and *yāsap* (“to add,” “to continue to do, carry on doing”; “to do again, more”)⁵: “And she conceived, and bare a son; and said, **God hath taken away** [*ʾāsap*] my reproach: And she called his name **Joseph** [*yôseph*]; and said, **The Lord shall add** [*yôsēp*, ‘is adding’] to me another son” (Genesis 30:23–24). As Moshe

1. Following Royal Skousen, *Analysis of Textual Variants of the Book of Mormon, Part One: Title Page, Witness Statements, 1 Nephi 1–2 Nephi 10* (Provo, UT: FARMS, 2004), 516–18; Skousen, ed., *The Book of Mormon: The Earliest Text* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2009), 82.

2. “Salvation”: perhaps an echo of the name Jesus (*yēšūaʿ* or *yēhōšūaʿ*), “He [Yahweh] saves” (or “He [the Lord] is salvation”). See the explanation for this name offered by the angel in Matthew 1:21.

3. See 1 Nephi 5:14–16; 2 Nephi 3:4; Alma 10:3.

4. See Ludwig Koehler and Walter Baumgartner, *The Hebrew and Aramaic Lexicon of the Old Testament* (Leiden: Brill, 2001), 74–75. Hereafter cited as HALOT.

5. See HALOT, 418; see also p. 403.

Garsiel has observed, the text of the Joseph Cycle (Genesis 37–50) plays extensively on both verbal roots.⁶

In strict etymological terms, however, the Semitic/Hebrew name Joseph constitutes a jussive causative form of the verb *yāsap* and, as a possibly hypocoristic,⁷ theophoric⁸ name, means “may he [the Lord] add,”⁹ “may he increase,” etc. Book of Mormon writers, and Nephi in particular, evidence not only an awareness of the etymology and meaning of the name Joseph, but allowed the name and its meaning to inform their messages. In the first half of his writings (roughly 1 Nephi 1–2 Nephi 5), Nephi casts himself as Joseph in his relationship with his jealous brothers, as one whom his brothers “hated ... yet the more [wayyôsipû ‘ôd]” (Genesis 37:5, 8) and against whom “their anger did increase [cf. Hebrew *yāsap*]” (2 Nephi 5:2).¹⁰

In this article, I propose that Nephi’s wordplay on Joseph extends well beyond this autobiographical use of the patriarch Joseph’s name and biography (Genesis 37–50). In the latter part of Nephi’s writings, a thematic and prophetic wordplay on the name stands at the center of an extended

6. Moshe Garsiel, *Biblical Names: A Literary Study of Midrashic Derivations and Puns*, trans. Phyllis Hackett (Ramat Gan, Israel: Bar-Ilan University Press, 1991), 172–74. In addition to Genesis 30:23–24, see Genesis 37:5, 8; 42:17–18; 44:23; and 49:33–50:21. See also Exodus 1:8–10 and Numbers 36:3–4.

7. A *hypocorism* is a nickname or shortened form of an originally longer name. Joseph is probably a shortened form of a longer name like Josiphiah (Ezra 8:10), “May Yahweh add” or Eliasaph (“El [God] has added”). In English, the name *Joseph* itself is often further hypocoristicized to “Joe” or “Joey.”

8. Theophoric, from Greek *theophoros* (“god-carrying” or “god-bearing”), describes a personal name in which a divine name or title constitutes a component. Although the name Joseph, as a hypocoristicon, is formally missing a theophoric component, the verbal grammatical form of the name implies such (i.e., the *yô* in *yôsêp* constitutes a third person singular causative grammatical marker meaning “may he” — the “he” here refers to a divinity).

9. Martin Noth, *Die israelitischen Personennamen im Rahmen der Gemeinsemitischen Namengebung* (BWANT 3/10; Stuttgart: W. Kolhammer, 1928; repr. Hildesheim: Georg Olms Verlagsbuchhandlung, 1966), 212; Ephraim Speiser, *Genesis: Introduction, Translation, and Notes* (New York: Doubleday, 1964), 230, provides the full meaning for the name as “May Yahweh add another son for me” (Genesis 30:24).

10. Matthew L. Bowen, “‘Their Anger Did Increase Against Me’: Nephi’s Autobiographical Permutation of a Biblical Wordplay on the Name Joseph,” *Interpreter: A Journal of Mormon Scripture* 23 (2017): 115–36, <https://www.mormoninterpreter.com/their-anger-did-increase-against-me-nephis-autobiographical-permutation-of-a-biblical-wordplay-on-the-name-joseph/>.

midrash¹¹ on Isaiah 29 in 2 Nephi 25–30 and especially in 2 Nephi 27. Nephi’s rich, prophetic wordplay revolves around the name *Joseph* and its meaning, “may [God] add,” “may he increase,” “may he give more,” etc.

Nephi uses and adapts the verb *yāsap*, which occurs three times in Isaiah 29 (vv. 1, 14, 19) — just enough (in my view) to merit the description “thematic verb” — to expand and interpret the Isaianic text in creative and important ways. Nephi recognized and exploited the etymological connection between the name Joseph and verb *yāsap* as found in Isaiah 29 and elsewhere in the Isaianic corpus (e.g., Isaiah 11:11).¹² Thus, in his midrashic expansion of Isaiah 29 in 2 Nephi 27, Nephi also appears to expand and permute the use of the verb *yāsap* (or its scribal Egyptian equivalent) as many as six times in 2 Nephi 27 and in several additional instances in the chapters that precede (2 Nephi 25) and follow (2 Nephi 28–30). Isaiah 29:14, like the whole of Isaiah 11 (including v. 11), emerges as one of the most important single texts used in Nephi’s writings. For Nephi the importance of Isaiah 29:14, like that of Isaiah 11:11, consisted in the Lord, as the agent or subject of the verb *yāsap*, undertaking iterative action to restore Israel and Judah from their scattered state and conditions of apostasy (“their lost and fallen state”).¹³ Moreover, the use of *yāsap* in Isaiah 29:14 (“I **will proceed** [*yôsîp*] to do a marvellous work”) should be understood in the context of the use of Isaiah 29:19 (“the meek **shall increase** [*wëyospû*] their joy in the Lord”). Nephi understood that the Lord would “proceed” to do a marvelous work through a latter-day “Joseph” that would enable the “meek” to “increase” and have joy in the Lord in ways not otherwise possible.

Thematic Use #1:

“Add Ye Year to Year” (Isaiah 29:1) — Apostasy

The first occurrence of the verb *yāsap* in Isaiah 29 occurs as part of a “woe” oracle in the very first verse: “Woe to Ariel, to Ariel, the city where David

11. *Midrash* = Hebrew “inquiry,” “investigation,” or “study.” I take the position that the additions to the text of Isaiah 29 throughout 2 Nephi 27 constitute Nephi’s own interpretation of and commentary on Isaiah’s text (which he had on the brass plates) rather than a restoration of lost text.

12. See Matthew L. Bowen, “He Shall Add: Wordplay on the Name Joseph and an Early Instance of Gezera Shawa in the Book of Mormon,” *Insights* 30, no. 2 (2010): 2–4.

13. Cf. Abinadi’s description of the atonement of Jesus Christ as God “redeem[ing] his people from their lost and fallen state” (Mosiah 16:4). Alma uses the language of the Fall to describe the apostate Ammonihahites as “lost and fallen people” (Alma 9:30, 32).

dwelt! **add ye** [šēpû;¹⁴ IQIsa^a has šēpî, a singular feminine imperatival form] year to year; let them kill sacrifices. Yet I will distress Ariel, and there shall be heaviness and sorrow: and it shall be unto me as Ariel" (Isaiah 29:1–2). *Ariel*, sometimes taken to mean "altar hearth" (see the mention of the *har'el* or *hā'āri'el* in Ezekiel 43:15, perhaps an allusion by assonance to *har-ēl*, "the mountain of God"¹⁵), serves as cognomen or codename for Jerusalem (cf. the *'er'ellām*, "priests" or "inhabitants of Jerusalem," Isaiah 33:7).¹⁶ Numerous commentators have posited a connection with the Akkadian term *arallû*, a term for the "netherworld"¹⁷ (i.e., spirit world) or the "underworld and mountain of the gods, the altar for burnt offerings as the world mountain."¹⁸ All the foregoing would fit nicely with Isaiah's piled descriptions of Israel/Judah/Jerusalem "speak[ing] out of the ground [i.e., the spirit world]"; "and thy speech shall be low out of the dust [i.e., the spirit world]"; "thy voice shall be, as of one that hath a familiar spirit [i.e., as one channeling an ancestral spirit from the spirit world]"; "thy speech shall whisper out of the dust" (Isaiah 29:4).

Here in Isaiah 29:1–2, Isaiah uses the verb *yāsap* in a distinctly negative description of Judah and Jerusalem's apostasy. Whether written *šēpû* or *šēpî*, the prophet mordantly commands Jerusalem to "**add** year to year"¹⁹ and to let the cultic sacrifices "go around" (*yinqōpû*).²⁰ In other

14. HALOT (p. 418) analyzes *šēpû* as a plural imperative form of *yāsap*. So too, Francis Brown, S.R. Driver, and Charles A. Briggs, *The Brown-Driver-Briggs Hebrew and English Lexicon* (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson Publishers, 1996), 415, hereafter cited as BDB. Sometimes, however, *šēpû* is erroneously analyzed as a form of *spy/sph* ("to take away," "carry away"; "dwindle away"; "be carried away"), which means nearly the opposite of *yāsap* (see HALOT 763–64).

15. Joseph Blenkinsopp, *Isaiah 1–39: A New Translation with Commentary* (Anchor Bible 19; New York: Doubleday, 2000), 401. He writes: "It is ... possible that the designation is deliberately cryptic and polyvalent, perhaps including an allusion by assonance to *har-ēl*, 'the mountain of God.'"

16. HALOT, 82.

17. See *A Concise Dictionary of Akkadian*, ed. Jeremy Black, Andrew George, and Nicholas Postgate, SANTAG 5 (Wiesbaden: Harrassowitz Verlag, 2000), s.v. "arallû."

18. HALOT, 87. See, e.g., Blenkinsopp, *Isaiah 1–39*, 401.

19. Cf. the use of the verb *yāsap* in Isaiah 30:1: "Woe to the rebellious children, saith the Lord, that take counsel, but not of me; and that cover with a covering, but not of my spirit, that **they may add** [*šēpôt*, literally "to add"] sin to sin."

20. Hebrew **nqp* = "revolve, recur" Cf. Ugaritic *nqpt*, "cycle of the year." See HALOT, 722. This verb as used in Isaiah 29:1 describes time as circular or cyclical (cf. the Lord's "circuit" or "course" as described in Psalms 19:6; 1 Nephi 10:19; Alma 7:20; 37:12; D&C 3:2; 35:1). The ancient Israelite *tēqûpâ* "circuit" of the

words, Isaiah criticizes apostasy, hypocrisy,²¹ and sin in the observance of the Jerusalem temple's ritual, sacrificial system,²² and cultic calendar, as he does with equal vehemence in Isaiah 1:10–15.

Neither Nephi nor his successors quote the opaque text of Isaiah 29:1–2 in the Book of Mormon. Nephi renders the first instance of “Ariel” that occurs in Isaiah 29:7 as “Zion.” In other words, “the multitude of the nations that fight against Ariel” becomes “all the nations that fight against Zion” (2 Nephi 27:3; cf. 1 Nephi 22:14), while the reference to “fight against mount Zion” from Isaiah 29:8 remains unchanged. Whether the text of Isaiah 29:1–2 existed on the brass plates in something approximating the form attested in the Masoretic Text or the other ancient witnesses (LXX, Vulgate, Peshitta, etc.) is unknowable, since Nephi eschews quoting it.²³ In any case, Nephi “likens” the attack and siege on Jerusalem/Zion described in the subsequent verse (Isaiah 29:3) to the eventual destruction of his own people (see, e.g., 2 Nephi 26:15). The destruction of the Nephites, the condition of “those who have dwindled in unbelief”²⁴ (the Lamanites), and the general conditions of apostasy (Israelite and Gentile) described in Isaiah 29:1–13 necessitate the eventual fulfillment of the promise of iterative divine action mentioned in Isaiah 29:14.

year (Exodus 34:22, 2 Chronicles 24:23; cf. 1 Samuel 1:20) began at the autumnal, equinoctial festival (the New Year and Feast of Ingathering).

21. Cf. especially Isaiah 29:13.

22. J. Cheryl Exum (“Of Broken Pots, Fluttering Birds, and Visions in the Night: Extended Simile and Poetic Technique in Isaiah,” in *Beyond Form Criticisms: Essays in Old Testament Literary Criticism*. Ed. Paul R. House [Winona Lake, IN: Eisenbrauns, 1992], 362) writes: “The command *haggîm yinqôpû* [‘let the feasts go round’] appears ironic; presumably the ground for the woe cry and the impending attack has to do with cultic observance. ... The moaning and lamentation which result when *Yhwh* distresses Ariel, v. 2, are the opposite of what one expects at a religious festival, but, at the same time, fit readily the mourning called for by *hôy* [‘ah’] in v. 1.”

23. No portion of Isaiah 29:1–2 appears in the Book of Mormon in any form. Neither Nephi nor his successors quote it or attempt to interpret it.

24. “Those who have dwindled in unbelief”: a collocation used by Nephi in 2 Nephi 26:15, 17, 19 to describe the seed of his brothers Laman and Lemuel, and the sons of Ishmael, and the mixture of his own posterity (see 1 Nephi 13:10) and that of his of other brothers (see, e.g., 2 Nephi 3:3; 9:53) who survived the great war that put an end to the Nephite civilization.

Thematic Use #2:
“I Will Proceed to Do a Marvellous Work”
(Isaiah 29:14) — Restoration

The second instance of the verb *yāsap* occurs at the rhetorical turning-point of Isaiah 29 in v. 14: “Therefore, behold, **I will proceed** [*yôsîp*] **to do a marvellous work among this people, even a marvellous work and a wonder**: for the wisdom of their wise men shall perish, and the understanding of their prudent men shall be hid” (Isaiah 29:14). The expressions “do a marvelous work” (or “work a marvelous work,” Hebrew *lēhaplî*) and “marvelous work” (Hebrew *haplē*’ — the phrase “marvelous work and a wonder” is *haplē*’ *wāpele*’ polyptotonic)²⁵ are what usually draw our attention to this verse. The phrase “marvelous work” occurs at least 14 other times in scripture.²⁶

However, the active participle *yôsîp*, a form of the verb *yāsap*, may ultimately represent the more important term here. This participle implicitly modifies the Lord as doer of the action: *hinēnî yôsîp*; literally, “I am proceeding [to do ...].” As has been noted previously, this participle greatly resembles the name “Joseph” (*yōsēp*) in form and sound. From a Latter-day Saint perspective, it is tempting to see Isaiah making a deliberate wordplay on the name “Joseph,” *per ipsum*. However, we can conclude with greater certainty that Nephi not only sees a reference to the name Joseph in this passage but repeatedly uses and adapts it *as such*. I will discuss this possibility further below.

Moreover, we should note that whereas Jerusalem/Judah is the subject of the imperative form of the verb *yāsap* in its very negative use in Isaiah 29:1 (“add [ye] year to year”), Yahweh here becomes the one undertaking the action described in the active participle *yôsîp*. In other words, Yahweh is “adding” or “proceed[ing]” to undertake miraculous action that will in some measure reverse the devastating consequences

25. Polyptoton: a wordplay on cognate words — i.e., on words from the same root. Richard A. Lanham (*A Handlist of Rhetorical Terms*, 2nd ed. [Berkeley: University of California Press, 1991], s.v. “polyptoton”) defines *polyptoton* as a “repetition of words from the same root, but with different endings.” However, the example Lanham cites shows that polyptoton can reflect not only different endings but different prefixes and stem changes: (quoting Winston Churchill on Neville Chamberlain’s government): “So they go on in a strange paradox, **decided** only to be **undecided**, **resolved** to be **irresolute**, adamant for drift, solid for fluidity, all-**powerful** to be **impotent**” (emphasis added).

26. See 1 Nephi 14:7; 22:8; 2 Nephi 25:17; 27:26; 29:1; Alma 26:15; 3 Nephi 21:9; 28:32; D&C 4:1; 6:1; 11:1; 12:1; 14:1; 18:44.

of the apostasy mentioned earlier (Isaiah 29:1–13) and described by the verb form *sēpû/sēpî*.²⁷ This miraculous action will necessarily involve the “becom[ing]” or coming forth of the “book that is sealed” (Isaiah 29:11–12, 18).

Thematic Use #3:
“The Meek Shall Increase Their Joy in the Lord”
(Isaiah 29:19) — The Fruits of Restoration

Isaiah answers his use of the participial form *yôsîp* modifying *Yahweh* in Isaiah 29:14 with a third and final use of the verb *yâsap* in Isaiah 29:19. Where *Yahweh* undertook the restorative action of “adding” to “do a marvelous work and a wonder” in Isaiah 29:14, here the “adding” is undertaken by those who benefited from that action — the “meek.” Isaiah prophesies, “And in that day shall the deaf **hear the words of the book**, and the eyes of the blind shall see out of obscurity, and out of darkness. **The meek also shall increase** [*wēyospû*] their joy in the Lord, and the poor among men shall rejoice in the Holy One of Israel (Isaiah 29:18–19). The “meek” (*ʾānāwîm*)²⁸ now “add” or “increase” in ways that apostate inhabitants of Jerusalem (and more broadly Israel and Judah) did not and could not. They can “increase” without “add[ing] year to year” in apostate or hypocritical cultic observance (cf. again Isaiah 29:1).

Brown, Driver, and Briggs note that *yâsap* can here have the sense “have more.”²⁹ Koehler and Baumgartner further suggest that the phrase *yâsap šimḥâ*, as an expression, denotes “[he] has joy after joy.”³⁰ In Isaiah

27. Hebrew *ʾāsap* “collect, gather” = Akkadian *ešēpu* “collect, gather.” See Hayim ben Yosef Tawil, *An Akkadian Lexical Companion for Biblical Hebrew: Etymological, Semantic and Idiomatic Equivalence with Supplement on Biblical Aramaic* (Jersey City, NJ: KTAV Publishing House, 2009), 27.

28. Robert F. Smith (personal communication, June 2017, notes in possession of author) observes that “Jesus claimed to be ‘meek’ (Matthew 11:29), but the Greek term *praus* actually refers to being ‘gentle, humble,’ rather than ‘weak’ and ‘simpering.’ Jesus was clearly a very powerful figure, so the term must refer to a proper attitude toward others. The Greek term is also used to refer to a horse that has been ‘broken, trained,’ so that being able to obediently follow God’s will may be an integral part of being ‘meek’ in that Beatitude (Matthew 5:5), which is taken directly from Psalm 37:11 *ʾānāwîm* ‘meek’ (‘afflicted, undemanding, unassuming’).” This thus suggests a similar sense for *ʾānāwîm* as used by Isaiah in Isaiah 29:19.

29. BDB, 414.

30. HALOT, 418. Since these words are not attested together elsewhere, it is not clear that they constitute an idiom per se.

29:19, however, the noun *śimhâ* (“joy”) is separated from the verb *yāsap* by two words (*ʾānāwīm* [the subject] and *byhwh* [the preposition *in* + the divine name *yhwh*]) in a slightly odd word order, which may explain why Nephi saw the line *wēyospû ʾānāwīm byhwh śimhâ* as constituting two separate phrases (see further below). In either case, Isaiah 29 describes a future situation involving a forthcoming book — an event through which “the meek ... shall increase” — i.e., “the meek have more” (Isaiah 29:19 \cong 2 Nephi 27:30).

Isaiah describes additional fruits of restoration that will emerge in consequence of the forthcoming of the sealed book:

For the terrible one **is brought to nought** [*ʾāpēs*], and the scorner is consumed, and all that watch for iniquity are cut off: that make a man an offender for a word, and lay a snare for him that reproveth in the gate, and turn aside the just for a thing of nought. Therefore **thus saith the Lord, who redeemed Abraham, concerning the house of Jacob, Jacob shall not now be ashamed, neither shall his face now wax pale. But when he seeth his children, the work of mine hands, in the midst of him, they shall sanctify my name**, and sanctify the Holy One of Jacob, and shall fear the God of Israel. They also that erred in spirit shall come to understanding, and they that murmured shall learn doctrine. (Isaiah 29:20–24 \cong 2 Nephi 27:31–35)

Isaiah’s use of the verb *ʾāpēs* creates something of a pun on *wēyospû* in the previous verse: while the “meek shall increase [*wēyospû*]” the “terrible one is brought to naught [*ʾāpēs*]” — an opposite outcome. Isaiah prophesies that those who “watch for iniquity” and thus “make a man offender³¹ for a word [*dābār*]” — not least those who make the one through whom the Lord “proceed[ed] to bring forth”³² the “words [*dibrê*] of [the] book” (Isaiah 29:11, 18) an offender — would be “cut off.” This idiom evokes the penalty of excommunication mentioned throughout the Pentateuch — i.e., “cut off from among” the “people.”³³ This language appears in Nephi’s periphrastic or variant quotation³⁴ of Deuteronomy 18:15–19: “A prophet shall the Lord your God raise up unto

31. Literally, “those making [him] a sinner” = Hebrew *maḥāṭīʾê*.

32. 2 Nephi 27:14, see below.

33. See, e.g., Genesis 17:14; Exodus 30:33, 38; 31:14; Leviticus 7:20–21, 25, 27; 17:4, 9–10; 18:29; 19:8; 20:3, 5–6, 17–18; Numbers 9:13; 15:30; cf. Ezekiel 14:8; 25:7.

34. See John A. Tvedtnes and E. Jan Wilson, “The Prophet Like Moses,” *Insights* 27, no. 5 (2007): 2–3.

you, like unto me; him shall ye hear in all things whatsoever he shall say unto you. And it shall come to pass that all those who will not hear that prophet **shall be cut off from among the people**" (1 Nephi 22:20).

One of the most important fruits of the "sealed book" would be a restoration of the children of Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, and Joseph to "the Holy One of Jacob," i.e., the "God of Israel." The words of the sealed book would help redress the recurrent apostasy of Israel and Judah. All of this enables the eventual total fulfillment of the Abrahamic covenant. As Nephi described it, "And after our seed is scattered the Lord God **will proceed** [*yôšîp*] to do a marvelous work among the Gentiles, which shall be of great worth unto our seed; wherefore, it is likened unto ~~their~~ the being ~~nourished~~ nursed³⁵ by the Gentiles and being carried in their arms and upon their shoulders [see Isaiah 49:22]. And it shall also be of worth unto the Gentiles; and not only unto the Gentiles but unto all the house of Israel, unto the making known of the covenants of the **Father** [*'ab*] of heaven unto **Abraham** [*'abrâhâm*, usually understood to mean "Father of a multitude"³⁶], saying: In thy seed shall all the kindreds of the earth be blessed" (1 Nephi 22:8–9).

Midrashic Use #1:

Nephi's First "Joseph" *Gezera Shawa* on Isaiah 11:11 and 29:14 in 2 Nephi 25:17 (2 Ne 25:17; 29:1 \cong Isaiah 11:11; 29:14 [Isaiah 29:13–24 \cong 2 Ne 27:25–35])

Nephi's first unmistakably clear midrashic use of *yâsap* from Isaiah 29:14 in his writings occurs in 1 Nephi 22:8: "And after our seed is scattered the Lord God **will proceed** [*yôšîp*] to do a marvelous work among the Gentiles, which shall be of great worth unto our seed; wherefore, it is likened unto ~~their~~ the being ~~nourished~~ nursed³⁷ by the Gentiles and being carried in their arms and upon their shoulders." Nephi here interprets Isaiah 29:14 in terms of the description in Isaiah 49:22 of the gathering of Israel by "the Gentiles" (*gôyim*). Nephi exegetically substitutes "the Gentiles" for "this people" in the text of Isaiah 29:14. He does something similar with Isaiah 29:14 and Isaiah 52:10 again a few verses later in 1 Nephi 22:11: "Wherefore, the Lord God **will proceed** [*yôšîp*] to make bare his arm in the eyes of all the nations [*haggôyim*,

35. See Skousen, *Analysis of Textual Variants*, 1:461–62.

36. Genesis 17:4–5; Abraham 1:2; cf. Romans 4:1–18.

37. Skousen, *Analysis of Textual Variants*, 1:461–62.

Gentiles], in bringing about his covenants and his gospel unto ~~those who~~ they which³⁸ are of the house of Israel."³⁹

In two instances, Nephi directly interprets Isaiah 29:14 in light of Isaiah 11:11. He appears to have done this on the basis of these passages' shared use of the term *yāsap* (and their nearly homonymous forms, *yôšîp* in Isaiah 11:11 and *yôšîp* in Isaiah 29:14). As noted elsewhere,⁴⁰ this exegetical conjoining of two or more scriptural passages on the basis of shared terminology and interpretation came to be known in rabbinic times as *Gezera Shawa* (although the practice antedates rabbinic times).⁴¹ Nephi thus begins his sophisticated and rich midrash of Isaiah 29 with an exegetical juxtaposition of Isaiah 11:11 and Isaiah 29:14:

The⁴² Lord **will set** his hand **again** [*yôšîp*] the second time [Isaiah 11:11] to restore his people from their lost and fallen state. Wherefore, **he will proceed** [*yôšîp*] to do a marvelous work and a wonder [Isaiah 29:14] among the children of men. Wherefore, **he shall bring forth his words** unto them, which words shall judge them at the last day, for they shall be given them for the purpose of convincing them of the true Messiah, who was rejected by them; and unto the convincing of them that **they need not** look forward **any more** [cf. Hebrew *wēlō' yôšîpû* ... 'ôd] for a Messiah to come, for there should not any come, save it should be a false Messiah which should deceive the people; for there is save one Messiah spoken of by

38. Skousen, *Earliest Text*, 69–70.

39. See also Mormon 5:12–24.

40. Bowen, "He Shall Add," 2–4; Bowen, "Onomastic Wordplay on *Joseph* and *Benjamin* and *Gezera Shawa* in the Book of Mormon," *Interpreter: A Journal of Mormon Scripture* 18 (2016): 255–73, <https://www.mormoninterpreter.com/onomastic-wordplay-on-joseph-and-benjamin-and-gezera-shawa-in-the-book-of-mormon/>.

41. Hillel the Elder is sometimes wrongly said to be the originator of *Gezera Shawa*. H. L. Strack and Günter Stemberger (*Introduction to the Talmud and Midrash*, trans. Markus Bockmuehl [Minneapolis: Fortress, 1996], 17) note that *Gezera Shawa* was "not invented by Hillel" but constituted one of "the main types of argument in use at that time." The exegetical practice of interpreting two or more separate scriptural texts, each in light of the other, thus antedates Hillel.

42. Royal Skousen, *Analysis of Textual Variants of the Book of Mormon, Part Two: 2 Nephi 11 – Mosiah 16* (Provo, UT: FARMS, 2005), 819–20; idem, *Earliest Text*, 131.

the prophets, and that Messiah is he ~~who~~ which⁴³ should be rejected of the Jews. (2 Nephi 25:17–18)

Nephi juxtaposes Isaiah 11:11 with Isaiah 29:14 not only on the basis of their shared use of the verb *yāsap* and the homophony of *yōsîp* with *yōsîp*⁴⁴ but perhaps also because Yahweh is the subject or agent of both verb forms. In other words, both passages prophesy of divine iterative action and divine restorative action, and all of this through a future “Joseph” (see 2 Nephi 3:11–16, especially v. 15).

And Nephi offers more. The divine iterative action that will restore Israel from its scattered and displaced condition (“their lost and fallen state”), speaking both in physical and in spiritual terms, will ultimately “convince them of the true Messiah” such that they will “not look forward any more for a Messiah to come.” The literal remnants of Latter-day Israel “**shall no more again** [*lō’-yōsîp ôd*] stay upon him that smote them,” but shall believe in Jesus of Nazareth as Messiah on account of the work, and thus “shall stay upon the Lord, the Holy One of Israel, in truth” (Isaiah 10:20; 2 Nephi 20:20).

All of this will be done in fulfillment of promise. Nephi’s subsequent statement affirms the foregoing wordplay on the name Joseph: “Wherefore, for this cause hath the Lord God promised unto me that these things which I write shall be kept and preserved, and handed down unto my seed, from generation to generation, **that the promise may be fulfilled unto Joseph** [*yōsêp*], that his seed should never perish as long as the earth should stand” (2 Nephi 25:21). The “promise” the Lord made “unto Joseph” alludes back to the prophecy of Joseph preserved in 2 Nephi 3:

And great was⁴⁵ the covenants of the Lord which he made unto **Joseph** [*yōsêp*]. Wherefore, **Joseph** [*yōsêp*] truly saw our day. **And he obtained promise of the Lord, that out of the fruit of his loins the Lord God would raise up a righteous branch** unto the house of Israel; not the Messiah, but a branch which was to be broken off, **nevertheless, to be remembered in the covenants of the Lord that the Messiah should be made manifest unto them in the latter days**, in the spirit of power, **unto the bringing of them out of darkness unto light** — yea,

43. Skousen, *Earliest Text*, 132.

44. The phonological difference is one of vowel quantity. In reality the forms *yōsîp* and *yōsîp* represent different stems: the former a causative (Hiphil) jussive (like the name Joseph itself), the second an active (Qal) participle.

45. Skousen, *Earliest Text*, 81.

out of hidden darkness and out of captivity unto freedom.
(2 Nephi 3:4–5; cf. 1 Kings 8:21)

Lehi's summary of Joseph's prophecy, offered just before he cites that prophecy, appears to have been colored by Isaiah 29 (e.g., "the eyes of the blind shall see out of obscurity, and out of darkness," Isaiah 29:18 [=2 Nephi 27:29]; more examples of this will emerge below). The Lord's "promise ... unto Joseph" included the promise that he would raise up another "Joseph" who would help "make manifest" the Messiah — Jesus Christ — to the "seed" (posterity) of the patriarch, seed that would include that of Lehi and his son Joseph. Joseph then emphasized that the name Joseph constituted something of a sign. The latter-day "Joseph" would bear the name of his own father as well as that of the patriarch:

Wherefore, the fruit of thy loins shall write; and the fruit of the loins of Judah shall write; and that which shall be written by the fruit of thy loins, and also that which shall be written by the fruit of the loins of Judah, shall grow together [≅ 2 Nephi 29:12–13], unto the confounding of false doctrines [≅ 2 Nephi 28:9, 12, 15] and laying down of contentions, and establishing peace among the fruit of thy loins, and bringing them to the knowledge of their fathers [≅ 2 Nephi 30:5] in the latter days, and also to the knowledge of my covenants, saith the Lord. And out of weakness he shall be made strong, in that day when my work shall commence [≅ 2 Nephi 30:8] among all my people, unto the restoring thee, O house of Israel, saith the Lord. **And thus prophesied Joseph** [*yôšēp*], saying: Behold, that seer will the Lord bless; and they that seek to destroy him shall be confounded; for this promise, of⁴⁶ which I have obtained of the Lord, of the fruit of my loins, shall be fulfilled. Behold, **I am sure of the fulfilling of this promise; and his name shall be called after me; and it shall be after the name of his father.**⁴⁷ **And he shall be like unto me; for the thing, which the Lord shall bring forth by his hand, by the power of the Lord shall bring my people unto salvation. Yea, thus prophesied Joseph** [*yôšēp*]: I am sure of this thing, even as I am sure of the promise of Moses; for

46. Following Skousen, *Analysis of Textual Variants*, 1:516–18; idem, *Earliest Text*, 82.

47. Cf. Luke 1:59.

the Lord hath said unto me, I will preserve thy seed forever.
(2 Nephi 3:12–16)

As noted in brackets above, Nephi repeats Joseph’s prophecy extensively throughout 2 Nephi 25–30, Nephi’s quotation of 2 Nephi 3:14–16 in 2 Nephi 25:21 constituting another example of Seidel’s law (i.e., a repetition or quotation of material in inverse order).⁴⁸ It is specifically in view of the fulfillment of “the promise ... unto Joseph” (2 Nephi 25:21 \cong 2 Nephi 3:14) that “these things [the words preserved in the sealed book] shall go from generation to generation as long as the earth shall stand; and ... shall go according to the will and pleasure of God; and [that] the nations who shall possess them shall be judged of them according to the words which are written” (2 Nephi 25:22), that Nephi made his now-famous declaration of why he and his contemporaries wrote: “For we labor diligently to write, to persuade our children, and also our brethren, to believe in Christ, and to be reconciled to God” (2 Nephi 25:23); “And we talk of Christ, we rejoice in Christ, we preach of Christ, we prophesy of Christ, and we write according to our prophecies, that our children may know to what source they may look for a remission of their sins” (2 Nephi 25:26). Nephi’s midrash of Isaiah 29 and the Lord’s “proceed[ing]” (*yôšîp*) to bring forth the sealed book as part of a “marvelous work” (Isaiah 29:14) must be considered and remembered in this light.

Midrashic Use #2:

“The Lord God Will Proceed to Bring Forth the Words of the Book” (2 Nephi 27 \cong Isaiah 29)

2 Nephi 11 constitutes the closing bracket of Jacob’s quotation of Isaiah and his sermon (2 Nephi 6–10); and the beginning bracket of Nephi’s long quotation of Isaiah in 2 Nephi 12–24, 27. 2 Nephi 27 does not merely represent Nephi’s quotation of Isaiah 29, but contains extensive interpretation or “midrash” on his part.

Within the confines of his more detailed midrash of Isaiah 29 in 2 Nephi 27, Nephi begins his use of *yôšîp* in 2 Nephi 27:14 thus: **“Wherefore, the Lord God will proceed [*yôšîp*] to bring forth the words of the book;** and in the mouth of as many witnesses as seemeth

48. See David Bokovoy, “Inverted Quotations in the Book of Mormon,” *Insights* 20, no. 10 (2000): 2; Bokovoy and John A. Tvedtnes “Seidel’s Law,” in *Testaments: Links between the Book of Mormon and the Hebrew Bible* (Tooele, UT: Heritage Press, 2003), 56–60.

him good will he establish his word; and wo be unto him that rejecteth the word of God!" Nephi's statement "the Lord God will proceed [*yôšîp*] to bring forth the words of the book" clearly uses Isaiah's language from Isaiah 29:14, "**Wherefore I will proceed** [*yôšîp*] to do a marvellous work" (\cong 2 Nephi 27:26, see below).

However, Nephi does not merely borrow the language of Isaiah 29:14, he creatively adapts it, when he substitutes the phrase "to bring forth the words of the book" for the phrase "to do a marvelous work." Nephi had already established a precedent for this kind of midrashic use of the language of Isaiah 29:14. In his earlier explanation of his use of Isaiah 48–49, he declared: "Wherefore, **the Lord God will proceed to make bare his arm in the eyes of all the nations**, in bringing about his covenants and his gospel unto those who are of the house of Israel" (1 Nephi 22:11). Here Nephi combines the auxiliary verb *yôšîp* ("I will proceed") from Isaiah 29:14 with the language of Isaiah 52:10: "The Lord **hath made bare** [*hâšap*] his holy arm in the eyes of all the nations; and all the ends of the earth shall see the salvation of our God."⁴⁹ Nephi's use and adaptation of *yôšîp* in these passage suggest that he identifies the Lord's "bringing forth the words of the book" with the Lord's "do[ing] a marvelous work" and his "making bare his holy arm in the eyes of all the nations" as synonymous or nearly synonymous.

In addition to his incorporation and adaptation of *yôšîp*, Nephi takes the phrase "the words of the book" from Isaiah 29:11 ("the words of a book [*dibrê hassêper*] which is sealed") and Isaiah 29:18–19. In the latter text, we also find another of Isaiah's uses of the verb *yâsap*: "And in that day shall the deaf hear **the words of the book** [*dibrê sêper*], and the eyes of the blind shall see out of obscurity, and out of darkness. **The meek also shall increase** [*wěyospû*, cf. Joseph] their joy in the Lord, and the poor among men shall rejoice in the Holy One of Israel."

We should further note here that the phrase "and ... hear [*wěšāmē'û*] the words of the book" further recalls the prophecy of Lehi to his youngest son Joseph at the end of his citation of the prophecy of the patriarch Joseph: "And now, behold, my son Joseph, after this manner did my father of old prophesy. Wherefore, because of this covenant thou art blessed; for thy seed shall not be destroyed, for **they shall hearken unto the words of the book**" (2 Nephi 3:22–23). In his use of the phrase "they shall hearken unto the words of the book," Lehi appears to quote Isaiah's statement "in that day shall the deaf hear the words of the book" (Isaiah 29:18; cf. 2 Nephi 27:29), thus linking the fulfillment of

49. See Bowen, "He Shall Add," 2–4.

Isaiah's prophecy regarding the "the book which is sealed" to the future restoration of the descendants of his son "Joseph."

Nephi's declaration "in the mouth of as many witnesses as seemeth him good will he establish his word" (2 Nephi 27:14) invokes the Deuteronomic "law of witnesses": **"At the mouth of two witnesses, or three witnesses, shall he that is worthy of death be put to death; but at the mouth of one witness he shall not be put to death"** (Deuteronomy 17:6); "One witness shall not rise up against a man for any iniquity, or for any sin, in any sin that he sinneth: **at the mouth of two witnesses, or at the mouth of three witnesses, shall the matter** [*dābār*, or "word"] **be established** [*yāqûm*]" (Deuteronomy 19:15). Bruce A. Van Orden has observed that Nephi establishes a pattern of using the Deuteronomic "Law of Witnesses" throughout the book of 2 Nephi.⁵⁰

Nephi's invocation of the "law of witnesses" in 2 Nephi 27:14 recalls his invocation of that law at the outset of his lengthiest Isaiah citation (2 Nephi 12–24). By 2 Nephi 11, Nephi had already brought together the "law of witnesses" motif together with the *yāsap*-motif:

And now, Jacob spake many **more** things [words] to my people at that time; nevertheless only these things [words] have I caused to be written, for the things [words] which I have written sufficeth me. And now I, Nephi, **write more of the words of Isaiah**, for my soul delighteth in his words. For I will liken **his words** unto my people, and I will send them forth unto all my children, for he verily saw my Redeemer, even as I have seen him. And my brother, Jacob, also has seen him as I have seen him; wherefore, **I will send their words forth unto my children to prove unto them that my words are true. Wherefore, by the words of three, God hath said, I will establish my word. Nevertheless, God sendeth more witnesses**, and he proveth all his words. (2 Nephi 11:1–3)

Jacob spoke "words" or "things" that went beyond — or offered "more" — than what Nephi decided to record and preserve on his small plates. Then Nephi "proceeded"⁵¹ to write — or wrote "more" — of the words

50. Bruce A. Van Orden, "The Law of Witnesses in 2 Nephi," in *Second Nephi, The Doctrinal Structure*, ed. Monte S. Nyman and Charles D. Tate Jr. (Provo, UT: Religious Studies Center, Brigham Young University, 1989), 307–21; Van Orden, "'We Prophesy of Christ': The Law of Witnesses in 2nd Nephi," *Ensign* 20 (February 1990): 22–25.

51. See, e.g., 1 Nephi 10:1; 19:5; 2 Nephi 25:7; cf. Words of Mormon 1:9; Ether 1:1; 2:13; 6:1; 9:1; 13:1.

of Isaiah, namely the text of Isaiah 2–14 as a block (see 2 Nephi 12–24), as a “witness” or “testimony” of the words/things of which he and Jacob both testified. Again, this is significant because it frames the writing or bringing forth of additional scripture in terms of the Deuteronomic law of witnesses, especially Deuteronomy 19:15. Nephi reasons thus: In eschatological terms, “one [prophetic] witness” by itself is insufficient to condemn any man or woman “for any iniquity, or for any sin.” Thus, “in the mouth of two or three [prophetic] witnesses shall the matter [word] be established” (Deuteronomy 19:15). Nephi will later apply the same logic to scriptural witnesses and the eschatological final judgment (a “capital” case if ever such existed). Nephi further declares that God does not limit himself to “two or three witnesses,” but “sendeth more witnesses” (or, perhaps, “adds to send witnesses”) in order to “prove all his words.”

Structurally speaking, 2 Nephi 11 not only serves a closing bracket for Jacob’s quotation of Isaiah (2 Nephi 7–8) and the sermon in which he embeds it (2 Nephi 6, 9–10), it further serves as an opening bracket for Nephi’s longest block quotation of Isaiah (2 Nephi 12–24, 27). Even here, the bringing forth of “more” of the Lord’s word appears to revolve around the idea of *yāsap* (to “add” or “do something more”) and thus too the name Joseph.

Midrashic Use #3:

“The Lord God Will Deliver Again the Book” (2 Nephi 27:19 ≅ Isaiah 29:12)

The third passage in 2 Nephi 25–30 that plausibly reflects the Hebrew *yāsap*-idiom also describes iterative divine action. In this instance, Nephi prophesies that the Lord “will ... again” — i.e., “add” — to deliver the “book that is sealed” to the unlearned man who will become its translator: “Wherefore it shall come to pass, that the Lord God **will** deliver **again** the book and the words thereof to him that is not learned; and the man that is not learned shall say: I am not learned” (2 Nephi 27:19 ≅ Isaiah 29:12).

Here again, Nephi mixes the language of Isaiah 29:14 (“I [the Lord God] **will proceed** [to],” *yōsīp*) with the language of Isaiah 29:11–12 (“the words of a book that is sealed”; “And the book is delivered to him that is not learned, saying, Read this, I pray thee: and he saith, I am not learned.”) On one level, Nephi’s midrashic use of the “do again”/“proceed to do” idiom explicates what he believes the statement “I will proceed to do a marvelous work” signifies, namely that the Lord “will deliver again the book” by divine means and “the words thereof” also by divine means

to the book's unlearned translator. The Hebrew *yāsap* + verb idiom lies at the heart of this idea.

Nephi further prophesies: "Then shall the Lord God say unto him: The learned shall not read them, for they have rejected them, and I am able to do mine own work; wherefore thou shalt read the words which I shall give unto thee" (2 Nephi 27:20).⁵² One way of understanding this prophecy is that the "words of the book" would come into English translation as "the words which I shall give unto thee" — i.e., through divinely *given* translation (cf. the "gift and power of God," Omni 1:20).⁵³

Midrashic Use #4:

"Then Shalt Thou Seal up the Book Again" (2 Nephi 27:22–23)

Nephi's midrash of Isaiah 29 in 2 Nephi 27 does something unusual for midrash in that it addresses the future translator of the "book that is sealed" directly in the second person. That translator, of course, was Joseph Smith. Interestingly, Nephi records that the Lord gave the translator a commandment that, if given or rendered in Hebrew, would have plausibly used the verbal idiom from which the translator's name is derived — *yāsap/yôsîp*:

Wherefore, when thou hast read the words which I have commanded thee, and **obtained the witnesses** which I have promised unto thee, **then shalt thou seal up the book again** [cf. Hebrew *tôsîp*], and hide it up unto me, that I may preserve the words which thou hast not read, until I shall see fit in mine own wisdom to reveal all things unto the children of men. For behold, I am God; and **I am a God of miracles**; and I will show unto the world that I am the same yesterday, today, and forever; and I work not among the children of men save it be according to their faith. (2 Nephi 27:22–23)

Nephi may have originally recorded the instruction "thou shalt ... again" with the verb *tôsîp* ("thou shalt ... again"),⁵⁴ or with an Egyptian scribal equivalent. We recall that the name Joseph, *yôsēp*, constitutes a hypocoristic theophoric name with God (or a god) as the implied subject of the verb *yāsap*, "may he [God] add," "may he do something again," etc. Here, the text makes the translator (Joseph) a more concrete part of the ongoing and unfolding iterative divine action.

52. Cf. Deuteronomy 31:11; Jeremiah 36:6.

53. See also D&C 3:11; 5:31; 135:3.

54. Cf., e.g., Deuteronomy 28:68.

The Lord’s self-description, “I am a God of miracles,” also directly refers to and recalls the Lord’s “proceeding to do, a marvelous work — yea, a marvelous work and a wonder.”⁵⁵ One can render the phrase, “marvelous work and a wonder” as a “miraculous miracle,” as Russell M. Nelson has recently rendered it.⁵⁶

Midrashic Use #5:

“And Again It Shall Come to Pass ... ” (2 Nephi 27:24; 2 Nephi 27:25 \cong Isaiah 29:13)

Nephi’s in-depth midrash of Isaiah 29 in 2 Nephi 27 employs another important idiomatic description of iterative divine action, again pointing to the name Joseph. Nephi declares, “**And again it** [cf. Hebrew *wayyōsep*] shall come to pass [cf. *lēhiyōt*] that the Lord shall say unto him that shall read the words that shall be delivered him” (2 Nephi 27:24). Nephi’s phraseology here seems to approximate that of Genesis 4:2 (“**And she again** [*wattōsep*] bare his brother Abel” or “and again she bore his brother Abel); Genesis 8:10 (“**and again he** [*wayyōsep*] sent forth the dove out of the ark”); and 2 Samuel 24:1 (“**and again** [*wayyōsep*] the anger of the Lord was kindled against Israel”). If so, we have another example of deliberate wordplay on the name Joseph.

Nephi thus prophesies that the Lord would quote Isaiah 29:13 to the future “Joseph,” translator of the sealed book: “**And again it** shall come to pass that the Lord shall say unto him that shall read the words that shall be delivered him: Forasmuch as this people draw near unto me with their mouth, and with their lips do honor me, but have removed their hearts far from me, and their fear towards me is taught by the precepts⁵⁷ of men” (2 Nephi 27:24–25, quoting Isaiah 29:13). Indeed, the Prophet Joseph Smith reported that the Lord concatenated a quotation of Isaiah 29:13 and 2 Timothy 3:5 as a part of his first vision: “I was answered that I must join none of them, for they were all wrong; and the Personage who addressed me said that all their creeds were an abomination in his sight; that those professors were all corrupt; that: ‘they draw near to me with their lips, but their hearts are far from me,

55. Hebrew *haplē’ wāpele’* “prodigies and wonders (NJB), shocking and amazing (NRSV)” (Isaiah 29:14); Hebrew *nīplē’ōt* “wonders, wonderful things” (Exodus 3:20).

56. Russell M. Nelson, “Teach Repentance and Baptize Converts” (Seminar for New Mission Presidents, Provo, Utah, June 23, 2016).

57. Nephi changes the phrase “taught by the precept of men” from Isaiah 29:13 into the plural “taught by the precepts of men.” See also Nephi’s use of this phrase in 2 Nephi 28:14 (cf. also vv. 26 and 31).

they teach for doctrines the commandments of men [Isaiah 29:13], having a form of godliness, but they deny the power thereof' [2 Timothy 3:5]" (Joseph Smith — History 1:19).⁵⁸

As it turns out, the confluence of the Lord's description of apostasy and hypocrisy in Isaiah 29:13 with the participial use of the verb form *yôšîp* in Isaiah 29:14 matches well the theophanic events that precipitate the restoration of the gospel, the coming forth of the sealed book (the Book of Mormon), and the gathering of Israel — all "the marvelous work, yea, a marvelous work and a wonder." According to Joseph Smith's 1832 account of his First Vision, the Lord first called Joseph by name: "Joseph <my son> thy sins are forgiven thee."⁵⁹ In his 1835 account of that vision, Joseph clarifies that God the Father appeared first⁶⁰ and that Jesus spoke the aforementioned words. Joseph Smith's 1838 canonized account of the First Vision further reveals that the first word that God the Father spoke also was "Joseph."

Thus, to sum up, God the Father introduced his Beloved Son, "Joseph, this is my Beloved Son, hear him!" Then Jesus said, "Joseph, my son, thy sins are forgiven thee." Jesus then quoted Isaiah 29:13 and 2 Timothy 3:5. The emphasis on Joseph's personal name, then, seems significant in the context of Isaiah 29:14 and Yahweh "proceed[ing] [*yôšîp*] to do a marvelous work."

Joseph Smith's account of Moroni's appearances to him on September 21–22, 1823 also stress that Moroni began his conversations with him speaking his first name — "Joseph" (Joseph Smith — History 1:33, 49). The emphasis on Joseph's name in the First Vision and during Moroni's visitations seems particularly appropriate given Isaiah's use of *yôšîp* in Isaiah 29:14 and Nephi's midrashic permutations of that idiom. From

58. In a manner not dissimilar to the opening verses of Isaiah 29 and Nephi's in-depth midrash in 2 Nephi 27, 2 Timothy 3:1–5 describes widespread latter-day apostasy: "This know also, that in the last days perilous times shall come. For men shall be lovers of their own selves, covetous, boasters, proud, blasphemers, disobedient to parents, unthankful, unholy, without natural affection, trucebreakers, false accusers, incontinent, fierce, despisers of those that are good, traitors, heady, high-minded, lovers of pleasures more than lovers of God; having a form of godliness, but denying the power thereof: from such turn away."

59. *The Joseph Smith Papers: Histories, Volume 1: Joseph Smith Histories, 1832–1844*, ed. Karen Lynn Davidson, David J. Whittaker, Mark Ashurst-McGee, Richard L. Jensen (Salt Lake City, UT: The Church Historian's Press, 2012), 13.

60. *Ibid.*, 116. See also "Journal, 1835–1836," *The Joseph Smith Papers*, accessed June 26, 2017, <http://www.josephsmithpapers.org/paper-summary/journal-1835-1836/25>.

a Latter-day Saint perspective, we would further see, with Nephi, the Lord’s “proceed[ing] [*yôšîp*] to do a marvelous work” in the First Vision and his “proceed[ing] to bring forth the words of the Book” via Moroni’s ministrations as the moments when the prophecy of Isaiah 11:11 began to be fulfilled: “the Lord shall **set** his hand **again** [*yôšîp*] the second time to recover the remnant of his people” (see again 2 Nephi 25:17, 21; 29:1).

Midrashic Use #6:

“I Will Proceed to Do a Marvelous Work”
(2 Nephi 27:26 ≅ Isaiah 29:14; 2 Nephi 9:43)

After several interpretive adaptations of the *yâsap* idiom from Isaiah 29:14, Nephi finally quotes the passage in full in 2 Nephi 27:26. A side-by-side comparison of the two passages, however, reveals some important differences:

Isaiah 29:14	2 Nephi 27:26
Therefore, behold , I will proceed [<i>yôšîp</i>] to do a marvellous work among this people, even a marvellous work and a wonder: for the wisdom of their wise [men] shall perish, and the understanding of their prudent men shall be hid.	Therefore, I will proceed [<i>yôšîp</i>] to do a marvelous work among this people, yea , a marvelous work and a wonder, for the wisdom of their wise and learned shall perish, and the understanding of their prudent shall be hid.

The first distinct difference is the lack of the particle “behold” in 2 Nephi 27:26. However, the idiom underlying “behold, I will proceed” (*hinēnî yôšîp*) can be rendered essentially the same way yet without representing the particle *hinē* + *nî* in English with the particle “behold.” It is also interesting, if not significant, that the translated Book of Mormon text here does not replicate KJV’s use of “even,” an italicized term that the KJV translators supplied — i.e., it is not present in the underlying Hebrew text. Instead, the text uses the emphatic particle “yea.” It is possible that Nephi, recognizing the abruptness of the polyptotonic appositional phrase *haplē’ wāpele’* (“marvelous work and a wonder”), added a particle of his own, rendered “yea” in the Book of Mormon text. Or, like “even” in the KJV, it too may have been supplied according to the context.

A more significant textual variant occurs in the next phrase. Nephi's text expands the construction "the wisdom of their wise" to "the wisdom of their wise and learned." This expansion ensures that the reader understands that the type of wisdom that will perish will include that of "the learned" mentioned earlier in his midrash (2 Nephi 27:15–20). Moreover, in using this expanded construction, Nephi also recalls Jacob's earlier use of the expression "the wise and the learned" in the speech in which he interpreted Isaiah 48–49 (2 Nephi 6–10) as preserved by Nephi himself:

And whoso knocketh, to him will he open; and **the wise, and the learned**, and they that are rich, who are **puffed up because of their learning, and their wisdom**, and their riches — yea, they are they whom he despiseth; and save they shall cast these things away, and consider themselves fools before God, and come down in the depths of humility, he will not open unto them. But **the things of the wise and the prudent shall be hid from them forever** — yea, that happiness which is prepared for the saints. (2 Nephi 9:42–43)

Jacob's prediction that "the things of the wise and the prudent shall be hid from them forever" appears to quote or paraphrase Isaiah 29:14, "the wisdom of their wise men shall perish, and the understanding of their prudent men shall be hid." This indicates that Jacob had a version of Isaiah 29:14 in mind in his previous use of the phrase "the wise and the learned," and perhaps suggests that "the wise and the learned" existed in the version of Isaiah 29 that Nephi and Jacob had on the brass plates.

Midrashic Use #7:

"And the Meek Also Shall Increase and Their Joy Shall Be in the Lord" (2 Nephi 27:30 \cong Isaiah 29:19)

Just as Isaiah 29:19 represents a climactic moment in Isaiah's prophecy of the sealed book, Nephi's use and adaptation of this text in his midrash of Isaiah 29 also stands as a climactic moment. Nephi's text also renders Isaiah's text here somewhat differently:

Isaiah 29:19	2 Nephi 27:30
The meek also <u>shall increase</u> [wěyospû] their joy in the Lord, and the poor among men shall rejoice in the Holy One of Israel.	And the meek also <u>shall</u> <u>increase</u> [wěyospû], and their joy shall be in the Lord, and the poor among men shall rejoice in the Holy One of Israel.

Nephi’s midrash makes the verb *yāsap* an intransitive verb — i.e., a verb with no object — rather than reading “joy” as the object. Thus while Nephi emphasizes that the “joy” of the meek will be in the Lord, he stresses particularly that the “meek shall increase” not simply in just that one sense. The “book” that Yahweh would *yōsīp* — “add,” “proceed” — to bring forth as a “miraculous miracle” through a latter-day Joseph would enable and empower the “meek” to *yāsap* — to “add” or “increase” in manifold senses.

Much could be written here on the class of persons called “the meek” or the *‘ānāwīm*, derived from the verb *‘ānā*, which can mean “to humble,” “afflict,” or even “rape” somebody. Numerous Hebrew Bible passages reflect a special concern for the *‘ānāwīm* and their plight.⁶¹ An earlier prophecy by Isaiah that Nephi particularly ties to Isaiah 29 declares that the Messianic figure would “reprove with equity for the meek of the earth [‘*anēwē ‘āreš*’]” (Isaiah 11:4), a passage that Nephi quotes two other times in 2 Nephi 21:4 and 2 Nephi 30:9. Jesus famously quotes the promise of Psalm 37:11 (“the meek shall inherit the earth”) in his Beatitude in Matthew 5:5 (3 Nephi 12:5; see also especially D&C 88:17). Jacob and Nephi make additional references to the *‘ānāwīm* in 2 Nephi 9:30 (“they

61. E.g., Isaiah 11:4; 29:19; 32:7; 61:1; Amos 2:7; 8:4; Zephaniah 2:3; Job 24:4; Psalm 9:18; 10:7; Psalm 22:16; 25:9; 34:2; 37:11; 69:32; 76:9; 147:6; cf. Psalm 9:8; Proverbs 3:34; 14:21; 16:19. Both the Essenes and the early Christians called themselves “The Poor” (*‘ebyōnīm* or *‘ebyōnīm*), a synonym of *‘ānāwīm*: “It is important to see the extent to which the terminology Ebionim (‘the Poor’) and its synonyms penetrated Qumran literature. Early commentators were aware of the significance of this usage, though later ones have been mostly insensitive to it. The use of this terminology, and its ideological parallels, ‘Ani (‘Meek’) and Dal (‘Downtrodden’), as interchangeable terms of self-designation at Qumran, is of the utmost importance. There are even examples in crucial contexts of the published corpus of an allusion like ‘the Poor in Spirit’, known from Matthew’s Sermon on the Mount in both the War Scroll, xi. 10 and the Community Rule, iv.3.” (Robert H. Eisenman and Michael O. Wise, *The Dead Sea Scrolls Uncovered* [Shaftesbury, Dorset; Rockport, MA: Element, 1992/Penguin, 1993], 233).

despise the poor and they persecute the meek”) and 2 Nephi 28:13 (“they rob the poor because of their fine clothing; and they persecute the meek and the poor in heart”), texts which both appear to have connections to Isaiah 29:14.

Midrashic Use #8:

“We Need No More of the Word of God”! (2 Nephi 28:29 — 2 Nephi 28:2–32 ≅ Isaiah 28:10, 13; 29:13, 15, 21)

Even after offering a thoroughgoing midrash of the text of Isaiah 29 in 2 Nephi 27, Nephi continues to explicate several aspects of that text in the chapters that follow. A statement in 2 Nephi 28:2 suggests that the sealed book of Isaiah 29 and 2 Nephi 27 remains Nephi’s overarching topic for 2 Nephi 28–30: “The things [words] which shall be written out of the book shall 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).

In 2 Nephi 28:3–30, Nephi revisits the conditions of apostasy described in Isaiah 29 and 2 Nephi 27, using language from his vision of “the great and abominable Church” (1 Nephi 12–14). He also incorporates additional images from Isaiah (e.g., “let us eat and drink; for to morrow [tomorrow] we shall die,” Isaiah 22:13).

At the end of this description of widespread apostasy, Nephi issues woe oracles against those who reject additional light and truth from God. “Yea, wo be unto him that saith: **We have received, and we need no more!**” (2 Nephi 28:27); “And in fine, wo unto all those who tremble, and are angry because of the truth of God! For behold, he that is built upon the rock receiveth it with gladness; and he that is built upon a sandy foundation trembleth lest he shall fall. Wo be unto him that shall say: **We have received the word of God, and we need no more of the word of God, for we have enough!**” (2 Nephi 28:29).

Nephi thus draws an emphatic contrast between “the meek [who] **shall increase**” or who “**shall have more**” (*wēyospū*) and those who say, “We have received, and **we need no more!**” (2 Nephi 28:27); or worse, “We have received the word of God and **we need no more** of the word of God, for **we have enough!**” (2 Nephi 28:29). These objections arise from the same “Gentiles” (2 Nephi 28:32) who are “the wise, and the learned, and the rich, that are puffed up in the pride of their hearts” (v. 15) and “turn aside the just for a thing of naught” (v. 16; quoting Isaiah 29:21) and “rob the poor because of their fine sanctuaries ... [and] their fine clothing; and **they persecute the meek** [meek=Hebrew *‘ānāwīm*] and the poor in heart, because in their pride they are puffed up” (v. 13).

The declarations "we have received, and we need no more" and "we need no more of the word of God" invert the language of Isaiah 29:14 (2 Nephi 27), "I will **proceed** [*yôšîp*, add] to do a marvelous work" and 2 Nephi 27:14, "I will **proceed** [*yôšîp*] to bring forth the words of the book," as if somehow the human desire for "canon" and status quo could perchance thwart the divine intention to bring forth additional scripture.

Midrashic Use #9:

"Unto Him That Receiveth I Will Give More"

(2 Nephi 28:30 \cong Isaiah 28:10, 13)

Nephi further permutes and broadens his interpretation of Isaiah 29:14 and the idea of divine "adding" with his use of Isaiah 28:10 and 28:13. There, Isaiah describes the forthcoming of additional divine commandments or "precepts" in terms of [building]: "For precept must be upon precept, precept upon precept; line upon line, line upon line; here a little, and there a little"; "But the word of the Lord was unto them [or, came unto them] precept upon precept, precept upon precept; line upon line, line upon line; here a little, and there a little; that they might go, and fall backward, and be broken, and snared, and taken" (Isaiah 28:10, 13).

Although Isaiah describes a process of divine revelation that leads to the eventual "fall" of Jerusalem and Judah (cf. Jacob 4), Nephi sees the Lord's "line upon line" method of offering "additional" revelation and scripture as a process from which the righteous can benefit:

For behold, thus saith the Lord God: I will give unto the children of men line upon line, precept upon precept, here a little and there a little; and blessed are those who hearken unto my precepts, and lend an ear unto my counsel, for they shall learn wisdom; for **unto him that receiveth I will give more** [i.e., "Unto him that receiveth, I will add" cf. Hebrew *'ôšîp*]; and **from them that shall say, We have enough, from them shall be taken away even that which they have.** (2 Nephi 28:30)

Again, the name Joseph denotes "may he [God] add" or, with more epistemic modality, "he will add." Here the Lord promises to "give more" — i.e., to "add more" to those who "hearken" to his precepts or receive what he has already given. An idiomatic parallel from the Hebrew Bible comes from the prophet Nathan's confronting David after the latter illicitly took Bathsheba for himself and had her husband killed. Nathan declared, "And I gave thee thy master's house, and thy master's wives into thy bosom, and

gave thee the house of Israel and of Judah; and if that had been too little, **I would moreover have given** [*wě'ōsīpā*] unto thee such and such things" (2 Samuel 12:8). The idiom rendered "I would moreover have given" here literally means, "I would have added."⁶² Similarly, at the end of the book of Job, the narrator states that "the Lord **gave** [*wayyōsep*, **added to**] Job twice **as much** as he had before" (Job 42:10). In other words, the Lord "gave" Job "more." That appears to be the idiom Nephi's oracle uses.

Another intimation that Nephi is specifically thinking in terms of the fulfillment of Isaiah's prophecies is that Nephi's oracle also quotes and co-opts the language of Isaiah 28: "For precept must be upon precept, precept upon precept; line upon line, line upon line; here a little, and there a little"; "But the word of the Lord was unto them precept upon precept, precept upon precept; line upon line, line upon line; here a little, and there a little" (Isaiah 28:10, 13). It also seems very likely that Nephi saw in Isaiah's language a verbal picture of divine "adding."

Against the backdrop of the Lord's statement "unto him that receiveth will I give more, and from them that shall say, We have enough, from them shall be taken away even that which they have" (2 Nephi 28:30), it is interesting to consider Moroni's words to the Lord in Ether 12:35: "Wherefore, I know by this thing which thou hast said, that if the Gentiles have not charity, because of our weakness, that thou wilt prove them, and take away their talent, yea, even that which they have received, and **give unto them who shall have more abundantly.**" Both prophetic statements have the latter-day Gentiles particularly in view (see 2 Nephi 29 and below); and both statements revolve around the issue of being willing to "have more" and the Lord's willingness to give it. Thus in the broader context of 2 Nephi 25–30, Nephi's allusion to divine "adding" in 2 Nephi 28:30 contributes to the symbolism of the name Joseph in terms of those who are willing to "receive" all that the Lord is willing to "add."

Midrashic Use #10:

"At That Day When I Shall Proceed to Do a Marvelous Work Among Them" (2 Nephi 25:17; 29:1 \cong Isaiah 29:14)

Nephi then pivots back to Isaiah 29:14 yet again. Here in 2 Nephi 29:1, Nephi's second *Gezera Shawa* on Isaiah 11:11 and Isaiah 29:14 occurs, and he cites these passages as an oracle from the Lord himself. In this instance

62. Cf., e.g., NRSV 2 Samuel 12:8: "I gave you your master's house, and your master's wives into your bosom, and gave you the house of Israel and of Judah; and if that had been too little, **I would have added as much more.**"

the order of the two passages is reversed (another example of Seidel’s Law⁶³): “But behold, there shall be many — at that day when **I shall proceed** [*yôšîp*] to do a marvelous work among them, that I may remember my covenants which I have made unto the children of men, that I may **set my hand again** [**wě’ôsîp yādî*; cf. *yôšîp ... yādî*] the second time to recover my people [Isaiah 11:11], which are of the house of Israel” (2 Nephi 29:1). The oracle rewords the phraseology of Isaiah 11:11 from the third person into the first person (“that I may **set** my hand **again** the second time”). This has the practical effect of emphasizing the Lord’s intimate, personal involvement in initiating and carrying on the work of the gathering of Israel. We might cite the Lord’s personal visitation to Joseph Smith, which represents a concrete example of what Isaiah meant by his use of *yôšîp ... yādô* (Isaiah 11:11) and *hinēni yôšîp* (Isaiah 29:14).

Moreover, another practical effect of beginning this *Gezera Shawa* with the Isaiah 29:14 is that the Lord’s “proceeding” or “adding” to “do a marvelous work” makes the Lord’s initiation of the “marvelous work” — in hindsight, the First Vision, Moroni’s subsequent visitations, and the forthcoming of the “book that is sealed” (the Nephite records) — the departure point for the gathering of Israel. Nephi’s (and the Lord’s) repeated interpretation of Isaiah 11:11 and Isaiah 29:14 in light of each other signifies that no gathering of Israel would take place without the coming forth of the sealed book (eventually the Book of Mormon). Indeed, the express purpose of the coming forth of the Book of Mormon is the gathering of Israel.⁶⁴

Midrashic Use #11:

“There Cannot Be Any More Bible”? (2 Nephi 29:2–3 \cong Isaiah 5:26; 11:11–12 [cf. 2 Nephi 29:4, 6–7])

Nephi next records a significant permutation of the idea that the Lord “will add” or “will proceed do a marvelous work” by “adding” or “proceed[ing] to bring forth the words of the book.” In the immediate context of the aforementioned *Gezera Shawa* on Isaiah 29:14 (“I shall **proceed** [*yôšîp*] to do a marvelous work”) and Isaiah 11:11 (“that I may

63. See earlier discussion in this article.

64. Moroni, on the title-page of the Book of Mormon, describes the book’s *raison d’être* thus: “to show unto the remnant of the house of Israel what great things the Lord hath done for their fathers; and **that they may know the covenants of the Lord, that they are not cast off forever** — And also to the convincing of the Jew and Gentile that Jesus is the Christ, the Eternal God, manifesting himself unto all nations.”

set my hand **again** [**wě'ōsîp yādî*]), the Lord predicts that the Gentiles will respond to these “added” words from the “book that is sealed” with the declaration “A Bible! A Bible! We have got a Bible, and **there cannot be any more Bible**” (2 Nephi 29:3).

In their present context, these words amount to an obtuse and ill-conceived refutation of the prophecies of Isaiah 29:14 and Isaiah 11:11, but they also represent a deceptive misinterpretation and misapplication of so-called “canon-formula” passages, like Deuteronomy 4:2 (cf. 5:22 [MT 22:18]); 12:32 [MT 13:1]; Proverbs 30:6; and Revelation 22:18–20. These passages constitute injunctions against “adding” to or “diminishing” from individual scriptural books or works and serve to delimit their content as future scribes copied them. In all of the aforementioned passages from the Hebrew Bible, the verb *yāsap* (“add”) is the key term. Much more could be said on this topic that I cannot enter into here (see further below). However, it suffices for the present to say that none of these passages remotely preclude the writing, collection, and preservation of divine oracles in the future or the production of additional, individual works of scripture.

Through Nephi, the Lord asks the Gentiles — especially Gentiles of the latter-day — several penetrating questions, anticipating the aforementioned protests against additional works of scripture. The first of these questions pertains to the anti-Jewish (i.e., antisemitic) attitudes and assumptions of those who insist that “there cannot be any more Bible”:

But thus saith the Lord God: O fools, they shall have a Bible; and it shall proceed forth from **the Jews**, mine ancient covenant people. And **what thank they** [**yôdû 'et-hayyēhûdîm*] **the Jews for the Bible which they receive from them?** Yea, what do the Gentiles mean? **Do they remember the travails, and the labors, and the pains of the Jews**, and their diligence unto me, in bringing forth salvation unto **the Gentiles?** (2 Nephi 29:4)

As noted elsewhere, the Lord’s question “And what thank they the Jews ... ?” constitutes a wordplay on the name Judah/Jews,⁶⁵ a name the Hebrew Bible associates with the verb *ydy/ydh*, “to praise,” “thank,” or “acknowledge,” or “to praise out of a feeling of gratitude.” The Lord expresses indignation towards Gentiles (perhaps especially Gentile “Christians”)

65. Matthew L. Bowen, “What Thank They the Jews? (2 Nephi 29:4): A Note on the Name ‘Judah’ and Antisemitism,” *Interpreter: A Journal of Mormon Scripture* 12 (2014): 111–25, <https://www.mormoninterpreter.com/what-thank-they-the-jews-2-nephi-294-a-note-on-the-name-judah-and-antisemitism/>.

and the hypocrisy of declaring the all-sufficiency of scriptural texts whose authors' ethnic and religious origins many of these Gentiles revile.

In any case, the writing, collection, and preservation of scripture in times previous to Nephi's time, during Nephi's time, and in the future (i.e., additional scripture!) would occur through "the travails, and the labors, and the pains ... and [the] diligence" of the Jews. The Lord continues:

Thou fool, that shall say: A Bible, we have got a Bible, and **we need no more Bible**. Have ye obtained a Bible save it were by the Jews? Know ye not that **there are more nations than one?** Know ye not that I, the Lord your God, have created all men, and that I remember those who are upon the isles of the sea; and that I rule in the heavens above and in the earth beneath; and I **bring forth my word** unto the children of men, yea, even upon all the nations of the earth? (2 Nephi 29:6-7)

Here again we can clearly recognize thematic and lexical connections between Isaiah 29:14 and Nephi's midrash of Isaiah 29. Bearing in mind that the verb *yāsap* means to "add," "to do again," or "to do something more," the declamation "we need **no more Bible**" evokes the promise "I **will proceed** [*yôšîp*, add] to do a marvelous work"; and Nephi's earlier midrash of Isaiah 29:14, "the Lord God **shall proceed** [*yôšîp*, add] to bring forth the words of **the book**" (2 Nephi 27:24). The phrase "and I bring forth my word unto the children of men" (2 Nephi 29:7) recalls Nephi's earlier prophetic midrash on Isaiah, "Wherefore, the Lord God will proceed [*yôšîp*] to **bring forth the words of the book**" (2 Nephi 27:14), as well as Joseph the patriarch's prophecy regarding a future raised-up seer named "Joseph": "But a seer will I raise up out of the fruit of thy loins; and unto him will I give power **to bring forth my word** unto the seed of thy loins — **and not to the bringing forth my word only**, saith the Lord, but to the convincing them of my word, which shall have already gone forth among them" (2 Nephi 3:11).

Midrashic Use #12:

"Wherefore Murmur Ye Because That Ye Shall Receive More of My Word?" (2 Nephi 29:8-9)

The penetrating questions subsequently continue as the Lord returns to the issue of Gentile complaints about the bringing forth of additional scripture. Nephi's oracle frames "receiving more" of God's word in terms of the Deuteronomic law of witnesses (see Deuteronomy 17:6; 19:15).

One witness, according to that law, is insufficient to “establish” a “word” or “matter” (Hebrew *dābār*):

Wherefore murmur ye, because that ye shall receive more of my word? Know ye not that **the testimony of two nations is a witness unto you** that I am God, that I remember one nation like unto another? Wherefore, **I speak the same words unto one nation like unto another. And when the two nations shall run together the testimony of the two nations shall run together also.** And I do this **that I may prove unto many** that I am the same yesterday, today, and forever; and that **I speak forth my words according to mine own pleasure.** And because that **I have spoken one word ye need not suppose that I cannot speak another;** for my work is not yet finished; neither shall it be until the end of man, neither from that time henceforth and forever. (2 Nephi 29:8–9)

The expression “because that ye shall receive more of my word” plausibly represents an idiom like “because that ye shall add [*tôsîpû* or *tôsîpû*] to receive of my word [partitive].” Nephi’s return to the motif of the law of witnesses here, as in 2 Nephi 11 and 27, expands the idea of “more” scripture or “additional” scripture in terms of Deuteronomy’s legal requirement for “two or three witnesses” in capital cases (Deuteronomy 19:15; cf. 17:6). Indeed, legal language permeates 2 Nephi 29:8–9: “witness,” “testimony” (2 x), and “prove.” The Lord’s words, as preserved by Nephi, recall Nephi’s earlier appeal to Deuteronomy 19:15: “And now I, Nephi, write more of the words of Isaiah, for my soul delighteth in his words. For I will liken his words unto my people, and I will send them forth unto all my children, for he verily saw my Redeemer, even as I have seen him. ... Wherefore, **by the words of three, God hath said, I will establish my word.** Nevertheless, **God sendeth more witnesses,** and he proveth all his words” (2 Nephi 11:2–3).

Here in 2 Nephi 29:8–9, as in 2 Nephi 11:2–3, Nephi transmutes the application of the Deuteronomic law of witnesses (Deuteronomy 17:6; 19:15) into a form of “adding” or “writing more” scripture. Scriptural writers and even scriptural writings themselves become witnesses in the Lord’s “legal” cases with the human family, including final judgment (see especially 2 Nephi 33:14). Nephi’s interpretation of the coming forth of additional scripture as an application of the Deuteronomic law of witnesses represents another example of his sophisticated use of scripture.

Midrashic Use #13:
**"Neither Need Ye Suppose That I Have Not Caused More
 to Be Written" (2 Nephi 29:10–14)**

The Lord's oracle to Nephi uses yet another midrashic permutation of the *yāsap* idiom in Isaiah 29:14 in which he further demolishes two common misassumptions: (a) that the "Bible" as embraced by the Gentiles (including latter-day Gentile Christians) would contain all divinely inspired writing and (b) that the Lord himself would never add or bring forth more divine writing beyond human notions of a closed "canon".⁶⁶

Wherefore, because that ye have a Bible **ye need not suppose that it contains all my words; neither need ye suppose that I have not caused more to be written.** For I command all men, both in the east and in the west, and in the north, and in the south, and in the islands of the sea, that **they shall write the words which I speak unto them; for out of the books which shall be written I will judge the world,** every man according to their works, according to that which is written. For behold, **I shall speak unto the Jews and they shall write it; and I shall also speak unto the Nephites and they shall write it; and I shall also speak unto the other tribes of the house of Israel, which I have led away, and they shall write it; and I shall also speak unto all nations of the earth and they shall write it.** And it shall come to pass that the Jews shall have the words of the Nephites, and the Nephites shall have the words of the Jews; and the Nephites and the Jews shall have the words of the lost tribes of Israel; and the lost tribes of Israel shall have the words of the Nephites and the Jews. And it shall come to pass that my people, which are of the house of Israel, **shall be gathered home** unto the lands of their possessions; **and my word also shall be gathered in one.** And **I will show unto them that fight against my word**

66. See John W. Welch and David J. Whittaker, "Mormonism's Open Canon: Some Historical Perspectives on Its Religious Limits and Potentials," (Preliminary Report for the Foundation for Ancient Research and Mormon Studies, American Academy of Religion and the Society of Biblical Literature in Atlanta, Georgia, November 1986), <https://publications.mi.byu.edu/publications/PreliminaryReports/Set%205/Prelim%20Rep/Welch%20and%20Whittaker,%20Mormonisms%20Open%20Canon,%201986.pdf>. This report was in response to W. Davies, "Reflections on the Mormon Canon," *Harvard Theological Review* 79 (January–July 1986): 44–66.

and against my people, who are of the house of Israel, that I am God, and that I covenanted with Abraham that I would remember his seed forever. (2 Nephi 29:10–14)

The presupposition that the Lord will not or does not “add” to existing scripture from any arbitrary point in time represents a gross misunderstanding of texts like Deuteronomy 4:2 (“**Ye shall not add** [*lō’ tōsipû*] unto the word which I command you, neither shall ye diminish ought from it”); Deuteronomy 5:22 [MT 5:18] (“These words the Lord spake unto all your assembly in the mount, ... **and he added no more** [*wělo’ yāsap*]. And he wrote them in two tables of stone, and delivered them unto me”); Deuteronomy 12:32 [MT 13:1] (“What thing soever I command you, observe to do it: **thou shalt not add** [*lō’ tōsēp*] thereto, nor diminish from it”); Revelation 22:18–19, etc. — the so-called “canon” — formula (this will be treated in much greater depth elsewhere).⁶⁷ Each of these Deuteronomic iterations of the “canon”-formula, if taken out of context and interpreted literally, might be construed as precluding any additional Deuteronomic text, to say nothing of additional books of scripture. It is sufficient to note here, however, that the verb *yāsap* stands at the heart of the Hebrew Bible texts that preclude human alteration of divine revelation, as well as those that describe the forthcoming of additional scripture in terms of iterative divine action.

It is divine prerogative, of course, rather than human, that governs the coming forth of additional revelation and scripture.⁶⁸ Note how the verb *yāsap* also functions in the book of Jeremiah’s account of Jehoiakim’s attempted suppression of divine revelation. After Jehoiakim, king of Judah, had ordered burned a prophecy by the prophet Jeremiah that he disliked (see Jeremiah 36:1–26), the Lord ordered the burned scroll to be reproduced with additional material (see Jeremiah 36:27–31). The pericope concludes with the following statement: “Then took Jeremiah another roll, and gave it to Baruch the scribe, the son of Neriah; who wrote therein from the mouth of Jeremiah all the words of the book which Jehoiakim king of Judah had burned in the fire: **and there were added** [*nôsap*] besides unto them many like words” (Jeremiah 36:22). The result of the attempted suppression of divine, written revelation was “more” or “additional” revelation. Again, the name Joseph transparently means

67. Matthew L. Bowen, “There Cannot Be Any More Bible”? The Abuse of the So-called Canon Formula and Joseph Smith” (forthcoming).

68. See, e.g., 2 Peter 1:21: “For the prophecy came not in old time by the will of man: but holy men of God spake as they were moved by the Holy Ghost.” JST 1 Peter 1:20 adds, “no prophecy of the scriptures is given of any private will of man.”

"May he [God] add"; a greater irony, in view of what Isaiah 29:14 foretells in terms of the Lord "adding" (*yôšîp*) to bring forth written scripture and in view of what Joseph Smith's critics charge him with, is scarcely imaginable. It is accurate to say that the bringing forth of "additional" divine revelation, especially scriptural revelation, constituted Joseph Smith's life's work — most appropriate for someone named "Joseph."

We should also note here Nephi's further development of the idea of additional scripture as fulfillment of the Deuteronomic law of witnesses (Deuteronomy 19:15, cf. 17:6). The Jews, the Nephites, and the other tribes of Israel "shall write the words which I shall speak unto them." Here Nephi further records that the Lord's statement that out of these scriptural "books" the Lord would judge the world. In other words, each independent scriptural witness becomes a witness at the final judgment, fulfilling the requirement of two or three witnesses. Nephi makes this point even more explicit at the close of his writings (2 Nephi 33:14).

Last, Nephi's revelation warns those who "fight against my word and against my people" that the Lord will remember his covenant with Abraham. Those who "fight against [the Lord's] word and against [his] people" become the equivalent of those who "fight against Zion" (Isaiah 29:1–2, 7–8) and thus subject to the woes and consequences pronounced upon those who "fight against the Lamb of God" (1 Nephi 14:13) and "fight against God and the people of his church" (2 Nephi 25:14; cf. 2 Nephi 26:12).

Midrashic Use #14:

"Written unto the Gentiles, and Sealed up Again"

(2 Nephi 30:3 \cong 2 Nephi 27:14, 22 \cong Isaiah 29:14

[2 Nephi 27:30 \cong Isaiah 29:19; cf. 2 Nephi 30:17–18])

The final example — or final examples — of the midrashic use of *yāsap* comes in 2 Nephi 30. Nephi closes out his midrash of Isaiah 29 with a prophecy that again evokes the language of Isaiah's prophecy:

And now, **I would prophesy somewhat more** concerning the Jews and the Gentiles. For after **the book of which I have spoken shall come forth**, and be written unto the Gentiles, and **sealed up again** unto the Lord, there shall be many which shall believe **the words which are written**; and **they shall carry them forth** unto the remnant of our seed. (2 Nephi 30:3)

Nephi's expression "I would prophesy somewhat more" represents a near inversion of a statement that occurs in the Book of Amos,

when Amaziah, the priest at Bethel demands that the prophet Amos “**prophecy not again any more** [*lō’ tōsîp ‘ôd lēhinnābē*] at Beth-el” (Amos 7:13). Nephi’s plausible use of the *yāsap*-idiom thus dovetails nicely with what follows. His subsequent statement that the “book of which I have spoken,” — i.e., the words of the “book that is sealed” — would be “written unto the Gentiles and sealed up again” specifically recalls the commandment given unto the translator — i.e., Joseph Smith — “then shalt thou seal up the book again” in 2 Nephi 27:22, which itself appears to adapt or permute the *yāsap*-idiom used in Isaiah 29:14: The Lord “proceed[s] [*yôšîp*] to do a marvelous work” — that is, “proceed[s] [*yôšîp*] to bring forth the words of the book” (2 Nephi 27:14) and after the “book ... come[s] forth” the Lord commands the translator, the future “Joseph,” to “seal up the book **again** [Hebrew *tôšîp*, ‘shalt thou ... again’ or ‘thou shalt ... again’]” (2 Nephi 27:22). Again, Nephi prophetically alludes to the future translator’s name, Joseph, his instrumentality in the Lord’s “proceeding” (*yôšîp*), and the details of what that “marvelous work” or “marvelous work and a wonder” involved.

Moreover, the phrase “the words which are written” alludes to Nephi’s adaption of Isaiah 29:14 foretelling the Lord’s “proceed[ing] [*yôšîp*] to bring forth the words of the book.” It also echoes the description “the things which shall be written” (2 Nephi 28:2). Moreover, the phrase “there shall be many which shall believe the words that are written” refers to the “meek” who will “increase” (Isaiah 29:19; 2 Nephi 27:30). The “meek” will “increase,” in part, by service of those who “carry them [i.e., the words which are written] forth unto the remnant of our seed” (2 Nephi 30:3).

Nephi concludes his lengthy midrash and commentary on Isaiah 29 with the following prophecy:

There is nothing which is secret save it shall be revealed; there is no work of darkness save it shall be made manifest in the light; and **there is nothing which is sealed upon the earth save it shall be loosed**. Wherefore, **all things which have been revealed unto the children of men shall at that day be revealed**; and Satan shall have power over the hearts of the children of men **no more**, for a long time. And now, my beloved brethren, I make an end of my sayings. (2 Nephi 30:17–18)

Nephi reminds us that all “sealed” documents on the earth and their contents will be revealed, including (of course) the sealed book that he discussed at length and eventually all of its contents. One practical effect

of having "all things which have been revealed ... [being] revealed" again will be that Satan "shall ... no more" (cf. Hebrew *lō' yôšip*) have power over the human family. Nephi thus recalls his earlier citation of "the prophet" (Isaiah), who prophesied "that the time speedily cometh that Satan **shall** have **no more** power over the children of men" (1 Nephi 22:15; cf. Isaiah 52:1; 2 Nephi 8:24; 3 Nephi 20:36; see also Isaiah 51:22; 2 Nephi 8:24). The blessings promised in Isaiah 11:1–9 (and 2 Nephi 30:8–16) and Isaiah 29:17–24 will come to a full flowering.

Conclusion:

"He Shall Increase Their Seed" (Helaman 7:24; cf. Isaiah 37:31)

Near the end of his personal writings and following his adumbration of the doctrine of Christ (2 Nephi 30–31), Nephi briefly returns to the "adding" motif. Nephi felt unable to "add" or "give more" doctrine beyond what he had heretofore taught:

Behold, this is the doctrine of Christ, and **there will be no more doctrine given until after he shall manifest himself unto you in the flesh. And when he shall manifest himself unto you in the flesh, the things which he shall say unto you shall ye observe to do.** And now I, Nephi, **cannot say more**; the Spirit stoppeth mine utterance, and I am left to mourn because of the unbelief, and the wickedness, and the ignorance, and the stiffneckedness of men; for they will not search knowledge, nor understand great knowledge, when it is given unto them in plainness, even as plain as word can be. (2 Nephi 32:6–7)

Again and again, Nephi expresses his deep concern over the future of his posterity⁶⁹ and that of his brothers⁷⁰ and that portion of his posterity who would survive among the Lamanites — all descendants of "Joseph." Nephi recognized that "unbelief, ... wickedness, and ... ignorance" (including hardness of heart), such as would exist among the latter-day Gentiles, inevitably precluded the reception of additional revelation.

Nephi and his successors, rather, hoped that their posterity, as descendants of Joseph, would believe and obey the "additional" scripture claim, the promises made to Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, and Joseph, regardless of whether the Gentiles accepted such scripture. As

69. See especially 1 Nephi 15:4–5; 2 Nephi 33:3; see also 1 Nephi 6:6; 1 Nephi 12:15, 19–20; 2 Nephi 25:21; 26:15.

70. See, e.g., 1 Nephi 12:15, 19–20; 13:10–14; 38–39; 2 Nephi 26:15.

the Psalmist declared in one of Israel's temple-hymns:⁷¹ "The Lord **shall increase you more and more** [*yōsēp 'ālēkem*], you and your children" (Psalm 115:14). Similarly, Moses reiterated to Israel: "The Lord your God hath multiplied you, and, behold, ye are this day as the stars of heaven for multitude. (The Lord God of your fathers **make you** a thousand times so many **more** [*yōsēp 'ālēkem*, "add upon you"] as ye are, and bless you, as he hath promised you!)" (Deuteronomy 1:11).

But Nephi and his successors knew that such covenant promises and blessings do not amount to covenant entitlements. Nephi the son of Helaman testified against the degenerate Nephites of his time, prophesying that the Lord would "increase" the "seed" of their Josephite brethren, the Lamanites, well beyond the destruction of the Nephites: "For behold, they are more righteous than you, for they have not sinned against that great knowledge which ye have received; therefore the Lord will be merciful unto them; yea, he will lengthen out their days **and increase their seed**, even when thou shalt be utterly destroyed except thou shalt repent" (Helaman 7:24). The Lord leaves a remnant that perchance the descendants of the destroyed will return and repent, as Isaiah so often testified: "And the remnant that is escaped of the house of Judah **shall again** [*wēyāsēpā*] take root downward, and bear fruit upward" (Isaiah 37:31).

The Lord will "give more" to those who willingly receive that which he offers and obey that which he commands. The Lord has "added" or "proceeded" (*yōsīp*) to bring forth additional scripture (Isaiah 29:14; 2 Nephi 27:14, 26), so that "the meek [can] increase [*wēyospū*] their joy in the Lord" (Isaiah 29:19); or so that "the meek also shall increase [*wēyospū*], and their joy shall be in the Lord" (2 Nephi 27:30). The blessings in store for those who persistently receive what the Lord "adds" and obey it until the end of their lives can be summed up no better than the Lord does in the premortal council in heaven as recorded in the book of Abraham: "They who keep their second estate **shall have glory added upon** their heads for ever and ever" (Abraham 3:26).

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71. Margaret Barker, *The Gate of Heaven: The History and Symbolism of the Temple in Jerusalem* (Sheffield: Sheffield Phoenix, 2008), 45.

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A COMPELLING CASE FOR THEOSIS

John C. Hancock

Abstract: *What is theosis? Why does the doctrine of theosis matter? Why did God become man so that man might become God? In his book To Become Like God, Andrew C. Skinner answers these questions with compelling clarity. He provides ample convincing evidence that, far from being a deviation from original Christian beliefs, the doctrine of theosis, or the belief that human beings have the potential to become like God, is central to the Christian faith.*

Review of Andrew C. Skinner, *To Become Like God: Witnesses of Our Divine Potential* (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 2016). 164 pp. \$18.99 (hardback).

Andrew C. Skinner's *To Become Like God* is a life-changing book. It is rigorously researched and eloquently written, but more importantly, it communicates sublime truths in simple language. It expands the reader's vision of time and eternity, and it inspires the humble seeker of truth to reform his or her life in light of the ennobling doctrine of deification. "It is true intelligence," President John Taylor observed, "for a man to take a subject that is mysterious and great in itself and to unfold and simplify it so that a child can understand it."¹ No subject is as mysterious and great in itself as the doctrine of theosis, and in *To Become Like God*, Skinner unfolds and simplifies this subject in a marvelous way.

Skinner couches the Latter-day Saint doctrine of deification in its scriptural and historical context. He emphasizes the strength of the Latter-day Saints' doctrinal position: "It is my hope that readers will see that belief in the possibility that human beings can become like God is not a deviation from original Christian beliefs" (ix-x). Thus, Skinner's

1. John Taylor, "Discourse," *Deseret News*, Sept. 30, 1857, <https://contentdm.lib.byu.edu/digital/collection/desnews1/id/7995/rec/9>.

explicit intention is both descriptive and apologetic. But his aim is higher still; it is “to elevate our perspective and instill in us a desire to rejoice again over the restoration of ancient doctrine, specifically the doctrine of deification or, as it is called in classical Christian theology, *theosis* — the teaching that mortals can become gods” (x).

Skinner sets the stage for his masterful explanation of the doctrine of theosis with introductory chapters on the nature of God and Heavenly Father’s perfect plan. This introduction inoculates the reader from the danger of emphasizing one particular doctrine of the Gospel to the detriment of the beauty of the whole. Skinner’s study of the doctrine of theosis is deep and penetrating, but it is also broad and balanced. It squares well with Neal A. Maxwell’s insight:

The doctrines of Jesus Christ by themselves are dangerous, as G.K. Chesterton observed. Any principle of the Gospel, isolated, spun off, and practiced in solitude, can go wild. The incomplete insight is not insight at all! ... Just as the people of the Church need each other “that all may be edified together,” the doctrines of the Church need each other.²

Skinner avoids the trap of isolating, spinning off, or practicing the doctrine of theosis in solitude by unfolding it within the context of the plan of salvation, which was prepared in Heavenly Father’s perfect love and actualized through the Atonement of the Savior Jesus Christ. In this context, the ancient prophetic witnesses of the doctrine of theosis, along with the witness of Peter, the chief apostle, and the witnesses of the post-apostolic writers, Greek orthodoxy, the Protestant tradition, and the restored Gospel, become clearer. By carefully establishing the connection between the doctrine of theosis and the undergirding and overarching truths of Heavenly Father’s loving plan of salvation and the Atonement of the Savior Jesus Christ, Skinner inspires his readers to better understand and assimilate the truth concerning our divine potential.

In essence, Skinner sets out to answer a few basic questions, as posed on the inside front flap of the book’s dust jacket:

What does it mean to be a son or a daughter of God? A joint-heir with Jesus Christ? A possessor of all that the Father has? What did ancient Christians believe about the ultimate purpose of our creation? Do any other Christians hold similar views today?

2. Neal A. Maxwell, *A Time to Choose* (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book Company, 1972).

The simple answer to these questions is that far from being a heresy, as some Christians suppose, the doctrine of theosis is one of the oldest and most fundamental teachings of Christianity. Skinner draws from the writings of both ancient and modern Christians to demonstrate that the doctrine of deification was partially lost and then fully restored through the instrumentality of the Prophet Joseph Smith.

Skinner's opening chapters are rich with true doctrine, including doctrinal statements from the scriptures and latter-day prophets and apostles. These chapters also contain illuminating personal insights. He unpacks the statement attributed to the early Church Father Athanasius about the role of Jesus Christ: "God became man, so that man might become God" (4). After shedding light on the meaning of theosis, Skinner touches on the nature of God, His character, and His attributes, particularly His perfect love. Regarding God's glory and intelligence, he cites Elder Maxwell:

I testify that [God] is utterly incomparable in what He *is*, what He *knows*, what He *has accomplished*, and what He *has experienced*. ... In intelligence and performance, He far surpasses the individual and composite capacities and achievements of all who have lived, live now, and will yet live! (19)

Skinner notes that "one attribute of God seems to undergird and overarch all the rest: God is love (1 John 4:8)," or as is taught in *Lectures on Faith*:

[L]astly, but not less important to the exercise of faith in God, is the idea that he is love; for with all the other excellencies in his character, without this one to influence them, they could not have such powerful dominion over the minds of men; but when the idea is planted in the mind that he is love, who cannot see the just ground that men of every nation, kindred, and tongue, have to exercise faith in God so as to obtain eternal life? (21)

Skinner's chapter on the attributes of God is one that I hope to read over and over again, not only because it is true, but because it glows with the love of God.

Skinner's chapter on "The Father's Perfect Plan" (26) is no less true and no less inspiring. What is the Father's plan, and why did He create it? Skinner cites the Prophet Joseph Smith: "God himself [found] himself in the midst of spirits and glory, because he was greater ... saw proper to institute laws, whereby the rest could have a privilege to advance like himself" (27). In other words, Heavenly Father wants us to become like Him because He loves us. Heavenly Father's plan provides the privilege

for His children to advance and to become like Him, and theosis is only possible through the Savior Jesus Christ, whom God sent to execute the plan of salvation. Skinner cites the Prophet Joseph Smith again:

The great Jehovah contemplated the whole of the events connected with the earth, pertaining to the plan of salvation, before it rolled into existence, or ever “the morning stars sang together” for joy; the past, the present, and the future were and are, with Him, one eternal “now;” He knew of the fall of Adam, the iniquities of the antediluvians, of the depth of iniquity that would be connected with the human family, their weakness and strength, their power and glory, apostasies, their crimes, their righteousness and iniquity; He comprehended the fall of man, and his redemption; He knew the plan of salvation and *pointed it out*; He was acquainted with the situation of all nations and with their destiny; He ordered all things according to the council of His own will. (36)

Jesus Christ came to do the will of His Father so that God’s children might become like Him and share in His glory. Athanasius’ proclamation is true: “God became man, so that man might become God” (38).

Skinner then shows that there were many ancient prophetic witnesses of theosis, the greatest of which is that of the Savior Jesus Christ Himself. Skinner expounds upon many other Old and New Testament witnesses of theosis, including Adam, Abraham, John the Beloved, and the Apostle Paul. “It bears repeating” he writes, “the doctrine of godhood is at the heart of what we aim for in the true Church of Jesus Christ. Little wonder it is attacked, lampooned, downplayed, diminished, and ignored in our day” (54). Skinner demonstrates that the witness of Peter, the chief apostle, is particularly poignant with regards to the doctrine of theosis, or that which he called being “made partakers of the divine nature” (59). Peter received a powerful witness of the doctrine of theosis on the Mount of Transfiguration with Jesus and his fellow apostles James and John (67–68).

In addition to the witnesses of the Old and New Testament prophets and apostles, and to further establish the truth of the doctrine of theosis, Skinner draws from the witnesses of post-apostolic writers such as Athanasius, Justin Martyr, Irenaeus of Lyon, Clement of Alexandria, Hippolytus of Rome, Cyprian of Carthage, Polycarpus, Heraclitus, Basil, Gregory of Nazianzus, Gregory of Nyssa, Cyril of Alexandria, and deification in fifth century liturgy. He consults the witnesses of Greek Orthodoxy, including Macarios of Philadelphia, Macarius of

Egypt, John Chrysostom, Maximus the Confessor, John of Damascus, Michael Psellus, and others of the Greek Orthodox and Roman Catholic tradition, including Bernard of Clairvaux and Nicholas of Cusa. He gives voice to the witnesses of the Protestant tradition, including Martin Luther, John Calvin, John Wesley, Charles Wesley, and inspired protestant writers and poets. He also highlights the witnesses of the restored Gospel, including Brigham Young, Parley P. Pratt, and many others. Finally, Skinner echoes the witnesses of Joseph Smith and Lorenzo Snow. In his King Follett discourse, Joseph Smith taught:

Here, then, is eternal life, to know the only wise and true God [D&C 132:24]. You have got to learn how to be Gods yourselves, and to be kings and priests to God, the same as all Gods have done; by going from one small degree to another, from grace to grace, from exaltation to exaltation, until you are able to sit in glory as doth those who sit enthroned in everlasting power; and I want you to know that God in the last days, while certain individuals are proclaiming his name, is not trifling with you or me. (130)

Of course, there are things that we don't know, and Skinner stops short of theological speculation. In conclusion, he returns to his initial explanation of the nature and character of God in order to reemphasize the truth that is most fundamental to the doctrine of theosis, namely, "God is love." "The possibility that each of us may become like God," Skinner concludes,

should certainly humble us, but even more, it should thrill, inspire, and motivate us to strive to receive of God's fulness and his glory. Such knowledge should transform the way we see our fellow human beings. . . . Latter-day Saints, by doctrine and by practice, affirm that we are children of loving Parents who are anxious to have us return and live in their family unit, possessing what they possess. The doctrine of deification is a manifestation of that love. (141–42)

To Become Like God is a life-changing book, and it is a great addition to the Latter-day Saint Gospel library, the Christian library, and any other library. It scintillates with the light of truth and of true intelligence. More importantly, it radiates the love of God and the pure love of Christ. In it, Andrew C. Skinner provides ample convincing evidence that, far from being a deviation from original Christian beliefs, the belief in the possibility that human beings can become like God is central to the Christian faith. I couldn't recommend it more highly.

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AN INVITING EXPLORATION

David Calabro

Abstract: *This informative and very readable volume, targeted to a Latter-day Saint audience, serves as an introduction to the Apocrypha and an exploration of Latter-day Saint views of the books. Even those already familiar with the Apocrypha will find this book insightful in the Latter-day Saint approaches it brings to bear. Even so, the book touches too lightly on some issues, including the extent of the Apocrypha, the phenomenon of pseudonymity, and the reasons for the current exclusion of the Apocrypha from the Latter-day Saint canon.*

Review of Jared W. Ludlow, *Exploring the Apocrypha from a Latter-day Saint Perspective* (Springville, Utah: CFI, 2018). 234 pp. \$16.99.

Latter-day Saints have a unique relationship to the books that comprise the Apocrypha, a body of religious texts that includes the books of Esdras, Judith, Tobit, Maccabees, Wisdom of Solomon, Ecclesiasticus, and additions to some of the canonical books of the Old Testament. These texts are regarded as scripture by Catholic and Orthodox communities but are excluded from the Jewish and Protestant canons. On one hand, as with the two latter communities, the LDS Standard Works do not include these other texts. On the other hand, however, our belief in revealed ancient scripture outside the traditional canon suggests that we should approach the Apocrypha with special interest and insight. The Lord himself states that those who study the Apocrypha while enlightened by the Spirit “shall obtain benefit therefrom” (D&C 91:4–5). Yet, for the most part, Latter-day Saints have not availed themselves of the benefit of which the Lord speaks. Jared Ludlow, professor of ancient scripture at Brigham Young University, takes a significant step toward

rectifying this situation through his book *Exploring the Apocrypha from a Latter-day Saint Perspective*.

The purposes of this book, as explained in the preface, are to introduce the Apocrypha to Latter-day Saints and to explain “the role it can play in our own spiritual lives” (x). The organization of the book addresses this dual purpose. Two introductory chapters describe the Apocrypha in general terms (Chapter 1, “Apocrypha: What Is It and Where Did It Come From?”) and recount the history of its reception among Latter-day Saints (Chapter 2, “Joseph Smith and the Latter-day Saint Use of the Apocrypha”). Twelve subsequent chapters address each book of the Apocrypha in turn. Each chapter describes the historical background and contents of the book and then, in a “Conclusion” section, evaluates its potential doctrinal significance for Latter-day Saints. Most of the chapters cover narrative books, so the description includes a summary of the narrative; however, in the last two chapters, which cover Wisdom of Solomon and Ecclesiasticus, Ludlow groups the sayings into categories and summarizes them by topic.

To my mind, the three adjectives that best describe this book are *informative*, *concise*, and *readable*. The book is impressively learned, but the lay reader will be grateful that the erudition underlying the arguments, rather than cluttering the main text, is in large part relegated to the notes at the end of each chapter. The book is designed to motivate readers to read the Apocrypha for themselves, and Ludlow successfully navigates the fine line between too much and too little description.

Latter-day Saints will find many interesting gems in this book. For example, Ludlow highlights the messianic prophecies in 2 Esdras (see pages 84, 88, 89), and he discusses Esther, Susanna, and Judith in terms of their potential as role models for women believers (see pages 40–41, 52, 57, 141–42). Even those already familiar with the Apocrypha will find this book stimulating in the way it presents the Apocrypha from a Latter-day Saint perspective. For instance, I found Ludlow’s discussion of Jewish and Latter-day Saint responses to persecution, in the conclusion to the section on 1 Maccabees (163–65), especially thought-provoking.

In my reading of *Exploring the Apocrypha*, I noted a few points I wished were explored in more depth. One of these is the fluid boundary around the corpus of books that we call the Apocrypha. Ludlow touches lightly on this issue in parts of his discussion in Chapter 1. For instance, he mentions that the apocryphal books included in the earliest complete Greek Bible manuscripts (4th–5th centuries AD) had “different contents and ordering, which seems to indicate fluidity related to these texts at that

time” (9). He also mentions that “Eastern Orthodox Christians tended to accept all the books of the Apocrypha and some additional ones, including 3 Maccabees, Psalm 151, and 4 Maccabees (in an appendix)” (9–10). These other books do not receive much discussion elsewhere in *Exploring the Apocrypha*. Psalm 151, for example, is mentioned as one of the “[w]orks for which the discovery of Hebrew or Aramaic manuscripts of their texts ... has confirmed the view that they were composed in one or other of these languages” (5), but it does not appear on the categorized list of apocryphal books on the preceding page, and it is not discussed further in the volume.

The fluidity of this group of books implies that the distinction between “the Apocrypha” and the broader category of “apocryphal texts” or “Pseudepigrapha” is less rigid than Ludlow’s brief discussion (6–7) would suggest. Without an explicit discussion of this issue, some readers of *Exploring the Apocrypha* may be tempted to imagine a neat three-part division between the biblical canon, the Apocrypha, and the Pseudepigrapha. Yet the more fluid view resonates with the Latter-day Saint belief in an open canon which is, itself, at the tip of a continuum of authoritative and semi-authoritative texts. Examples demonstrating the fluid nature of this continuum include the Lectures on Faith, which were included in the Doctrine and Covenants from 1835 to 1921; the Joseph Smith Egyptian Papyri, which have an ambiguous relationship to the canonical Book of Abraham; and the hymn “O Say, What Is Truth,” which was included in the Pearl of Great Price when it was originally canonized in 1880. All this points to a close parallel between our Restoration canon and the ancient biblical canon.¹

On pages 6–7 and in endnotes 21–22 on page 17, Ludlow provides a brief but intriguing discussion of how the apocryphal texts came into being. He addresses the classic problem of how those apocryphal books that are pseudonymously attributed to Old Testament prophets could ever have been promulgated as legitimate religious texts. (In the narrow definition of the “Apocrypha,” this question would apply mainly to 2 Esdras, but in view of the permeable boundary between the Apocrypha and the broader category of “apocryphal texts,” as discussed above, the question has wider relevance.) In answer to this question, Ludlow takes up a theory developed by R. H. Charles around 1912 and endorsed to an LDS

1. For further examples and discussion, see Robert J. Matthews, “Whose Apocrypha? Viewing Ancient Apocrypha from the Vantage of Events in the Present Dispensation,” in *Apocryphal Writings and the Latter-day Saints*, ed. C. Wilfred Griggs (Salt Lake City: Greg Kofford Books, 2007), 1–18.

audience by Stephen E. Robinson in 1983.² The pseudonymous books of the Apocrypha, according to this theory, were produced as a “pious fraud,” or, in other words, “an intentional deceit practiced to gain normative standing for new ideas.”³ Such a measure was necessary, according to Charles and Robinson, because religious authorities at that time believed “that the heavens were sealed and that the spirit of prophecy had departed from Israel,” so that any work claiming inspiration outside the established prophetic canon would fail to find acceptance among the authorities.⁴ (It is worth noting that the explicit reference to the fraudulent, deceptive nature of this enterprise is Robinson’s; Charles is more concerned with the motivating factor, the belief that the canon was closed.)

More discussion of this issue would have been helpful, particularly since Charles’s theory is both problematic and contested.⁵ Although it is certain that some religious groups of the relevant period (around 200 BC to 100 AD) held a conservative view of the biblical canon, the religious climate of that time was very diverse, and there is little if any evidence for the kind of censorship that Charles’s theory posits; “indeed there was nothing to prevent any writer at this time issuing his book either anonymously or in his own name.”⁶ Further, “Charles’s explanation charges the apocalyptists [or the writers of pseudonymous apocryphal works] not only with deception but also with a marked credulity in believing that such deception would be accepted by their readers at its face value.”⁷ This points to a *non sequitur* in Charles’s theory, for if the prophetic canon were regarded as closed and final, putting a new work under the name of an ancient prophet would by no means guarantee its acceptance; in fact, in the religious climate this theory presupposes, such

2. R. H. Charles, *The Book of Enoch* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1912), x; Charles, *Eschatology* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1913), 196–205; Charles, *The Apocrypha and Pseudepigrapha of the Old Testament* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1913), 2:viii–ix; Stephen E. Robinson, “Lying for God: the Uses of Apocrypha,” in *Apocryphal Writings and the Latter-day Saints*, ed. C. Wilfred Griggs (Salt Lake City: Greg Kofford Books, 2007), 133–54.

3. Robinson, “Lying for God,” 141, 143.

4. *Ibid.*, 142.

5. On this issue, see John J. Collins, *The Apocalyptic Imagination: An Introduction to Jewish Apocalyptic Literature*, second edition (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1998), 14–15, 39–40; Bruce M. Metzger, “Literary Forgeries and Canonical Pseudepigrapha,” *Journal of Biblical Literature* 91, no. 1 (1972): 17, 20–21; D. S. Russell, *The Method and Message of Jewish Apocalyptic* (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1964), 127–39, 158–77; Russell, *The Old Testament Pseudepigrapha: Patriarchs and Prophets in Early Judaism* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1987), 8–12.

6. Russell, *Method and Message*, 131.

7. *Ibid.*

a work would doubtless come under accusations of sacrilege. Ultimately, Charles's interpretation represents a refusal to come to grips with the mystical worldview embodied in the texts, an aspect of Charles's work that has been noted elsewhere.⁸

Personally, I find the theory of D. S. Russell to be more persuasive. According to Russell, the pseudonymous writers of apocryphal texts "believed that they themselves were recipients of divine revelations." Their descriptions of the ancient prophets receiving revelation "reflect an actual experience in which they believed themselves to be inspired by the spirit of God and thereby to receive revelations concealed from the ordinary run of men." More specifically, "the apocalyptic visionary saw the ancient patriarch or prophet being introduced to these mysteries and in so doing he was introduced to them himself. What the ancient worthy saw he himself was now seeing. They were sharing a common knowledge; they were recipients of a common revelation."⁹ This would, of course, resonate with Restoration scriptures like the Book of Abraham, in which Abraham recounts in the first person revelations that he received. Joseph Smith, who received the Book of Abraham by revelation, would be a precise modern parallel to the "apocalyptic visionary" that Russell describes. This does not necessarily imply that all these texts are equally *true* revelations. Nevertheless, this approach is a less arbitrary alternative to that of Robinson, which would label Joseph Smith's scripture as *revelation* and the apocryphal works as *fraud*. Our experience as Latter-day Saints, which often includes having to endure uncharitable labeling of our scripture, should give us empathy for the ancient writers.

In his analysis of the Lord's statement regarding the Apocrypha in D&C 91, Ludlow states that "the Apocrypha was not to be translated as part of the JST, and, consequently, it is not part of the LDS canon" (23). But the fact that the Apocrypha was not translated is not a sufficient reason for its exclusion from the canon. Other parts of the Bible also were not touched in the JST and yet remain in the canon, most notably Song of Solomon, about which Joseph Smith wrote in the manuscript of his inspired translation, "The Songs of Solomon are not Inspired writings."¹⁰ Further, this would imply that the decision not to include the Apocrypha in the canon occurred early in the Church's history and was directly

8. Collins, *The Apocalyptic Imagination*, 14–15.

9. Russell, *Old Testament Pseudepigrapha*, 9–10.

10. See Dana M. Pike, "Reading the Song of Solomon as a Latter-day Saint," *Religious Educator* 15, no. 2 (2014): 91–113, <https://rsc.byu.edu/archived/re-15-no-2-2014/reading-song-solomon-latter-day-saint>.

based on this revelation, which is contradicted by the very interesting story Ludlow recounts about the deposit of the Bible in the cornerstone of the Nauvoo Temple, in which it was decided that the Bible placed in the deposit “should be complete — containing the Apocrypha” (24).

How, then, do we explain the eventual exclusion of the Apocrypha from our canon? Ludlow mentions a more satisfying possibility: “Beyond these cases of Apocrypha use during the time of Joseph Smith, we can search in vain for instances of Joseph Smith preaching from the Apocrypha; they don’t seem to exist. ... This may be a reason the Apocrypha was not included in the LDS canon: it was simply not a major source for sermons or writings” (27). Bound up with this is doubtless the fact that the Bible many early Church members owned would have contained only the Protestant canon, without the Apocrypha.

If the exclusion of the Apocrypha from our canon was due to accidents of history, which I think is likely, one may wonder whether these books could legitimately be regarded as part of our canon after all. Indeed, on reading D&C 91, it is hard to see what in this revelation distinguishes the Apocrypha from the rest of the Bible. Other parts of the Bible have also been tampered with by the hands of men (see 1 Nephi 13:20–41). Scripture in general, including the Bible, can be understood properly only by the Spirit (see 1 Corinthians 2:11–16; 2 Peter 1:19–21; Moroni 10:4–5; D&C 50:19–23). A ready illustration of this last point is found in Ludlow’s discussion of teachings in Ecclesiasticus that do not “agree with LDS teachings or modern sensibilities.” He refers to the statement in D&C 91 that the Apocrypha contains both true and false teachings, and he suggests applying this principle to avoid “false doctrine.” But the examples that Ludlow gives in footnote 9, including the doctrines of harsh discipline for children, the finality of death, and God as a source of evil (specifically in the punishment of sinners), are not so different from doctrines taught in the Bible itself.¹¹ It is even possible that the reason Joseph Smith was not required to translate the Apocrypha was not because the Apocrypha was regarded as less important or authoritative but because it was less problematic than other parts of the Bible. The Lord states in D&C 91:1 that the Apocrypha “is mostly translated correctly” — something that could not be said, for example, of the book of Genesis and the Gospels of Matthew and John! Thus, Joseph Smith may not have needed to translate the Apocrypha because it was already acceptable as it stood. However, on the other side of the argument, it could be that it was specifically the

11. See Proverbs 22:15, 23:13, 29:15; Psalm 88:10; Ecclesiastes 9:5–6; Joshua 23:15; Judges 9:23; 2 Kings 21:12; Jeremiah 21:10; and Amos 9:4.

“interpolations” that were at issue in the Apocrypha, in contrast to the rest of the Bible, in which Joseph Smith’s task was to restore “plain and precious things” that had been “taken away” (1 Nephi 13:28).

In summary, *Exploring the Apocrypha* is an excellent introduction to a very complicated body of literature. It makes the Apocrypha accessible to a lay readership, and it also suggests ways in which Latter-day Saints can understand and apply its teachings. The book is well-researched and accurate, although a few points it covers briefly could be corrected or discussed in more depth. Ludlow has fulfilled his task as an experienced guide. May his readers go on to undertake their own explorations of this fascinating corpus.

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A VALUABLE LDS RESOURCE FOR LEARNING FROM THE APOCRYPHA

Jeff Lindsay

Abstract: *Latter-day Saints are often aware that the Apocrypha contains valuable sacred material along with some “interpolations of men,” but few know how to approach those ancient texts and what they could learn from them. A new book by Jared W. Ludlow provides a helpful tool to guide LDS readers in appreciating the Apocrypha and exploring the material in these highly diverse sacred documents.*

Review of Jared W. Ludlow, *Exploring the Apocrypha from a Latter-day Saint Perspective* (Springville, Utah: CFI, 2018). 234 pp. \$16.99.

Never repeat a conversation, and you will lose nothing at all. With friend or foe do not report it, and unless it would be a sin for you, do not reveal it; for someone may have heard you and watched you, and in time will hate you. Have you heard something? Let it die with you. Be brave, it will not make you burst! Having heard something, the fool suffers birth pangs like a woman in labor with a child. Like an arrow stuck in a person's thigh, so is gossip inside a fool.

—*Ecclesiasticus*, aka *The Wisdom of Jesus Ben Sira*,
aka *Sirach* 19:7–12.

The above passage is one of many treasures discussed in a new book aimed at helping Latter-day Saints better appreciate the Apocrypha, Jared W. Ludlow's *Exploring the Apocrypha from a Latter-day Saint Perspective*. Ludlow's book is a valuable resource for Latter-day Saints (and others) seeking to better understand an important part of the sacred texts respected by many in Christianity and Judaism. Though not part of our

official canon, they have been a part of the canon in other faiths and are included in a majority of the Bibles used by Christians around the world. For Latter-day Saints, according to a canonized statement regarding the Apocrypha, we are told that “There are many things contained therein that are true” (D&C 91:1) and that “whoso is enlightened by the Spirit shall obtain benefit therefrom” (D&C 91:5), in spite of the “interpolations by the hands of men” that are also at play (D&C 91:2).

Latter-day Saints, unfortunately, have tended to ignore the Apocrypha, but there is value that we should be extracting. Ludlow’s book is precisely the kind of guide that many of us need in order to know where the richest sources of value can be found and what the key lessons are that we can learn.

Ludlow begins with a helpful overview of what the Apocrypha is. The 183 chapters in that collection come from early Jewish writers well after the latest books in our current Old Testament were written (ca. 400 BC), with many dated to around the first and second centuries BC. These texts were circulated among Greek-speaking Jews as the Septuagint translation from Hebrew to Greek was created. Many appear to be original Greek compositions rather than translations from Hebrew or Aramaic to Greek. Ludlow groups them according to three categories and considers each text in this order:

Biblical Expansions

- The Additions to the Book of Esther
- Daniel Stories: Song of the Three Young Men, Susanna, Bel and the Dragon
- First Book of Esdras (Greek form of the name Ezra)
- Second Book of Esdras (the only Apocrypha text not from the Greek Septuagint but found in several Old Latin manuscripts)
- Prayer of Manasseh
- Baruch and Letter of Jeremiah

Heroic Stories

- Tobit
- Judith
- 1 Maccabees
- 2 Maccabees

Wisdom Literature

- Wisdom of Solomon
- Ecclesiasticus or the Wisdom of Jesus ben Sirach

As Ludlow reviews each of the books of the Apocrypha, he thoroughly illustrates how “the Apocrypha can be a valuable tool for helping us understand the political, cultural, and religious background of Jesus Christ and his contemporaries” (5) and how these texts provide teachings and stories relevant to Latter-day Saints.

Ludlow explains that as Jewish and Christian groups debated the value of these texts, they were given the label *apocrypha*, meaning “things that are hidden.” It was a positive label for some and a negative label for others. The term is also applied to many other texts outside the Apocrypha that were falsely attributed to various prophets and apostles (generally known as the “Pseudepigrapha,” a Greek term describing texts with a “false superscription”), but Ludlow considers only the closed set of books formally known as the Apocrypha.

Ludlow reviews the history of the debate over these books, where views have varied widely. The Catholic church in the 1546 Council of Trent declared all the books to be deemed canonical except 2 Esdras and the Prayer of Manasseh. Protestants have generally rejected them, but some (such as Martin Luther) saw value in some of the Apocrypha, and portions have often been printed in Protestant Bibles.

Despite the Apocrypha’s checkered canonical history, there can be no doubt that it has impacted Christian and Jewish cultures. In Jewish practice, Hanukkah has become a central festival, and the Maccabees form a part of Jewish identity. In the Christian world, the Apocrypha has influenced poets, artists, hymn-writers, dramatists, composers, and even explorers such as Christopher Columbus, who used a passage in 2 Esdras about the earth being composed of six parts land to seek financial support for his journey westward. Even in early Christian sites like the catacombs of Rome, depictions of Apocrypha scenes have been found. (12)

Ludlow devotes a chapter to reviewing the history of LDS views regarding the Apocrypha. The beginning of LDS inquiry into the Apocrypha comes from Joseph Smith, wondering if his inspired translation of the Bible should include the Apocrypha. The answer, through revelation on March 9, 1833, is now printed in Section 91 of the Doctrine and Covenants:

1 Verily, thus saith the Lord unto you concerning the Apocrypha—
There are many things contained therein that are true, and it

is mostly translated correctly;

2 There are many things contained therein that are not true,
which are interpolations by the hands of men.

3 Verily, I say unto you, that it is not needful that the
Apocrypha should be translated.

4 Therefore, whoso readeth it, let him understand, for the
Spirit manifesteth truth;

5 And whoso is enlightened by the Spirit shall obtain benefit
therefrom;

6 And whoso receiveth not by the Spirit, cannot be benefited.
Therefore it is not needful that it should be translated. Amen.

Joseph made other statements that point to the value of the Apocrypha and apparently respected it enough to include the Apocrypha in the “complete Bible” that was deposited in the Nauvoo Temple (24). However, it doesn’t seem to have influenced his sermons or teachings (27), though a few other early LDS leaders occasionally used small portions from the Apocrypha.

Ludlow’s review of the contents and highlights of each of the books of the Apocrypha provides valuable historical information that will help readers better appreciate the cultural, religious, and political setting as the New Testament begins. One can also sometimes see influence from the Apocrypha on New Testament writers, such as the Book of Judith’s treatment on searching the depths of God and not knowing His mind, which appears to have influenced Paul’s words in 1 Corinthians 2:6-7, 12 (133).

There are also occasional nuggets of particular interest to LDS readers, such as the Wisdom of Solomon’s teaching on the Creation, praising God for His all-powerful hand “which created the world out of formless matter” (Wisdom of Solomon 11:17), an acknowledgment that creation was not *ex nihilo* (188).

The Wisdom of Solomon also has brief references to the premortal existence (193). Indeed, it was the final section on the Wisdom literature of the Apocrypha that I most keenly enjoyed, and I think many LDS readers will find particular value in those books and that portion of Ludlow, though the entire treatment is clear, interesting, and well-suited for a broad LDS audience.

In his closing remarks, Ludlow nicely summarizes the nature of the diverse and complex texts he has treated:

The Apocrypha consists of a variety of texts making it both interesting and challenging. Comprising wisdom literature, apocalypses, tales, and scriptural expansions, the Apocrypha

runs the gamut of ancient religious literature. Its eclectic collection is reflected in how each book of the Apocrypha is handled in this work; varied approaches are used in different chapters because of the diverse styles of the texts. Yet despite their diversity, the texts give us a glimpse into the world of Second Temple Judaism and its Hellenistic influence. These texts are also important to understanding the historical background to Jesus and the early Christians and the concerns and aspirations of early Jews and Christians. (223)

I strongly recommend Ludlow's thoughtful work for any LDS reader interested in better understanding the broad body of treasured ancient texts encompassed in the Apocrypha.

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“IF I PRAY NOT AMISS”

David L. Clark

Abstract: *In 2nd Nephi, it is suggested that the Lord answers prayers but that requests made in prayer should not violate some kind of standard that would make them “amiss.” This undefined standard most likely excludes many prayers requesting immunity from those conditions of mortality which all mortals accepted and embraced with great enthusiasm in the great Council in Heaven. However, except for limited latter-day explanations of that great conference, our eager acceptance of all details of the conditions of mortality did not carry over into mortal memory. Consequently, when we request exemption from those conditions joyfully endorsed in premortal time, perhaps many qualify for the “prayers amiss” category. Exceptions from mortal conditions are granted only for divine and sometimes incomprehensible purposes.*

In 1839, after several months of imprisonment in the Liberty Jail under miserable conditions and without respite, the Prophet finally expressed his complete frustration: “O God, where art thou?”¹ echoing the thoughts of generations of humans who have suffered similar and even worse inflictions while waiting for God to respond with the help requested in prayer. However, unlike Joseph, whose plea was answered impressively, many of those whose prayers for help in dire situations are not answered have asked why there was no deliverance from evil for them. Such events have contributed to the development of the classic Problem of Evil: Why does an omnipotent God permit evil that He could prevent?² Within The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, the resolution of the problem is the Prophet’s explanation of the eternal nature of

1. Doctrine and Covenants 121:1.

2. For a general discussion on the problem of evil from a broad perspective, see https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Problem_of_evil.

matter and the nonsense of a creation *ex nihilo*. Briefly put, a Latter-day Saint interpretation is that God did not create Earth nor its inhabitants from nothing (*ex nihilo*) but organized matter that was co-eternal and had its own set of characteristics, populating it with individuals whose spirits are co-eternal with God and capable of exercising agency. David Paulsen has discussed the traditional interpretations of the question and outlined how our understanding differs from the standard Christian concept of omnipotence and *ex nihilo*.³ God, the organizer of select matter with which He coexisted, cannot be held responsible for inherent characteristics of that matter nor of actions related to its agency, and He consequently depends on empathy and the atonement in the mortal crusade against evil.⁴

Nephi, after the death of his father Lehi was soon involved with his contentious brothers on various issues, and in response he wrote a kind of “psalm” on the plates his father had given him, in which he expressed his concerns, hopes, problems, shortcomings, and testimony. At the conclusion of his psalm, he noted, almost casually, a significant observation: “Yea, I know that God will give liberally to him that asketh. Yea, my God will give me, if I ask not amiss; therefore I will lift up my voice unto thee.”⁵ So it is important to avoid asking for things that are amiss. Given the constant encouragement in the scriptures to pray always and pray about almost anything,⁶ the obvious question is “What kind of prayer is amiss?”

Latter-day Saint literature frequently addresses the question of prayers amiss. The Book of Mormon records that when Moroni summarized his final counsel to the remnants of Lehi’s posterity, he reminded them that “it is counted evil unto a man, if he shall pray and not with real intent of heart; yea, and it profiteth him nothing, for God

3. See David L. Paulsen, “Joseph Smith and the Problem of Evil,” *BYU Studies Quarterly* 39, no. 1 (2000): 53–65. Also, see Paulsen, “The God of Abraham, Isaac, and (William) James,” *The Journal of Speculative Philosophy*, New Series 13, no. 2, 1999, 114–46, for additional discussion, including the contribution of William James to the problem.

4. See Tyler Johnson, “Empathy and the Atonement,” *BYU Studies Quarterly* 55, no. 4, (2016), 105–22.

5. 2 Nephi 4: 15–35.

6. See Alma 34:18–28. Speaking to the poor and despised among the Zoramites, Amulek instructed, “Cry unto him for mercy,” for humility, for your flocks, for your crops, for your household, and for aid against the enemy and the devil, and as well he gave other advice.

receiveth none such.”⁷ Certainly an example of prayer amiss. And in the Doctrine & Covenants, “do not ask for that which you ought not,”⁸ and “if ye ask anything that is not expedient for you, it shall turn into your condemnation.”⁹ Other examples of prayers amiss were given by the Prophet Joseph Smith in an 1830 letter to the Colesville Saints when he instructed, “Pray not with covetous hearts that ye may consume it upon your lusts.”¹⁰ In addition, Joseph F. Smith advised that “we should not ask the Lord for that which is unnecessary or which would not be beneficial to us.”¹¹ President Hinckley’s observation that those who pray to a Mother in Heaven are misguided clearly defines another type of prayer amiss.¹² A Latter-day Saint writer went to the heart of the problem of “prayer amiss” when she wrote, “How many of my prayers have been amiss because they were offered in an attempt to convince God to trample on the agency of someone else? I remember a period of time when I was fasting weekly and praying fervently that a loved one would change. When I begged to understand why my prayers weren’t answered I received a one-word, startling reply: ‘agency.’”¹³ Infringing on the agency of others is a significant category of prayers amiss, but there is an even larger arena of possible prayers amiss related to activities in the premortal Council in Heaven.

In the Church’s unique interpretation of this premortal major council, in attendance were all participants who were to experience mortality.¹⁴

7. Moroni 7:9.

8. Doctrine and Covenants 8:10.

9. Doctrine and Covenants 88:65.

10. From a letter Joseph Smith and John Whitmer sent to Colesville Saints, Aug. 30, 1830, based on D&C 46:9. Joseph Smith, “Prayer and Personal Revelation,” in *Teachings of Presidents of the Church: Joseph Smith* (Salt Lake City: The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, 2011), 131.

11. Joseph F. Smith, *Gospel Doctrine*, 11th ed. (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 1959), 218.

12. Sheri L. Dew, *The Biography of Gordon B. Hinckley: Go Forward with Faith* (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 1996), 457.

13. Darla Isackson, “When We Pray Amiss,” *Meridian Magazine*, 27 July 2005, <https://ldsmag.com/article-1-694/>.

14. See John H. Lund, “Council in Heaven,” in *Encyclopedia of Mormonism*, ed. Daniel H. Ludlow (New York: Macmillan Publishing, 1992), 328–29. The history of thought concerning the premortal existence from ancient traditions to the present is explored in detail in Terryl L. Givens, *When Souls Had Wings: Pre-Mortal Existence in Western Thought*, (New York: Oxford University Press, 2010), 212, 220. This includes discussion of early Latter-day Saint premortal doctrine but with no reference to the Council in Heaven.

Among the agenda items of that Grand Council was the plan of salvation and an explanation of its function in mortality. The Prophet Joseph Smith wrote, “At the first organization in heaven we were all present and saw the Savior chosen and appointed, and the plan of salvation made and *we sanctioned it*.”¹⁵ According to John Taylor “It is evident that at that Council certain plans had been proposed and discussed, [including] ... a full discussion of those principles.”¹⁶ Bruce R. McConkie concluded that the plan was taught to all the hosts of heaven, and all its facets were “*debated and evaluated*.”¹⁷ President Spencer W. Kimball explained that “the Lord made a blueprint, as any great contractor will do before constructing. He drew up the plans, wrote the specifications, and presented them.”¹⁸ And more recently, Terryl Givens concluded that the order and ordinances of the Kingdom “*were non-negotiable, set in stone, ‘by the Priesthood in the council of heaven before the world was.*”¹⁹

From these observations we can surmise that by the conclusion of the Council, we must have understood that our mortal existence would involve all the challenges we would encounter in mortality, *both work and pleasure, health and sickness, joy and sorrow, happiness and disappointment, achievement and failure, peace and war, and eventually (and perhaps sooner than might be wanted), death and loneliness for those who survive*. Both the bright and darker sides of mortality were explained. While we would like to know more of this transcendental council, accounts are brief; in reference to the account given in the Book of Mormon, Neal Maxwell has pointed out that information “was not given there in overwhelming abundance.”²⁰ But the full spectrum of the mortal experience was explained; and in response to this complete tutorial on mortality, according to the description in the scriptures,

15. Andrew F. Ehat and Lyndon W. Cook, eds., *The Words of Joseph Smith: The Contemporary Accounts of the Nauvoo Discourses of the Prophet Joseph* (Provo, UT: Brigham Young University Religious Studies Center, 1980), 6:60, emphasis added.

16. John Taylor, *Mediation and Atonement*, (Salt Lake City: Deseret News Publishing, 1892), 93, emphasis added.

17. Bruce R. McConkie, *The Promised Messiah* (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 1978), 48–51, emphasis added.

18. Spencer W. Kimball, *The Teachings of Spencer W. Kimball*, ed. Edward L. Kimball (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 1982), 29.

19. Terryl L. Givens, *Wrestling the Angel: The Foundations of Mormon Thought: Cosmos, God, Humanity* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2015), 299, emphasis added.

20. Neal A. Maxwell, “*But for a Small Moment*,” (Salt Lake City, Bookcraft, 1986), 91.

all participants in that great Council shouted for joy. The joy was then enhanced by a heavenly choir of morning stars,²¹ which must be interpreted as an enthusiastic acceptance of the entire plan. Or, as Givens and Givens have written, "If we were involved in the deliberations that culminated in creating and peopling this world, then we are not passive victims of providence. *We would have entered into the conditions of this mortal state aware of the harrowing hazards mortality entails.*"²²

But this unique interpretation of the Great Council was in premortal time. Now move forward. As humans filled the earth, they experienced the full range of the mortal conditions but without memory of the premortal Council and their enthusiastic response to its agenda. In mortal time, humans looked forward to joy but were less comfortable with sorrow; they enjoyed achievement but wanted no part of failure; health was greatly desirable, but please no sickness, no accidents and certainly no war or premature death! As humans experienced the full range of mortal conditions and the darker side of mortality clearly explained and accepted in the Council, these became a challenge to Earth's inhabitants and led to frustrations, pleadings, and cries similar to those of the Prophet Joseph Smith: "O God, where art thou?"²³ As mortals with a truncated vision of eternity, we clearly are not comfortable with all the conditions of mortality. But might the repeated prayers for exemptions from the darker side of mortality be examples of the "prayers amiss" referred to by Nephi? Are such prayers not antithetical to those principles we enthusiastically agreed to in that Great Council in heaven? Perhaps it is important that we be constantly reminded that we once rejoiced for the challenges of work and pleasure, joy and sorrow, achievement and failure, sickness and health, accidents and recovery, death and safety, disbelief and testimony, happiness and sadness, trial and error, and peace and war.

Jenkins Lloyd Jones suggested,

Anyone who imagines that bliss is normal is going to waste a lot of time running around shouting that he has been robbed. Most putts don't drop. Most beef is tough. Most children grow up to be just people. Most successful marriages require a high degree of mutual toleration. Most jobs are more often dull than otherwise. ... Life is like an old-time rail journey — delays,

21. See Job 38:7.

22. Terryl Givens and Fiona Givens, *The God Who Weeps: How Mormonism Make Sense of Life* (Salt Lake City: Ensign Peak, 2012), 53, emphasis added.

23. Doctrine and Covenants 121:1.

sidetracks, smoke, dust, cinders, and jolts, interspersed only occasionally by beautiful vistas and thrilling bursts of speed. The trick is to thank the Lord for letting you have the ride.²⁴

Succinctly put, we may often pray for the wrong thing. Perhaps our prayer should be more a supplication for help in coping with the conditions of mortality rather than a request for exemption from the more difficult and darker parts. President Kimball endorsed this conclusion: “If all the sick for whom we pray were healed, if all the righteous were protected and the wicked destroyed, the whole program of the Father would be annulled and the basic principle of the gospel, free agency, would be ended. No man would have to live by faith.”²⁵ He then advised that in prayer, “ask [God] to assist you to remain true to your covenants and keep clean and worthy and active” and “thank the Lord for the courage and strength he helped you muster to avert a threatened calamity.”²⁶

And Neal Maxwell added:

Petitioning in prayer has taught me, again and again, that the vault of heaven with all its blessings is to be opened only by a combination lock. One tumbler falls when there is faith, a second when there is personal righteousness; the third and final tumbler falls only when what is sought is, in God’s judgment —not ours — right for us. Sometimes we pound on the vault door for something we want very much and wonder why the door does not open. We would be very spoiled children if that vault door opened any more easily than it does. I can tell, looking back, that God truly loves me by inventorying the petitions He has refused to grant me. Our rejected petitions tell us much about ourselves but also much about our flawless Father.²⁷

There appears to be agreement among both ancient and modern prophets that exemptions from the conditions of mortality should not be an expected commodity. Life is not a smooth train ride free from the necessity of faith. Perhaps, as President Kimball suggested, our prayers

24. Jenkins Lloyd Jones, “Big Rock Candy Mountains,” *The Deseret News*, 12 June 1973.

25. Spencer W. Kimball, *Faith Precedes the Miracle* (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 1972), 97.

26. *Ibid.*, 131, 134.

27. Neal A. Maxwell, “Insights,” *New Era* (April 1978), <https://www.lds.org/new-era/1978/04/insights?lang=eng>.

should not be constant requests for mortal immunity but be directed more for help in coping with our mortal conditions. And faith, righteousness, and God's will generally are in place before exemptions are granted. However, while an enhanced understanding of the pre-mortal existence and the purpose of life allows us to avoid the world's common problem of evil that blames God for injustice in the world, our observation that He sometimes makes exceptions introduces a unique Latter-day Saint interpretation of the problem. Prayers amiss aside, why does an omnipotent God answer some prayers that request mortal exemptions from premortal agreements but not others?

Probably everyone has had the same experience as Mary Ellen Edmunds, who wrote, "Isn't it hard sometimes to say and mean those words: 'Thy will be done'? (Some mistakenly say, 'For dumb! That cancels out your prayer!') ... I sit in meetings where testimonies are being shared about miracles, and I hurt for others sitting in the chapel who are suffering because the miracle *they* had hoped for didn't happen."²⁸ In one sense the phrase "Thy will be done" is an unnecessary, even rhetorical benediction to a prayer because humans do not counsel God and because the phrase presumptuously suggests that "I think I have a better idea, but what the heck, do what You think is best." However, in Christ's case, it was the premier demonstration of humility, a God who experienced ultimate mortal suffering but acknowledged to His Father at the conclusion of His mortal existence that Their plan should and would be fulfilled.

Clearly, prayers laced with repeated demands for mortal immunities or requests that might impinge on the agency of others are amiss. And one must be careful in claims of success. On the personal level, I remember hearing a testimony claiming that prayer restored life to a "pet" goldfish and how this affected a wife and mother present at the meeting and whose prayers for help for her young husband with multiple sclerosis were not similarly answered. Certainly, exceptions from conditions of mortality are certified monthly in fast and testimony meetings. And some must be valid. God can make exemptions from evil in mortality but for reasons known only to Him.

Perhaps some problems could be avoided if we examined the scriptural model for prayer. In the seminal recipe for proper prayer, in addition to praise, forgiveness and inspiration, there is only one

28. Mary Ellen Edmunds, "Peace Amidst Suffering," in *The Arms of His Love: Talks from the 1999 Women's Conference Sponsored by Brigham Young University and the Relief Society* (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 2000), 224.

request for what could be interpreted as a specific, immediate, mortal-physical help: “Give us this day our daily bread.”²⁹ But as John Welch has written, even the request for daily bread is often interpreted to be the bread of life or a request for “spiritual manna from heaven.”³⁰ Of additional interest is the fact that the “daily bread” part of the Matthew record of the Lord’s Prayer is omitted in the Book of Mormon version,³¹ perhaps an indication of the same understanding expressed by Welch and many others.³²

Perhaps the most interesting thing to be learned from an examination of all that has been written or talked about regarding prayer is the almost universal advice that our prayers should be spiritually tuned rather than requests for exemption from conditions of mortality or requests that could impinge on the agency of others. Neal Maxwell counseled, “Exceptional souls are not developed, however, by being made exceptions to the challenges that are common to mankind.”³³ Elsewhere, after providing an explanation of what we commonly observe in the lives of our General Authorities, he concluded, “Hence it seems prudent for us to realize that just because one is set apart or ordained to a certain calling or assignment, he or she must not expect to be set apart from the stresses of life. There appear to be no immunities.”³⁴

29. Matthew 6:9–13. See also, B. H. Roberts, *The Truth, The Way, The Life: An Elementary Treatise on Theology*, ed. John W. Welch (Provo, UT: BYU Studies Monograph, 1994), 506–7. Roberts points out that the Lord’s Prayer “was not given as a set form to be always followed, and used on every occasion, but rather as an illustration of the spirit in which prayer should be offered.” And he reminds us that the Lord’s Prayer has an error that Joseph Smith corrected in his translation of the New Testament. The Lord would not lead us into temptation, so why ask him not to? The correction is “suffer us not to be led into temptation.”

30. John W. Welch, “The Lord’s Prayers,” *Ensign* (January 1976), 14–17, <https://www.lds.org/ensign/1976/01/the-lords-prayers?lang=eng>.

31. See 3 Nephi 13:9–13.

32. See Jack Wellman, “The Lord’s Prayer — Meaning and Lessons From The Our Father Prayer,” *Christian Crier* (blog), 13 May 2014, <http://www.patheos.com/blogs/christiancrier/2014/05/13/the-lords-prayer-meaning-and-lessons-from-the-our-father-prayer/>. <http://www.patheos.com/blogs/christiancrier/2014/05/13/the-lords-prayer-meaning-and-lessons-from-the-our-father-prayer/>. See also William Stillman, “My Personal Interpretation of the Lord’s Prayer,” *The Blog, Huffington Post*, updated 2 April 2014, https://www.huffingtonpost.com/william-stillman/lords-prayer_b_4697047.html.

33. Neal A. Maxwell, *We Will Prove Them Herewith* (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 1982), 116.

34. Neal A. Maxwell, *Sermons not Spoken*, (Salt Lake City: Bookcraft, 1985), 26.

David A. Bednar in an October 2008 Conference address reminded us that prayers might best be directed toward receiving spiritual help in reflecting on inappropriate talk and actions, guidance on becoming better humans, and forgiveness for our shortcomings. He also suggested that a valid prayer might include "remorse for our weaknesses and for not putting off the natural man more earnestly. Determine to pattern our life after the Savior more completely. Plead for greater strength to do and to become better."³⁵ Boyd K. Packer counseled that our prayers should be a pleading to "receive ... inspiration and remain worthy to receive it."³⁶ President David O. McKay suggested that appropriate prayer might include "O, let me not lose my head this day as I meet temptation, as I am tempted to misjudge my fellows. Keep me from trespassing upon the rights of others."³⁷ His counselor Hugh B. Brown taught, "Let us pray for those who love us, for our leaders, church and state. Let us pray for those who need help and support our prayers with service. Let us pray for health and strength and wisdom. Pray for faith to carry on when our strength seems insufficient, and the answer is delayed."³⁸ And Brigham Young counseled, "Every breath should virtually be a prayer that God preserve us from sin and from the effects of sin."³⁹ Most of this counsel avoids requests for exemptions from Jenkins Lloyd Jones's "train ride." Perhaps one pragmatic function of prayer is that it allows us to prioritize those things that are important for our lives, including guidance in our response to life's challenges as well as thanking God for "the ride."

However, just as we have received considerable counsel on addressing the favored spiritual requests in prayer, there are obvious exceptions from some of the physical conditions of mortality. One might even relate exemptions from mortal conditions granted in prayer to the miracles of Christ and others before and since His time. While most miracles are certainly exemptions from conditions imposed by mortality, they are also for more spectacularly divine purposes, many perhaps even anticipated in that premortal Council. Christ's miracles were important

35. David A. Bednar, "Pray Always," *Ensign* (November 2008), 41, <https://www.lds.org/ensign/2008/11/pray-always?lang=eng>.

36. Boyd K. Packer, "Prayer and Promptings," *Ensign* (November 2009), 45, <https://www.lds.org/ensign/2009/11/prayer-and-promptings?lang=eng>.

37. David O. McKay, *Secrets of a Happy Life*, comp. Llewelyn R. McKay (Salt Lake City: Bookcraft, 1967), 89.

38. Eugene E. Campbell and Richard D. Poll, *Hugh B. Brown: His Life and Thought* (Salt Lake City: Bookcraft, 1975), 202–3.

39. Brigham Young, *Discourses of Brigham Young*, comp. John A. Widtsoe (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 1926), 67.

in demonstrating His divine nature to the disbelieving multitudes and thus critical to introduction of Christianity to the world. Miracles performed before and since Christ's time were also related to more critical eternal issues than some of our more common mortal problems, such as success or failure, or even sickness and health.

Other exemptions include Joseph Smith's prayers, which included requests for what might be called *physical* things. Mark L. McConkie records that the Prophet asked for things that included better food, protection, and help in casting out devils.⁴⁰ President Thomas S. Monson recorded a prayer for a woman who lost her voice just before a road show production and regained it in time for the performance following the prayer. Also answered were a prayer to find lost money and a prayer for good weather for Bruce R. McConkie's funeral.⁴¹ Hugh B. Brown told the story of a World War II pilot returning from a bombing mission in a badly damaged airplane: crashing into the English Channel was apparently the only choice, but a prayer enabled the pilot to make it to an air base in England.⁴² And President Hinckley wrote, perhaps with a twinkle in his eye, "Ask God to forgive your sins. ... Ask Him to help you realize your righteous and worthy ambitions. ... Ask Him to take away your worries and fears. Ask Him to help you *find a companion with whom you can share your life*."⁴³

The question, of course, is why some of the prayers for immunity are answered and others not. Terryl and Fiona Givens point out that "it is also possible that God's answers are sometimes too indirect, too oblique, for us to recognize because we are looking for something more palpable. ... And sometimes prayer expectations are too grandiose rather than too modest. ... If prayer is to succeed, it must bridge the divide between earth and heaven, a mortal heart and a divine mind. The only way this is possible is for us to relinquish all our preconceptions of how God may choose to answer our entreaties."⁴⁴ We absolve God from the evil inherent

40. Mark L. McConkie, *Remembering Joseph: Personal Recollections of Those Who Knew the Prophet Joseph Smith* (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 2003), 116–17, 181–83.

41. Heidi S. Swinton, *To the Rescue: The Biography of Thomas S. Monson* (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 2010), 72, 78, 422.

42. Edwin B. Firmage, ed., *The Memoirs of Hugh B. Brown: An Abundant Life* (Salt Lake City: Signature Books, 1988), 102–3.

43. Gordon B. Hinckley, *Way to Be!* (New York City: Simon and Schuster, 2002), 114, emphasis added.

44. Terryl Givens and Fiona Givens, *The Crucible of Doubt: Reflections on the Quest for Faith* (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 2014), 126, 128, 129.

in eternal matter used in creation. In asking for exemptions from the challenges of mortality, we rejoice when those prayers for immunity are answered. We are left with only the admonition to pray not amiss and to acknowledge that God's answer may not resolve our request in the manner we would like.

How does an omnipotent God decide who gets the exemption and who does not? I am not aware of any definitive answer to this incisive question. Partial answers include advice from the First Presidency: "Heavenly Father hears your prayers. He may not always answer as you expect, but He does answer — in His own time and according to His will. Because He knows what is best for you, He may sometimes answer *no*, even when your petitions are sincere."⁴⁵ Lorraine M. Wright added insight when she told a women's conference, "What happens when our prayers are not answered in the way we would like? What happens when the illness isn't cured? What happens when the person dies anyway? ... We must draw upon our faith to help us understand. ... Clearly our calendar is sometimes not the same as Heavenly Father's."⁴⁶ And Darla Isackson observed, "When we try to convince God that our righteous acts should shield us from natural law, from consequences of our choices or the choices of others, or from the trials God uses to tutor and refine us, we are praying amiss."⁴⁷ And "one of the best ways to avoid praying amiss is to trust God's long-term plan and His timing and pray accordingly. So many times when we seem to be getting a 'no' answer, God is really saying 'yes' to much more important things that couldn't be brought about if He said 'yes' to our current request."⁴⁸

In Paulsen's discussion of William James's, "God's chess game," he points out that God is one player and humanity the other, and the game proceeds as follows: While God may not foresee the actual moves His opponent will make, He does know all the moves that are possible, and He knows how to respond in a way which will permit His victory,⁴⁹

45. *True to the Faith: A Gospel Reference* (Salt Lake City: The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, 2004), s.v. "prayer."

46. Lorraine M. Wright, "What's Love Got to Do with it? Conversations That Heal," in *The Arms of His Love: Talks from the 1999 Women's Conference Sponsored by Brigham Young University and the Relief Society* (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 2000), 156.

47. Darla Isackson, "When We Pray Amiss," *Meridian Magazine*, 27 July 2005, <https://ldsmag.com/article-1-694/>.

48. Darla Isackson, *Trust God No Matter What!* (Salt Lake City: Digital Legend Press, 2008), 52.

49. Paulsen, "The God of Abraham, Isaac, and (William) James," 126–27.

which I think is His goal as recorded in Moses 1:39: “For behold, this is my work and my glory — to bring to pass the immortality and eternal life of man.” How He answers individual prayer is best explained by this divine objective.

So what is the answer? Are those prayers simply misdirected that ask for relief from the mortal conditions we so joyfully embraced in our premortal life? Do our prayers ensnarl us in the trap of faulting God for not answering our requests when our prayers may simply be amiss? Should we acknowledge that answers to our pleadings might be beyond the framework we accepted in embracing mortality? Should our *prayers be directed more toward inspiration for help in coping with the elements of mortality*, using empathy and the atonement to assist us, *rather than asking for exemption or immunity from the joyfully accepted conditions of mortality*? In Christ’s agonized prayer for personal relief, the granting of which would compromise the atonement, He included the humble understanding that “Thy will be done,” a clear statement saying, “Answer me how and in the way — you choose — not constrain[ing] the manner in which the answer came.”⁵⁰ Chieko Okazaki suggested that we should not pray for simple solutions: “He wants us to take seriously that promise about the constant companionship of the Holy Ghost. And this, in turn, means that Heavenly Father doesn’t want to hear only ‘nice’ prayers. He wants to hear real prayers, honest prayers.”⁵¹

God is not responsible for all things, and prayers that do not continually offend our premortal perceptions or challenge the agency of others may be answered. However, this understanding also endorses what Nephi wrote almost 600 BC: “I know that [God] loveth his children; nevertheless, I do not know the meaning of all things.”⁵² Such humility allows the modern Latter-day Saint, while avoiding prayer amiss, both to freely ask for appropriate avoidance of the unpleasant aspects of mortal experience and to understand that such exceptions will be real but uncommon, their purpose divine and often incomprehensible.

David Clark: *Following completion of studies at BYU, Columbia, and the University of Iowa, he taught at SMU and BYU but spent most of his professional career at the University of Wisconsin-Madison, where he*

50. Givens and Givens, *The Crucible of Doubt*, 130.

51. Chieko N. Okazaki, *Lighten Up!* (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 1993), 182–83.

52. 1 Nephi 11:17.

served as chairman of the Department of Geology and Geophysics and associate dean responsible for the Natural Sciences at Wisconsin. His research focused on the geology of the Arctic Ocean, and from 1995-1999, he served as Chairman of the Polar Research Board of the National Academy of Science. He received the R.C. Moore Award for Excellence in Paleontology and the Pander Society Medal for micropaleontology research. He published two books related to theology and history of the restored Church of Jesus Christ and also has published in the Journal of Mormon History and BYU Studies.

TO BE LEARNED IS GOOD, IF ONE STAYS ON THE RAILS

Paul C. Peterson

ABSTRACT: *This review essay looks at certain problematical issues in the recently published collection of essays honoring Latter-day Saint historian Richard Lyman Bushman. Problems emerge from the title itself, “To Be Learned is Good,” as a result of the failure to note that the Book of Mormon passage “To be learned is good” is a conditional statement. In addition, since these essays are billed as “Essays on Faith and Scholarship,” it is odd most of them do not touch on this subject at all. I examine four essays in depth, including Adam Miller’s “Christo-Fiction, Mormon Philosophy, and the Virtual Body of Christ,” which is offered as a form of clarifying Mormon philosophy but provides more confusion than clarification. Jared Hickman’s essay, “The Perverse Core of Mormonism: The Book of Mormon, Genetic Secularity, and Messianic Decoloniality,” presents Mormonism as a religion that has much in common with Marxism, Frantz Fanon, and Sean Coulhard. While not as bold as Hickman, Patrick Mason looks at Mormonism as a modern religion and suggests that premodern thinkers are largely irrelevant to Mormonism and the modern world. Mason argues that “Mormonism is a religion that could meaningfully converse with modern philosophies and ideologies from transcendentalism, liberalism, and Marxism.” I discuss the weaknesses of this view. Attention is also given to the distinction between apologetics and “Mormon Studies” that arise from essays by Grant Wacker, Armand Mauss, Terryl Givens, and Brian D. Birch, who suggests “a methodological pluralism” in approaching Mormon studies. I note that several of the essays in this volume are worthy of positive note, particularly those by Bushman himself, Mauss (who does address the presumed theme of the book), Givens, Mauro Properzi, and Melissa Wei-Tsing Inouye (who also addresses the titled theme of the book in a most engaging manner).*

Review of J. Spencer Fluhman, Kathleen Flake, and Jed Woodworth, eds., *To Be Learned is Good: Essays on Faith and Scholarship in Honor of Richard Lyman Bushman* (Provo, Utah: Neal A. Maxwell Institute for Religious Scholarship, Brigham Young University, 2017). 368 pp. \$24.56 (hardcover).

The Neal A. Maxwell Institute for Religious Scholarship has undertaken a project that on its face should have been excellent — a collection of essays honoring Latter-day Saint historian Richard Bushman. It consists of 26 essays by scholars who have been students of Bushman or been influenced by him. It “reflects the vibrant exchanges from a memorable scholars’ colloquium in June 2016 in honor of ... Bushman” (ix). Not surprisingly, some of the most prominent figures in contemporary Mormon intellectual circles are contributors, including Bushman himself; his wife, Claudia Bushman; as well as Terryl L. Givens, Armand L. Mauss, Adam S. Miller, Philip L. Barlow, Matthew J. Grow, Laurie F. Maffley-Kipp, Patrick Q. Mason, Laurel Thatcher Ulrich, Grant Underwood, and Jed Woodworth (who assisted Bushman in the research and editing of Bushman’s monumental biography *Joseph Smith: Rough Stone Rolling*).

For all its promise, this collection goes seriously off the rails in several ways. Most notably, the book presents itself as a series of essays on faith and scholarship, implying that the essays, or at least some of them, will consider the relationship between the two. But this important topic seems at best an afterthought for many if not most of the essays. There is even a problem with the volume’s title. Latter-day Saints will recognize that the phrase “to be learned is good” comes from Second Nephi in The Book of Mormon: “But to be learned is good if they hearken unto the counsels of God” (2 Nephi 9:29). I may have missed it, but I saw no place in this book that recognized that the statement “to be learned is good” is a conditional statement. Hence, “To be learned is good *if* we ‘hearken unto the counsels of God.’” That condition is the crucial key to the relationship between faith and scholarship. This makes the failure to address the absence of the qualifying condition a mystery. Why is the conditional statement left out? Why is “to be learned is good” instead presented as a nonconditional absolute?

In the Book of Mormon, the “to be learned is good” passage is preceded by some stark warnings:

Wherefore, he has given a law; and where there is no law given there is no punishment; and where there is no punishment there

is no condemnation; and where there is no condemnation the mercies of the Holy One of Israel have claim upon them, because of the atonement; for they are delivered by the power of him.

For the atonement satisfieth the demands of his justice upon all those who have not the law given to them, that they are delivered from that awful monster, death and hell, and the devil, and the lake of fire and brimstone, which is endless torment; and they are restored to that God who gave them breath, which is the Holy One of Israel.

But wo unto him that has the law given, yea, that has all the commandments of God, like unto us, and that transgresseth them, and that wasteth the days of his probation, for awful is his state! (2 Nephi 9:25-27)

And the starkest warning of all, particularly for intellectuals (either real or feigned), is the very next verse:

O that cunning plan of the evil one! O the vainness, and the frailties, and the foolishness of men! When they are learned they think they are wise, and they hearken not unto the counsel of God, for they set it aside, supposing they know of themselves, wherefore, their wisdom is foolishness and it profiteth them not. And they shall perish. (2 Nephi 9:28)

The majority of the essays in this book ignore the question of the relationship between faith and scholarship altogether and seem unwilling to acknowledge the possibility that the presumed wisdom of the academic world can often be foolishness.

Interestingly enough, one person who does not ignore this question is Bushman himself, who has given serious thought to it for much of his academic career. In 1969, Bushman wrote the article "Faithful History," a thoughtful and useful article for *Dialogue*.¹ For this book, Bushman has written an even better essay, "Finding the Right Words: Speaking Faith in Secular Times" (295-306). This essay, which is an elaboration on President Spencer W. Kimball's famous 1976 "Second Century of Brigham Young University" address,² is one that any Mormon attending

1. Richard L. Bushman, "Faithful History," *Dialogue: A Journal of Mormon Thought* 4 (Winter 1969), 11-25.

2. Spencer W. Kimball, "Second Century Address," *BYU Studies Quarterly* 16, no. 4 (1976): 445-58.

or thinking of attending a university as either an undergraduate or graduate student would be well-advised to read.

Bushman discusses briefly but movingly a crisis of faith he had before going on his mission. Reflecting on that period in his life, Bushman writes, “I have come to believe that in actuality my problem was not faith but finding the words to express my faith” (299). These would have to be words that were comprehensible to those outside as well as inside the faith, almost like translating from one language to another. The words we might use in a testimony meeting are not necessarily going to be understood by someone outside the faith, as we might expect. That is not only a simple lesson but also a profound one.

Adam Miller and Philosophy of a Kind

This volume is divided into six sections. Section 3 is ominously entitled “Reenvisioning Mormonism.” Does Mormonism really need reenvisioning? If it does, none of the essays in this section or elsewhere in the book offers any clue as to why it needs reenvisioning.

Adam Miller’s essay, “Christo-Fiction, Mormon Philosophy, and the Virtual Body of Christ” (101–10), is a representative essay in this section of the book. Miller, who is probably best known for his book *Letters to a Young Mormon*,³ attempts to clarify some matters, but his essay winds up creating much more confusion than clarification. It is best to turn to Miller’s own words:

For the sake of clarity, let’s borrow some language from Manuel DeLanda’s *Intensive Science and Virtual Philosophy*. As we’ve described things, there are three elements in play when it comes to defining Mormonism: (1) the *actual*, (2) the *potential* and (3) what DeLanda, following Gilles Deleuze, refers to as the *virtual*. We can understand (1) what is actual as the *point* in space occupied by a thing in its present state, (2) what is potential as the *line* or vector that traces and projects the specific trajectory of a thing’s past development and future actualization and (3) what is virtual as the *state space* that defines a thing’s manifold of possible states and vectors — a manifold that by definition can be partially actualized only in narrow slices that, compared to that thing’s entire field of action, are exceedingly thin. (102–103)

3. Adam S. Miller, *Letters to a Young Mormon* (Provo, UT: Neal A. Maxwell Institute for Religious Scholarship, Brigham Young University, 2013). A second edition of this book was published in January 2018.

Keep in mind that this is Miller's way of attaining clarity. He goes on to tell us that as "a philosopher, then, what I'm interested in is not just Mormonism's actual position (Mormonism as a point in space), or even Mormonism's potential (Mormonism as a specific temporal vector, historical or projected), but this deeper category that shapes them both. I want to know what Mormonism can do. I want to grasp the virtual state space that maps Mormonism's field of action" (103).

Just in case this is not yet altogether clear, we should, Miller suggests, return to DeLanda

to describe the virtual kind of state space. *State space* is a term of art adapted from the world of engineering. In mathematical models of discrete dynamical systems, state space refers to the set of possible values a given system can generate. DeLanda simply says, "state space is a space of given possibility states," or again, "State spaces may be viewed as a way of specifying possible worlds for a given physical system, or at least, each trajectory in the phase portrait representing one possible historical sequence of states for a system or process." In this sense, a state space is a static representation of an agent's dynamic range of action. (103)

Unfortunately, the essay never gets any clearer. Miller loves to remind his readers that he is a philosopher (he does so twice in the first three pages of this essay). And it is true, but he is an academic philosopher and not a Socrates.

Reading this essay reminds me of a story I used to share in many of the classes I taught. A young college freshman returned home for Christmas at the end of his first semester, a semester in which he had an introductory English course where he was taught "critical thinking," an introductory sociology course where he was taught about the social construction of reality, and an introductory philosophy class where he learned about his place in the "space state." When he arrives at home, his mother hands him a glass of water. He says (without a thank you), "This is a glass of water. Or is it a glass of water? And if it is a glass of water, why is it a glass of water?" Shocked, the mother is befuddled at what has happened to her son. But, keep in mind, it is good to be learned.

Jared Hickman and the Perverse Core of Mormonism

Another essay in this section, Jared Hickman's "The Perverse Core of Mormonism: The Book of Mormon, Genetic Secularity, and Messianic

Decoloniality” (131-45), does, indeed, offer us a fundamentally reenvisioned Mormonism. Hickman begins by telling us that his aim

is to further my previous work on the Book of Mormon toward exposing what I will call the perverse core of Mormonism. This rubric echoes the Slovenian theorist Slavoj Žižek’s recent defense of “the Christian legacy.” In a nutshell, Žižek offers a counterintuitive Marxist response to the “Christian and other fundamentalisms” and “New Age spiritualisms” that, by his account, plague contemporary society. (131)

In Hickman’s view, “Žižek ends up arguing that Christianity harbors in its ‘perverse core’ what might seem to be its exact opposite — the atheistic materialism of Marx” (131-32). This will lead to “a human community tasked with the revolutionary transformation of its material conditions” (132). Why stop there, though? It seems that a revolutionary transformation of Christianity as a whole is not enough for Hickman, who offers a “dialectical extension of Žižek’s argument” (132). In this extension Hickman insists that

Mormonism, understood as part of the “onslaught of new spiritualisms” [Žižek] decries, contains at its perverse core that which might well seem to be its exact opposite: decolonization, including the repudiation of Christian evangelization and the valorization of non-Christian spiritual traditions. If, for Žižek, Christianity leads to Marx, then, for me, Mormonism might be said to lead to Frantz Fanon,⁴ the great black Martinican anti-colonial theorist and activist who intervened within a Hegelian-Marxist tradition that had exhibited conceptual and practical difficulty with race as a meaningful category of analysis and reality. (132)

Although even more precisely in Hickman’s view,

Mormonism ushers us to Glen Sean Coulhard, the Yellowknives Dene political philosopher who, in his recent *Red Skin, White Masks: Rejecting the Colonial Politics of Recognition*, has brilliantly rewritten Fanon from an unapologetically indigenous perspective, experimentally shifting the center of radical critique from Third to Fourth World. (132)

4. Fanon was really big in college Marxist circles approximately 50 years ago. He is probably best known for his book *The Wretched of the Earth* (1963).

Ultimately, in Hickman's reenvisioning of Mormonism, "the Book of Mormon suggests that its faithful readers will honor and sustain Native peoples without the missionary agenda or ethnocentric paternalism found within secular history. This reading, it seems to me, commits readers to the project of decolonization, an undeniable part of which is the renewal and reinvention of non-Christian Native spiritual practices" (140).

Hickman certainly gives us a reenvisioned and different Mormonism. This is not surprising, given its foundation in Marx, Fanon, and Coulhard, that it is a primarily a political and social project, a radicalized and more malevolent version of the Social Gospel Movement of the late 19th century. The only thing missing in Hickman's presentation is Liberation Theology. Perhaps this will follow in the future as a natural result of a reenvisioned Mormonism. The cost of this reenvisioned Mormonism is merely the loss of the Mormon soul.

Patrick Mason and Modern Religion

Section 5 of the book, "Scholarship in Its Purest and Best Form?" includes a number of essays that bear consideration. One such essay is Patrick Mason's "A Modern Religion" (223-36). He wisely seeks to distinguish Mormonism as a modern religion from the long-familiar view that it is an American religion, as so classified by Harold Bloom. To characterize the religion as an American religion was always far too limiting. Why? One reason is that from the very beginning, the community of Saints has seen itself as a worldwide church even when it was primarily located in North America. In the fulfillment of prophecy, the Church has now begun to become what it was envisioned at the very beginning.

Mason's distinction is a sound and useful one. However, he reaches some odd conclusions regarding Mormonism as a modern religion. After a solid discussion of Mormon theology and the role of the human soul in that theology, Mason goes on to assert the following: "With eternity as its backdrop, Mormonism is a religion ... that could meaningfully converse with modern philosophies and ideologies from transcendentalism to liberalism to Marxism" (229). (What is this fascination that some of these academics have with Marxism?) For the knowledgeable Marxist (that is, knowledgeable about his own "scientific" understanding of the world), religion, politics, philosophy, art, and literature have no independent standing. These are necessarily, in Marxist ideology, mere epiphenomena that reflect the dominant modes of production as they exist at any given moment in history.

This is one of the best-known features of Marxism. For example, Marx and Engels, in their book *The German Ideology*, explain that

in religion people make their empirical world into an entity that is only conceived, imagined, that confronts them as something foreign. This again is by no means to be explained from other concepts, from “self-consciousness” and similar nonsense, but from the entire hitherto existing mode of production and intercourse, which is just as independent of the pure concept as the invention of the self-acting mule and the use of railways are independent of Hegelian philosophy. If he wants to speak of an “essence” of religion, i.e., of a material basis of this inessentiality, then he should look for it neither in the “essence of man,” nor in the predicate of God, but in the material world which each stage of religious development finds in existence.⁵

In the Marxist view, all our intellectualizing is a waste of time and will bear no fruit. In this world, Mormonism, like all other religions, is a fraud; religion, philosophy, and self-consciousness are nonsense. For Marx and Engels, the term *nonsense* literally means there is no empirical evidence or support for the truth claims of religion, philosophy, or self-consciousness. How meaningful conversations can take place with a group (in this case, Marxists) that denies the possibility of anything that someone else says of a spiritual or philosophic nature is not clear.

In his concluding paragraph, Mason writes:

Far from being an anti-modern ideology [is Mormonism really an ideology?], Mormonism in its most robust form represents a distinctive way of being modern — theologically, socially, culturally, and existentially. It stands to reason then that Mormonism’s best conversation partners are not the pre-modern luminaries Plato, Aristotle, Augustine, and Aquinas — though they have much to teach us — but rather modern (and often non-American) thinkers such as Emerson, Weber, Einstein, James, Kierkegaard, Sartre, Gandhi, McIntyre, and Taylor. The next phase in Mormonism’s engagement with and place in the academy may well come not by dehistoricizing a religion that insists on history, but rather in broadening our sense of just what that historicity entails. (233)

5. Karl Marx and Frederick Engels, *The German Ideology* (Moscow: Progress Publishers, 1968), 170-71.

Mason holds the Howard W. Hunter Chair of Mormon Studies and is Dean of the School of Arts and Humanities at Claremont Graduate University. I mention this because his essay reminds me of a conversation I had 45 or so years ago with a fellow student when I was in the PhD program in government at Claremont. In a nonconfrontational way, he presented to me what he saw as the great flaw in Mormonism, namely that it is a modern religion and it did not have the long intellectual tradition that we find in Catholicism (Aquinas and Augustine), Judaism (Moses Maimonides), or Islam (Averroes, Avicenna, and Al-Farabi). These philosophers, in various ways, saw in Plato and Aristotle a rational presentation of the world and human nature which they believed matched what they saw in their sacred texts. Hence, they saw in the writings of Plato and Aristotle genuine assistance in understanding the world in which they lived.

My friend's point, of course, was that without such an intellectual tradition, Mormonism was subject to being buffeted about by fads and fashions of the moment. Plato (particularly in *The Republic*) and Aristotle remain two of the greatest teachers on the nature of the soul. These "premodern luminaries" give us a richer understanding of the soul than what we find in the often soulless modern academy, where the soul has been replaced, with dire consequences, by the self. And speaking of fads, universities and colleges are institutions that seem particularly susceptible to fads; this is most notably true in the humanities and the social sciences, with economics less likely to be so victimized. Through Plato and Aristotle we see a withering critique of the world in which we find ourselves, a world in which we do not have to succumb to its follies, as opposed to Mason's proposed embrace of what our scriptures teach is a debased and fallen world. Plato and Aristotle are of particular value *precisely* because they are not of the modern world.

We also have to keep in mind that, although Mormonism is a modern religion, its foundational text — the Book of Mormon — is a work from antiquity. We know that there are many who do not believe that the Book of Mormon is an ancient work (that it is, at best, "inspired frontier fiction"), but taking seriously the idea of the Book of Mormon as an ancient work makes forgoing "premodern luminaries" even more problematic.

On Apologetics and "Mormon Studies"

Not surprisingly, issues related to defense of the faith⁶ and the presumably broader and more rigorous field of Mormon Studies arise at several

6. *Defense of the faith* is a phrase largely synonymous with what is called in the New Testament *apologia*, a word meaning to set out reasons or evidence as one

points. Hence Grant Wacker informs his readers that he “has never been much impressed by theological apologetics. For every argument *pro* there is an argument *con*” (244). Of course, that statement is true of almost all academic endeavors. Wacker and every other academic are in the business of defending, as best they can, whatever it is they believe. This is, or at least ought to be, what takes place in every university and academic publication.

In his highly interesting intellectual autobiographical article, sociologist Armand Mauss discusses his move away from a kind of apologetics approach to his study of Mormonism but also recognizes that apologetics is “a perfectly legitimate category of theory, sometimes used with great erudition and sophistication” (260). Mauss offers Terry Givens as an example of such erudition and sophistication (268n4).

In his own essay entitled “The Poetics of Prejudice” (21–33), Givens cites Gadamer’s warning “that there is such a thing as methodological sterility, that is, the application of a method to something not really worth knowing, to something that has not been made an object of investigation on the basis of a *genuine question*” (29, emphasis in the original). As Givens puts it,

A genuine question is a question we ask at personal risk. This is one of those intersections where pure religion and intellectual integrity powerfully align. Openness to risk may in fact prove a useful differentiator between apologetics so-called and a more religious studies-oriented scholarship. *Apologetics*, like *cult*, may be a term that has been too deformed in contemporary discourse to be a useful designation. Its semiotic value is too encumbered with pejorative connotations that overlie its distinguished history. And like *cult*, it has been wielded as a cudgel to discredit and dismiss, under the guise of applying some kind of objective rhetorical label. Since all academic activities involve formal argumentation in defense of a position, we are all apologists of a sort. So let me say instead that Gadamer’s “genuine question,” which exposes the interrogator to genuine risk, should be a hallmark of any work done in the field of religious studies, by a secularist or by a committed believer. And in its absence we may find the kind of work that deserves the label of “apologetic” in the pejorative sense. (29–30)

would in a court, and from which we have the words *apology* and *apologetics*.

In his essay “On Being Epistemologically Vulnerable: Mormonism and the Secular Study of Religion” (199–211), Brian Birch seeks to promote what he calls “a methodological pluralism” in approaching Mormon studies — the primary purpose of which [is] to identify the conditions under which apologetic scholarship may contribute in *academically* productive ways to this subfield” (204). He then explains that he “took up this issue with the aim of proposing a constructive way forward in the debates between the apologetics community and scholars advocating the development of critical methodologies in the academic study of Mormonism” (204).

I see two problems with Birch’s project. First, it presumes that heretofore apologetic scholarship has not contributed in academically productive ways. Second, so-called “critical methodologies” take many forms, but they tend to share a largely unexamined bias of reductionism of one type or another. This bias tends to prevent those who hold it from taking most apologetics seriously. For example, Birch finds it “fascinating” that the Maxwell Institute, with its change in focus, has been accused of “opening the door to a creeping secularism — that the quest for academic legitimacy⁷ has led to an unhealthy compromise of spiritual values” (205). Birch cites BYU political science professor Ralph Hancock as one who has been among the “most vociferous” in openly expressing concern that “Brigham Young University is ‘succumbing to a secular paradigm’ and thus losing the distinctiveness of its institutional mission” (205). Birch then quotes Hancock: “There comes a point where the secular framework ... can no longer be translated into the community’s authoritative religious idiom. When this happens, faith is left speechless, defenseless, resourceless” (205).

Birch’s reply to Hancock’s concerns is his “methodological pluralism” with its underlying and unexamined assumptions, which is most likely a “solution” that is doomed to failure, due in part at least to an embrace of the sterile methodologies that Givens decries. Birch admits that “vigilance is a virtue in retaining the religious vitality and distinctiveness of Mormonism,” but he warns that “there is a considerable danger in the isolationism that comes with assuming a monolithic Mormon idiom — authoritative or otherwise” (206). So, as Birch presents it, our choice is between religious vitality and “a monolithic Mormon idiom.” While certain beliefs and practices are fundamental to Mormonism and define the Mormon identity, this is a far cry from some vague “considerable

7. This very choice of wording is symptomatic of the unexamined bias of which I speak. Embarking upon a “quest for academic legitimacy” implicitly asserts that academic legitimacy was previously lacking, else there would be no need for such a quest.

danger” that Birch calls “a monolithic Mormonism.” It is hard to walk on the campus of Brigham Young University and see a monolithic representation of Mormonism, or anything approaching it.

Rays of Light

While there is much that is problematic about some of the essays in this volume, there are also several fine essays, a few of which have already been mentioned. It is perhaps fitting that the man who has been honored, so to speak, with this collection, Richard Bushman, has produced one of the best essays in the book. The Terryl Givens essay also well warrants a careful reading, as does Armand Mauss’s look back at his scholarly career. Mauro Properzi’s essay, “Truth, Community, and Prophetic Authority” (35–46), is of interest. In addition, in her essay “Above, Beyond, and in Between: A Teacher’s Role,” Melissa Wei-Tsing Inouye (69–79) takes the overall theme of the book in a uniquely productive way. In a delightful and thoughtfully engaging manner, Inouye discusses how her Mormonism influences her teaching and her relationships with students. This is one of the finest reads in the book, and those who are or who aspire to be teachers will serve themselves well if they read this essay.

What seems clear from this collection of essays is that the Maxwell Institute remains adrift. The failures of this book bring to mind numerous other anthologies that have been published over the years which have dealt more effectively with the issues raised or ignored in this volume. Of particular note is *Expressions of Faith: Testimonies of Latter-day Saint Scholars*, a nice collection of essays put together over two decades ago by historian Susan Easton Black and published by FARMS.⁸ No less than Richard Bushman himself has a fine essay in that volume.

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8. Susan Easton Black, *Expressions of Faith: Testimonies of Latter-day Saint Scholars* (Provo, UT: Foundation for Ancient Research and Mormon Studies, 1996).

the University of California, Riverside, and in 1980 he received his PhD in government from Claremont Graduate School in California. Now retired, Peterson lives in Provo, Utah, with his wife, Pamela Jackson Peterson.

“THEY SHALL NO MORE BE CONFOUNDED”: MORONI’S WORDPLAY ON JOSEPH IN ETHER 13:1-13 AND MORONI 10:31

Matthew L. Bowen

ABSTRACT: *In two related prophecies, Moroni employs an apparent wordplay on the name Joseph in terms of the Hebrew idiom (lōʾ) yôšîp ... ʾôd (+ verbal component), as preserved in the phrases “they shall no more be confounded” (Ether 13:8) and “that thou mayest no more be confounded” (Moroni 10:31). That phraseology enjoyed a long currency within Nephite prophecy (e.g., 1 Nephi 14:2, 15:20), ultimately having its source in Isaiah’s prophecies regarding Jerusalem/Zion (see, for example, Isaiah 51:22; 52:1–2; 54:2–4). Ether and Moroni’s prophecy in Ether 13 that the Old Jerusalem and the New Jerusalem would “no more be confounded” further affirms the gathering of Israel in general and the gathering of the seed of Joseph in particular.*

A part from the preservation of the prophecies of Joseph in 2 Nephi 3:1–4:3 where the name Joseph occurs thirteen times, the greatest concentration or clustering of the name Joseph in the Book of Mormon occurs in Ether 13, where it occurs seven times (a number of completion in Hebrew numerology).¹ This might seem an odd phenomenon, given that the book of Ether is primarily an abridgment of Jaredite records and an account of the destruction of the Jaredites. However, Moroni, our editor, like Ether and Coriantumr (cf. Ether 13:21) whose people he describes, lived to see his own nation destroyed in fulfillment of prophecy.

1. For more examples of the use of “sevens” in the Book of Mormon, see Corbin Volluz, “A Study in Seven: Hebrew Numerology in the Book of Mormon,” *BYU Studies Quarterly* 53, no. 2 (2014): 57–83, <https://scholarsarchive.byu.edu/byusq/vol53/iss2/7>.

Moreover, where Ether and Coriantumr also “live[d] to see the fulfilling of the prophecies which had been spoken concerning another people receiving the land for their inheritance” in place of the Jaredites (Ether 13:21), Moroni foresaw that another “Gentile” nation would be raised up to receive the land for their inheritance, dispossessing the remnant of Lehi’s seed (the descendants of the Lamanites and dissenting Nephites), who were descendants of the patriarch Joseph. Isaiah’s writings, more than those of any other biblical writer, deal with the Lord’s promises regarding Israel after its dispossession and scattering by non-Israelite nations (the “Gentiles”; see 3 Nephi 23:1–4).

Moroni’s cobbling together of elements from Isaiah 51:17, 22; 52:1–2; and 54:3–4 in Moroni 10:31 confirms the importance of Isaiah’s writings even in very late Nephite religious thought (see also Moroni’s earlier statement on Isaiah’s writings in Mormon 8:23 quoting Isaiah 29:4 and 2 Nephi 3:20).² As I will endeavor to show, Moroni’s adumbration of Ether’s prophecy concerning the restoration of the Jerusalem of old and the building of a New Jerusalem, owes much in terms of language to Nephi’s and Mormon’s prophecies concerning the gathering of Judah and Israel and to their understanding of the prophecies of Isaiah.

In particular, I will endeavor to show, on the basis of Isaiah’s prophecies, wordplay on the name of Joseph in terms of the Hebrew idiom (*lōʾ*) *yôšîp* ... *ʾôd* (+ verbal component)³ apparently represented in Moroni’s Isaiah-based prophecies, especially in the phrases “they shall no more be confounded” (Ether 13:8) and “that thou mayest no more be confounded” (Moroni 10:31). This wordplay evokes the name of the one *to whom* the Lord had made promises fulfilled by Israel’s “gathering”⁴ — i.e., the patriarch Joseph⁵ — but also hints at the name of the one *through whom* the Lord would “set his hand again [Hebrew *yôšîp yādô*”⁶

2. Mormon 8:23: “Search the prophecies of Isaiah. Behold, I cannot write them. Yea, behold I say unto you, that those saints who have gone before me, who have possessed this land, shall cry, yea, even from the dust will they cry unto the Lord; and as the Lord liveth he will remember the covenant which he hath made with them.”

3. On the *yāsap/yôšîp* (+ verbal component) construction and its performance of “again”/“no more”-related adverbial functions, see Bruce K. Waltke and M. O’Connor, *Introduction to Biblical Hebrew Syntax* (Winona Lake, IN: Eisenbrauns, 1990), 602, 656–57.

4. See 2 Nephi 3:3–16.

5. See, e.g., 2 Nephi 3:3–16; 25:21; JST Genesis 50:24–36.

6. Isaiah 11:11 [2 Nephi 21:11]; 2 Nephi 6:14; 25:17; 29:1; Jacob 6:2.

to gather Israel, so that Israel might “no more be confounded” — a future Joseph, the son of Joseph (see 2 Nephi 3:15).

“It Should Be Built Up Again, a Holy City unto the Lord”

Moroni’s summation of Ether’s prophecy in Ether 13 constitutes something of a very long paraphrase. Moroni, however, does not just summarize or paraphrase Ether, but his language abundantly cites earlier ancient Israelite and Nephite prophecy concerning “the house of Joseph,” the house of Israel, and the “remnant of Joseph’s seed.” Clearly, Moroni understood the prophecies of the Jaredite prophet Ether to refer not only to the coming of Christ, but also concerning a New Jerusalem:

Behold, Ether saw the days of Christ, and he spake concerning a New Jerusalem upon this land. And he spake also concerning the house of Israel, and the Jerusalem from whence Lehi should come — after it should be destroyed **it should be built up again** [cf. Hebrew *yôšîp*], a holy city unto the Lord; wherefore, it could not be a new Jerusalem for it had been in a time of old; but **it should be built up again** [*yôšîp*], **and become a holy city of the Lord**; and it should be built unto the house of Israel. And that **a New Jerusalem should be built up upon this land, unto the remnant of the seed of Joseph** [*yôšēp*], for which things there has been a type. (Ether 13:4–6)

Although such a prophecy might seem unlikely to come from a non-Israelite prophet with no traditional knowledge of or personal experience with an Old Jerusalem, it must be remembered that the Lord, as Moroni tells us earlier, “showed” the brother of Jared “all things.”⁷ Additionally, it must be remembered that Moroni is interpreting Ether for a latter-day Israelite and Gentile audience.⁸ The exact details of what Ether “saw” and “spake” (i.e., prophesied) regarding the “house of Israel” and a “New Jerusalem” are unknowable without the text of Moroni’s original sources. But whatever Ether’s original language, terminology, etc., we can confidently conclude that Moroni is giving us the most accurate encapsulation of Ether of which he was capable.

If Moroni’s prophecy that “the Jerusalem, from whence Lehi should come” should “be built up **again**” (stated twice) alludes to Isaiah 11:11 (“And it shall come to pass in that day, that the Lord **shall set** his hand **again** [*yôšîp*] the second time to recover the remnant of his people”), it

7. Ether 3:26; 12:21; cf. Ether 4:7.

8. See, e.g., the title page of the Book of Mormon; Moroni 1:4.

indeed reflects the Hebrew *yôšîp* (+ verbal component) idiom. Juxtaposed here with the name Joseph, we can then conclude that Moroni recognizes and emphasizes a connection between Isaiah's prophecy (and thus Nephite prophecy) and the name Joseph.

The collocation "remnant of the seed of Joseph" finds its earliest extant biblical antecedent in the phrase "remnant of Joseph [*šē'ērîṭ yôšēp*]" (Amos 5:15; but cf. Alma 46:23, 27). Amos appears to play on the name Joseph in oracles declaring that the Lord "**will not again** [*lō' 'ôšîp*] pass by them [the northern kingdom of Israel or 'Joseph'] **any more** [*'ôd*]" (Amos 7:8, 8:2). Isaiah's prophecies appear to reverse the seeming finality of the Lord's sentence as articulated through Amos. Significantly, many of the prophecies of Isaiah that offer hope incorporate variations of the *yôšîp/lō' yôšîp 'ôd* (+ verbal component) idiom.

Moroni remarks that a "New Jerusalem" being built upon the land of promise (the Americas) "unto the remnant of the seed of **Joseph** [*yôšēp*]" found its "type" in the biography of Joseph in Egypt and his preservation of his father and his father's family's life after his brothers "hated him **yet the more**" (*wayyôšîpû 'ôd*, Genesis 37:5, 8). We recall that the name Joseph in Genesis 30:23–24 is explained in terms of two verbs: *'āsap* ("God hath **taken away** [**gathered in/up**, *'āsap*] my reproach") and *yāsap* ("The Lord **shall add** [**may** (he) **add**,⁹ *yôšēp*] to me another son"). This double-etymology makes clear that the name Joseph was associated with divine "taking away" or "gathering" and divine "adding" — iterative divine action taken on Israel's behalf.

"They Shall No More Be Confounded"

Moroni sees the merciful preservation of Jacob's and Joseph's posterity — Jacob's being "brought" from Canaan to Egypt and a "remnant of the seed of Joseph" later being "brought" out of Jerusalem — as a "type" or pattern for the building "again" of the "Jerusalem of old" and the building of a "New Jerusalem":

For as **Joseph** brought his father down into the land of Egypt, even so he died there; wherefore, the Lord brought **a remnant of the seed of Joseph** out of the land of Jerusalem, that he might be merciful unto **the seed of Joseph** that they should perish not, even as he was merciful unto **the father of Joseph** that

9. Cf. Martin Noth, *Die israelitischen Personennamen im Rahmen der Gemeinsemitischen Namengebung* (BWANT 3/10; Stuttgart: W. Kolhammer, 1928), 212; Ephraim A. Speiser, *Genesis: Introduction, Translation, and Notes* (New York: Doubleday, 1964), 230–33.

he should perish not. Wherefore, **the remnant of the house of Joseph** [*yôšēp*] shall be built upon this land; and it shall be a land of their inheritance; and they shall build up a holy city unto the Lord, like unto the Jerusalem of old; and **they shall no more** [cf. *lō' yôšîpû/yôšîpû ... ôd*] **be confounded**, until the end come when the earth shall pass away. And there shall be a new heaven and a new earth; and they shall be like unto the old save the old have passed away, and all things have become new. And then cometh the New Jerusalem; and blessed are they who dwell therein, for it is they whose garments are white through the blood of the Lamb; and **they are they who are numbered among the remnant of the seed of Joseph**, who were of the house of Israel. (Ether 13:7–10)

Moroni appears to juxtapose the name Joseph with the *lō' yôšîp*-idiom or its Nephite scribal equivalent. Just as “the Jerusalem of old” shall “**no more** drink ... again [*lō' tōšîpî*]” the “cup of trembling” (Isaiah 51:22) and “**henceforth there shall no more** [*lō' yôšîp*] come into [Jerusalem] the uncircumcised and the unclean” (Isaiah 52:1), the inhabitants of the New Jerusalem too “shall no more be confounded” (see further below). Or, as Nephi foretold to his brothers regarding their posterity in the latter days as descendants of Joseph, “they **should no more** be confounded, **neither should they** be scattered **again**” (1 Nephi 15:20). Nephi may have borrowed the Hebrew term *kālam* (“be hurt, humiliated”; “be ashamed,” “put to shame,” “be confounded”)¹⁰ — rendered by the KJV translators as “confound” — from Isaiah 54:4 (*tikkālēmî*).

When Moroni identifies the inhabitants of the New Jerusalem as “they who are **numbered** among the remnant of the seed of **Joseph** [*yôšēp*],” his words further echo Nephi’s words to his brothers: “**they shall be remembered numbered again** [cf. Hebrew *yôšîpû/yôšîpû*] among the house of Israel; they shall be grafted in, being a natural branch of the olive tree, into the true olive tree” (1 Nephi 15:16). As Royal Skousen has shown, the original manuscript read “numbered” here rather than “remembered.”¹¹

Nephi’s statement, “they should no more be confounded, neither should they be scattered again” (1 Nephi 15:20), and thus Moroni’s words

10. Ludwig Koehler and Walter Baumgartner, *The Hebrew and Aramaic Lexicon of the Old Testament* (Leiden, Netherlands: Brill, 2001), 480. Hereafter cited as HALOT.

11. Royal Skousen, *Analysis of Textual Variants of the Book of Mormon, Part One: 1 Nephi 1–2 Nephi 10* (Provo, UT: FARMS, 2004), 327.

in Ether 13, also represent adaptations or interpretations of the angel’s words to Nephi as preserved in 1 Nephi 14:1–2:

1 Nephi 15:16, 20	1 Nephi 14:1–2
<p>Behold, I say unto you, Yea; <u>they shall be remembered numbered again</u> [cf. <i>yôšîpû/yôšîpû</i>] among the house of Israel; they shall be grafted in, being a natural branch of the olive tree, into the true olive tree (1 Nephi 15:16).</p> <p>And I did rehearse unto them the words of Isaiah, who spake concerning the restoration of the Jews, or of the house of Israel; and after they were restored <u>they should no more</u> [<i>lô’ yôšîpû/yôšîpû ... ‘ôd</i>] be confounded, neither should they be scattered again [cf. <i>wělô’ yôšîpû/yôšîpû ... ‘ôd</i>]. (1 Nephi 15:20)</p>	<p>And it shall come to pass, that if the Gentiles shall hearken unto the Lamb of God in that day ... and harden not their hearts against the Lamb of God, they shall be numbered among the seed of thy father; yea, they shall be numbered among the house of Israel; and they shall be blessed people upon the promised land forever; <u>they shall be no more</u> [cf. <i>lô’ yôšîpû/yôšîpû ... ‘ôd</i>] brought down into captivity; and the house of Israel shall no more be confounded.</p>

Clearly, Nephi’s words to his brothers in 1 Nephi 15:16, 20 represent a reiteration of the information relayed to him as recorded in 1 Nephi 14:2. Ether 13:8–10 exhibits a remarkable degree of textual dependence on (and wordplay involving) all three of the above passages. Moroni will use Nephi’s collocation “blessed people” in his refrain “blessed are they” (Ether 13:10–11).¹² Nephi’s statement, “And I did rehearse unto them the words of Isaiah,” confirms that his repeated use and Moroni’s use of the adverbial auxiliary expression “no more” in the phrase “shall no more be confounded” has its source in Isaiah. These words are themselves an adaptation of the language of Isaiah.

In fact, Nephi’s use of “no more” here reflects several texts from the book of Isaiah that describe the blessings the “remnant” of latter-day Israel will enjoy after being gathered again. Note the use of the *lô’ yôšîp ‘ôd* (+ verbal component) in each instance:

12. Both collocations “blessed people” and “blessed are they” probably also have some reference to the Abrahamic covenant (see, e.g., Genesis 12:3; 22:18).

And it shall come to pass in that day, that the remnant of Israel, and such as are escaped of the house of Jacob, **shall no more again** [*lō' yôšîp 'ôd*] stay upon him that smote them; but shall stay upon the Lord, the Holy One of Israel, in truth. (Isaiah 10:20; 2 Nephi 20:20)

Thus saith thy Lord the Lord, and thy God that pleadeth the cause of his people, Behold, I have taken out of thine hand the cup of trembling, even the dregs of the cup of my fury; **thou shalt no more** [*lō' tōšîpî*] **drink it again** [*'ôd*]. (Isaiah 51:22)

Awake, awake; put on thy strength, O Zion; put on thy beautiful garments, O Jerusalem, the holy city: for henceforth **there shall no more** [*lō' yôšîp ... 'ôd*] come into thee the uncircumcised and the unclean. (Isaiah 52:1)

These passages strongly suggest that the phrase “shall no more” (+ verb) in Nephi’s text represents the Hebrew *lō' yôšîp 'ôd* (+ verb) idiom with which Nephi would have been familiar as a Hebrew-speaking Israelite. Since Moroni himself states that he and other Nephites of his time continued to use Hebrew,¹³ and since Moroni was heir of the whole of the Nephite scripture- and record-keeping tradition, it is more than reasonable to suppose his familiarity with the *lō' yôšîp 'ôd* (+ verbal component) idiom as well. Nephi’s use of Isaiah 11:11 and 29:14 with *yâsap/yôšîp* in 2 Nephi 25:17 (cf. 25:21) and 2 Nephi 29:1 constitutes a wordplay on the name Joseph (in *Gezera Shawa*), as I have suggested elsewhere.¹⁴ I further submit that Nephi’s deployment of *lō' yôšîp 'ôd* should be similarly understood.

In addition to the foregoing, the “be confounded” element appears to have been quoted from or constitutes an allusion to Isaiah 54:4: “Fear not; for thou shalt not be ashamed: **neither be thou confounded** [*wē'al tikkālēmî*] for thou shalt not be put to shame: for thou shalt forget the shame of thy youth, and shalt not remember the reproach of thy widowhood **any more** [*'ôd*” (Isaiah 54:4). The relationship between Isaiah 52:1–2 and Isaiah 54:3–4 in Nephite thought (or at least in

13. Mormon 9:33.

14. Matthew L. Bowen, “‘He Shall Add’: Wordplay on the Name Joseph and an Early Instance of *Gezera Shawa* in the Book of Mormon,” *Insights* 30, no. 2 (2010): 2–4; Bowen, “Onomastic Wordplay on *Joseph* and *Benjamin* and *Gezera Shawa* in the Book of Mormon,” *Interpreter: A Journal of Mormon Scripture* 18 (2016): 255–73.

Moroni's thought) becomes clear once the evidence of Moroni 10:31 is considered (see further below).

“Gathered in From the Four Quarters of the Earth and From the North Countries”

As noted earlier, the text of Genesis 30:23 etiologizes Joseph with the verb *’āsap*, which can mean to “take away,” but more commonly means to “gather up” or “gather in.” Hence, not only does the name Joseph midrashically connote “God hath **taken away** [*’āsap*] my reproach” but also “God has **gathered in** my reproach” or “God has **gathered together** my reproach.”

Accordingly, we find the later biography of Joseph mentioning that Joseph “gathered” his brothers, the patriarchs of the twelve tribes (minus himself and Benjamin), into “ward” or “keeping”: “And he **put them all together** [*wayye’ēsōp*, literally, “**gathered them together**”] into ward three days. And **Joseph** [*yōsēp*] said unto them the third day, This do, and live; for I fear God” (Genesis 42:17-18). A paronomasia on the name “Joseph” and *wayye’ēsōp*, establishes another clear lexical link between the name “Joseph” and the verb *’āsap*, to “gather”: Joseph is “gathering” the family to Egypt, an important aspect of the “type” or typological deliverance that Moroni cites.

Importantly, Moroni himself appears to employ the wordplay on Joseph’s name in terms of the verb *’āsap*:

And there shall be a new heaven and a new earth; and they shall be like unto the old save the old have passed away, and all things have become new. And then cometh the New Jerusalem; and **blessed are they** who dwell therein, for it is they whose garments are white through the blood of the Lamb; and **they are they who are numbered among the remnant of the seed of Joseph** [*yōsēp*] who were of the house of Israel. And then also cometh the Jerusalem of old; and the inhabitants thereof, **blessed are they**, for they have been washed in the blood of the Lamb; and they are they who were scattered **and gathered in** [cf. Hebrew *wayyē’āsēpû*] **from the four quarters of the earth**, and from the north countries, and are partakers of the fulfilling of the covenant which God made with their father, Abraham. (Ether 13:9-11)

The wordplay serves to link the name “Joseph” and the “remnant of the seed of Joseph” who will inhabit “the New Jerusalem” with those who are “gathered in” to inhabit the Jerusalem of old. Unstated but

perhaps implied in the wordplay is that the same “remnant of the seed of Joseph” will serve an important role in the “gather[ing] in” of Judah¹⁵ (“then also cometh the Jerusalem of old”) and the other tribes from the “four quarters of the earth.” The “Joseph” tribes are responsible for “gathering” the family of Israel (cf. again Genesis 42:17).¹⁶

Moroni’s apparent wordplay on the name Joseph owes a literary debt to that of his father Mormon. In an autobiographic interlude in 3 Nephi 5, Mormon acknowledges the Lord’s beneficence to “the house of Jacob” and in particular to the “seed of Joseph”:

I am Mormon, and a pure descendant of Lehi. I have reason to bless my God and my Savior Jesus Christ, that he brought our fathers out of the land of Jerusalem ... Surely he hath blessed the house of Jacob, and hath been merciful unto **the seed of Joseph** [*yôšēp*] And insomuch as the children of Lehi have kept his commandments **he hath blessed them** and prospered them according to his word. Yea, and surely **shall he again** [cf. Hebrew *yôšip*] bring **a remnant of the seed of Joseph** to the knowledge of the Lord their God. And as surely as the Lord liveth, will he **gather in** [cf. Hebrew *’āsap/qibbēš*] **from the four quarters of the earth** all the remnant of the seed of Jacob, who are scattered abroad upon all the face of the earth. And as he hath covenanted with all the house of Jacob, even so shall the covenant wherewith he hath covenanted with the house of Jacob be fulfilled in his own due time, unto the restoring all the house of Jacob unto the knowledge of the covenant that he hath covenanted with them. And then shall they know their Redeemer, who is Jesus Christ, the Son of God; and then shall they be **gathered in from the four quarters of the earth unto their own lands**, from whence

15. Orson Hyde’s dedication of the Holy Land for the gathering and return of the Jews — the tribe of Judah on October 24, 1841 can be seen as evidence of this. See “Interesting News From Alexandria and Jerusalem. Letter from Elder Hyde”, *Times and Seasons*, April 1, 1842, <http://www.josephsmithpapers.org/paper-summary/times-and-seasons-1-april-1842/5>.

16. See also D&C 133:30–34. D&C 113:5–6: “What is the root of Jesse spoken of in the 10th verse of the 11th chapter? Behold, thus saith the Lord, it is a descendant of Jesse, as well as of Joseph, unto whom rightly belongs the priesthood, and the keys of the kingdom, for an ensign, and for the gathering of my people in the last days.” This likely refers to the Melchizedek priesthood, and not to the priesthood of Aaron.

they have been dispersed; yea, as the Lord liveth so shall it be.
Amen. (3 Nephi 5:20-26)

Mormon mentions “the seed of Joseph” and the “remnant of the seed of Joseph” twice in connection with the promise that “surely shall he again bring,” which may represent the *yôšîp* (+ verbal component) idiom, creating a wordplay on the name “Joseph.” Moreover, Mormon uses a verb rendered “gather in” twice — once active, once passive — which conceivably represents the verb *’āsap* (“to gather in,” “gather up”). If so, we have Mormon employing a double-play on the name “Joseph” in terms of the verbs *’āsap* and *yāsap*, much as we find in Genesis 30:23–24. Intriguingly, this double wordplay on *’āsap* and *yāsap* occurs in Isaiah 11:11–12, the very text to which Mormon appears to have referenced:

And it shall come to pass in that day, that **the Lord shall set his hand again** [*yôšîp*] the second time to recover the remnant of his people, which shall be left, from Assyria, and from Egypt, and from Pathros, and from Cush, and from Elam, and from Shinar, and from Hamath, and from the islands of the sea. And he shall set up an ensign for the nations, and **shall assemble** [**gather in**, *wē’āsap*] **the outcasts of Israel, and gather together** [*yēqabbēš*] **the dispersed of Judah from the four corners of the earth.** (Isaiah 11:11–12)

On one level, Isaiah’s text plays on the name “Joseph” as the name of the patriarch of the dominant northern half-tribe of Ephraim (cf. the mention of Ephraim in Isaiah 11:13). Nephi, however, detects an additional level of wordplay (compare 2 Nephi 25:17, 21; 29:1 with 2 Nephi 3), alluding to the “Joseph” that would be the Lord’s instrument in the latter-day gathering of the entire house of Israel.

In the context of the Lord’s “**proceed**[ing] [*yôšîp/yôšēp*] to do a marvelous work and a wonder” (2 Nephi 29:1; citing Isaiah 29:14) and “**set**[ting] his hand **again** [*yôšēp*]” (2 Nephi 29:1, citing Isaiah 11:11), Nephi explicitly links the coming forth of and “gathering” of additional scripture with the “gathering home” of Israel:

And it shall come to pass that my people, which are of the house of Israel, shall be **gathered home** unto the lands of their possessions; and my word also shall be **gathered in one**. And I will show unto them that fight against my word and against my people, who are of the house of Israel, that I am God, and that I covenanted with Abraham that I would remember his seed forever. (2 Nephi 29:14)

The appearance and “gathering” of this additional scripture will constitute the signal or sign that the Lord is “gathering” Israel again (see, especially, 3 Nephi 21:7, 26–28; see also 2 Nephi 30:5–7; Mormon 3:17; Ether 4:16; cf. 8:24). As the Lord himself foretold to the Lamanites and Nephites at the temple in Bountiful: “And then **will I gather them in** [cf. *wē’āsaptī*] from **the four quarters of the earth**; and then will I fulfil the covenant which the Father hath made unto all the people of the house of Israel” (3 Nephi 16:5).

This language may ultimately have its source in the prophecies of Zenos: “Nevertheless, when that day cometh, saith the prophet, that they **no more** [cf. Hebrew *lō’ yôšîpû*]¹⁷ turn aside their hearts against the Holy One of Israel, then will he remember the covenants which he made to their fathers. Yea, then will he remember the isles of the sea; yea, and all the people who are of the house of Israel, **will I gather in**, saith the Lord, according to the words of the prophet Zenos, **from the four quarters of the earth**” (1 Nephi 19:15–16). By far, the two most common verbs for “gathering” in the Hebrew Bible are *’āsap* (“gather in,” “assemble”; “take away”) and *qibbēš* (“gather together”). In three instances in the KJV in which the idiom “gather in”¹⁸ occurs, the underlying verb is always *’āsap*. The use of the idioms “no more” (+ verb) and “will I gather in” appear to constitute a wordplay on *yāsap* (*lō’ yôšîp*) and *’āsap* that looks something like the wordplay in Isaiah 11:11–12: “And it shall come to pass in that day, that the Lord shall **set** his hand **again** [*yôšîp*] the second time to recover the remnant of his people ... And he shall set up an ensign for the nations, and shall **assemble** [**gather in**, *wē’āsap*] the outcasts of Israel, and **gather together** [*yēqabbēš*] the dispersed of Judah from the four corners of the earth.”

17. Cf. also Isaiah 10:22.

18. Exodus 23:10 (“And six years thou shalt sow thy land, **and shalt gather in** [*wē’āsaptā*] the fruits thereof”); Leviticus 25:3 (“Six years thou shalt sow thy field, and six years thou shalt prune thy vineyard, **and gather in** [*wē’āsaptā*] the fruit thereof”), 20 (“And if ye shall say, What shall we eat the seventh year? behold, we shall not sow, **nor gather in** [*wēlō’ ne’ēsōp*] our increase”); and Deuteronomy 11:14 (“...**that thou mayest gather in** [*wē’āsaptā*] thy corn, and thy wine, and thine oil”). cf. Genesis 6:21.

Isaiah 51:17, 22; 52:1–2 & Isaiah 54:2–4	Moroni 10:31
<p>Awake, awake, stand up, O Jerusalem, which hast drunk at the hand of the Lord the cup of his fury; thou hast drunken the dregs of the cup of trembling, and wrung them out. ... Thus saith thy Lord the Lord, and thy God that pleadeth the cause of his people, Behold, I have taken out of thine hand the cup of trembling, even the dregs of the cup of my fury; <u>thou shalt no more drink it again</u> [lō' tōsîpî ... 'ôd]: (Isaiah 51: 17, 22)</p> <p>Awake, awake; put on thy strength, O Zion; put on thy beautiful garments, O Jerusalem, the holy city: for henceforth <u>there shall no more</u> [lō' yôsip ... 'ôd] come into thee the uncircumcised and the unclean. Shake thyself from the dust; arise, and sit down, O Jerusalem: loose thyself from the bands of thy neck, O captive daughter of Zion. (Isaiah 52:1–2)</p> <p>Enlarge the place of thy tent, and let them stretch forth the curtains of thine habitations: spare not, lengthen thy cords, and strengthen thy stakes; For thou shalt break forth on the right hand and on the left; and thy seed shall inherit the Gentiles, and make the desolate cities to be inhabited. Fear not; for thou shalt not be ashamed: neither be thou confounded; for thou shalt not be put to shame: for thou shalt forget the shame of thy youth, and shalt not remember the reproach of thy widowhood any more. (Isaiah 54:2–4)</p>	<p>And awake, and arise from the dust, O Jerusalem; yea, and put on thy beautiful garments, O daughter of Zion; and strengthen thy stakes and enlarge thy borders forever, <u>that thou mayest no more be confounded</u>, that the covenants of the Eternal Father which he hath made unto thee, O house of Israel, may be fulfilled. (Moroni 10:31)</p>

“That Thou Mayest No More Be Confounded” (Moroni 10:31)

The importance of the writings of Isaiah in Moroni’s understanding of the Lord’s covenants with Israel emerges in one of his earliest statements: “Search the prophecies of Isaiah. Behold, I cannot write them. Yea, behold I say unto you, that those saints who have gone before me, who have possessed this land, shall cry, yea, **even from the dust will they cry** unto the Lord; and as the Lord liveth he will remember the covenant which he hath made with them” (Mormon 8:23). Moroni’s statement, “those saints . . . shall cry, yea, even from the dust” seemingly alludes to Isaiah 29:4 and subsequent Nephite midrash on that passage.

Moroni concludes his personal writings as well as the entire Book of Mormon with an exhortation combining the language of Isaiah 51:17, 22; 52:1–2; and Isaiah 54:4:

This concluding exhortation alone recommends Isaiah 52:1–2 and 54:2–4 as two of the most important texts in the book of Isaiah, quite apart from any other evidence. The purpose clause “that thou mayest no more be confounded,” in a real sense, offers a purpose clause for the entire Book of Mormon. Those words apply to Israel/Zion and the saints, collectively and individually.

Conclusion and Pragmatics

In his summation of Ether 13:1–13, Moroni uses the language of Isaiah and earlier Isaiah-inspired Nephite prophecy, including language from passages that employ forms of the *lō’ yāsap/yōsīp* (+ verbal component) construction (“and they shall **no more** be confounded,” Ether 13:8; “that thou mayest **no more** be confounded,” Moroni 10:31), in conjunction with his sevenfold-mention of the name Joseph. This suggests the strong possibility of deliberate wordplay on the name Joseph (“May he [God] add” *yāsap*, “add,” “increase,” “do more”).¹⁹ This wordplay emphasizes the traditional etiological association of the name Joseph with “gather[ing] in” and “add[ing],” especially iterative divine action (Genesis 30:23–24).

Moroni’s (and Ether’s) prophecies look forward to the latter-day restoration of the “Jerusalem of old” and the coming of the New Jerusalem. As the Lord has promised his people in this dispensation: “And Israel shall be saved in mine own due time; and by the keys which I have given shall they be led, and **no more be confounded** at all” (D&C 35:25). On an individual level, the key to our “no more be[ing] confounded” is to have a correct understanding of the principles taught

19. Noth, *Die israelitischen Personennamen*, 212. See also HALOT, 403.

in the Book of Mormon and to apply them. Regarding this, Joseph Smith was recorded to have said: “I told the brethren that the book of Mormon was the most correct of any book on earth, and the key stone of our religion, and a man would get nearer to God by abiding by its precepts, than by any other book”²⁰ As we get nearer to God, we are “gathered in” and are “no more ... confounded.”

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20. Joseph Smith, “History, 1838–1856, volume C-1 (2 November 1838–31 July 1842),” *The Joseph Smith Papers*, <http://www.josephsmithpapers.org/paper-summary/history-1838-1856-volume-c-1-2-november-1838-31-july-1842/427>. For an excellent study on the context of Joseph Smith’s statement regarding the Book of Mormon, see Scott C. Esplin, “Getting ‘Nearer to God’: A History of Joseph Smith’s Statement,” in *Living the Book of Mormon: Abiding by Its Precepts*, ed. Gaye Strathearn and Charles Swift (Provo, UT: Religious Studies Center, Brigham Young University; Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 2007), 41–54. Regarding the history of Joseph Smith’s statement, Esplin observes, “Without the aid of Joseph Smith himself or a personal journal to fill in missing details, Willard Richards was forced to rely on other records to craft the history. ... In fact, Wilford Woodruff’s journal itself may be the statement’s source, since it nearly identically matches the statement found in *History of the Church*. The authors of *History of the Church* likely changed Wilford Woodruff’s third-person account to sound like Joseph’s first-person record.” Such was common practice at that time.

COMPARING BOOK OF MORMON NAMES WITH THOSE FOUND IN J.R.R. TOLKIEN'S WORKS: AN EXPLORATORY STUDY

Brad Wilcox, Wendy Baker-Smemoe,
Bruce L. Brown, and Sharon Black

Abstract: *The works of Tolkien and the Book of Mormon have been compared in a variety of ways by multiple authors and researchers, but none have looked specifically at the unusual names found within both. Wordprint studies are one tool used in author attribution research, but do authors use specific sounds more than others — consciously or subconsciously — when selecting or inventing names? Some research suggests they may and that their patterns could create a “sound print” or phonoprint. This constitutes a fresh and unusual path of research that deserves more attention. The purpose of this exploratory study was to see if phonoprints surfaced when examining Dwarf, Elf, Hobbit, Man, and other names created by Tolkien and Jaredite, Nephite, Mulekite, and Lamanite names found in the Book of Mormon. Results suggest that Tolkien had a phonoprint he was unable to entirely escape when creating character names, even when he claimed he based them on distinct languages. In contrast, in Book of Mormon names, a single author’s phonoprint did not emerge. Names varied by group in the way one would expect authentic names from different cultures to vary. Although much more research needs to be done to establish the validity and reliability of using phonoprints for author identification, this study opens a door for future research.*

One of the unexplained mysteries of the world is the Voynich Manuscript,¹ a 240-page, richly illustrated book, carbon dated to the

1. “17 Unexplained Mysteries of the World That Remain Unsolved,” *Entertainment, Movies and Gaming Network*, accessed September 1, 2018, <http://>

14th or 15th century, written in characters a virtual army of worldwide linguists and code breakers have been unable to translate. It is considered by scholars to be either a real language or a skillfully invented language that has characters grouped with the appearance of forming words.² Its origin is unknown. It belonged at one time to Emperor Rudolph II of Germany (1576–1612), who thought it to be the work of Roger Bacon, an English Franciscan friar and philosopher (1219–1292),³ though this has been overridden by a number of analyses.⁴ The book is now housed in the Beinecke Library at Yale University.

Linguistic Analyses

Although no one has been able to interpret its characters or discern whether there is any meaning to its text,⁵ extensive linguistic analyses of the Voynich Manuscript have been made. A statistical study of the word equivalents claimed that the text adheres to linguistic rules.⁶ Jorge Stolfi, who dealt with such rules, designated *core*, *mantle*, and *crust* characters.⁷ German and Latin influences have been found, and some scholars have suggested that the manuscript might represent collaboration between individuals from Italy and Germany.⁸ After years of analyzing patterns in the linguistics of the manuscript, Marcelo Montemurro, a theoretical physicist from the

emgn.com/entertainment/17-unexplained-mysteries-of-the-world-that-remain-unsolved/.

2. Megan Gannon, “10 Words in Mysterious Voynich Manuscript Decoded,” *LiveScience*, February 20, 2014, <http://www.livescience.com/43542-voynich-manuscript-10-words-cracked.html>.

3. “Voynich Manuscript: A Mysterious, Undeciphered Manuscript Dating to the 15th or 16th Century,” *Beinecke Rare Book & Manuscript Library* (website), accessed September 1, 2018, <http://beinecke.library.yale.edu/collections/highlights/voynich-manuscript>.

4. René Zandbergen, “Text Analysis,” *Voynich Manuscript* (website), last updated May 26, 2018, <http://www.voynich.nu/analysis.html>.

5. René Zandbergen, “Text Analysis — Transcription of the Text,” *Voynich Manuscript* (website), last updated February 2, 2018, <http://www.voynich.nu/transcr.html>.

6. Gannon, “10 Words in Mysterious Voynich Manuscript Decoded”.

7. Jorge Stolfi, “A Grammar for Voynichese Words,” *Instituto De Computacao* (website), last edited June 14, 2000, <http://www.ic.unicamp.br/~stolfi/voynich/00-06-07-word-grammar/>.

8. Prescott Currier, “The Voynich Manuscript: Some Notes and Observations” (Seminar, New Research on the Voynich Manuscript, Washington, D.C., November 30, 1976), <https://www.nsa.gov/news-features/declassified-documents/voynich/assets/files/proceedings-of-a-seminar-30-november-1976.pdf>.

University of Manchester, UK, and a colleague used computerized statistical methods to find “semantic networks” which appeared to them to be clustered patterns of content-bearing words, with new word structures indicating a shift in topic.⁹ Linguist Prescott Currier has found two different writing styles and text properties, thus being able to conclude that whatever it might say in whatever language, it is co-authored.¹⁰

If linguists can make fascinating analyses of unknown languages and communication systems in the Voynich Manuscript, then the Book of Mormon seems to open itself to similar investigation. Readers who believe the Book of Mormon claim it was translated from an ancient record represented in characters that no one but a prophet with divine intervention could be able to read. Other manuscripts that invite linguistic exploration are the works of J. R. R. Tolkien. He created worlds, cultures, and characters based on languages he invented himself.

Tolkien was a brilliant linguistics scholar who had mastered thirteen languages (ancient and modern) and had a working knowledge¹¹ of nine more; he invented imaginary languages in his spare time, having started this practice as a child. He knew how to create linguistic systems. Fortunately, he didn’t want his works to be unreadable like the Voynich book; the stories are told in English.

At the time the Book of Mormon was published, Joseph Smith had about a third or fourth grade education and no knowledge of languages or linguistics. He never claimed to have created the Book of Mormon — its people, its cultures, or the languages from which it was derived. He explained that he had translated an ancient record into English by the gift and power of God.

Purpose of the Study

One element *The Lord of the Rings* and the Book of Mormon have in common are hundreds of unusual, striking names. Tolkien created his names while Joseph Smith maintained the names in the Book of Mormon are authentic. Peter A. Huff (not a Latter-day Saint), referred to the Book of Mormon as “an extraordinary piece of literature” comparable to

9. Marcelo A. Montemurro, “Mysterious Voynich Manuscript Has ‘Genuine Message,’” interviewed by Melissa Hogenboom, *BBC News*, June 22, 2013, www.bbc.com/news/science-environment-22975809.

10. Currier, “The Voynich Manuscript: Some Notes and Observations”.

11. Calvin George, “J. R. R. Tolkien’s Linguistic Foundation for Middle Earth,” *Thought Hub*, September 22, 2015, <http://www.sagu.edu/thoughthub/j-r-r-tolkien-s-linguistic-foundation-for-middle-earth>.

Tolkien's *The Lord of the Rings*.¹² Although he is not the first or only person to compare the two works, the purpose of this study was to explore Huff's analogy by looking closely at the names contained in both volumes.

Authentic personal names are derived from many different sources; few parents choose their children's names according to linguistic forms and codes. In contrast, fictional names in creative works come primarily from one source, the author, and they are usually carefully and purposefully chosen or invented. Although Joseph Smith maintained he translated the Book of Mormon from an ancient record, critics claim he wrote it as any author writes a fictional work. If these critics are correct, he would have presumably chosen or created the names as fiction writers do.

Background

To examine and compare names from these two sources, we need to consider differences between authentic and fictional names in general as well as some background concerning names of Tolkien's characters and names in the Book of Mormon.

Authentic Names

Personal names have cultural significance. Some societies use personal names to teach culturally important lessons or remind their owners of significant events. In other societies names can reflect social or financial position or incidents surrounding a child's birth.¹³ Additional reasons for choosing names, at least historically, include naming a child with hoped-for characteristics,¹⁴ focusing on the location of the birth,¹⁵ or alluding to the occupations of parents.¹⁶

Today, with the interaction of many different cultures and peoples, personal names may derive from multiple languages and origins.¹⁷ Many

12. Peter A. Huff, "A Gentile Recommends the Book of Mormon," *Dialogue: A Journal of Mormon Thought* 43, no. 2 (Summer 2010): 209–10.

13. Susan M. Suzman, "Names as Pointers: Zulu Personal Naming Practices," *Language in Society* 23 (June 1994): 253–72.

14. Francisco J. Rubio Orcilla, "Celtic Kuono in Hispano-Celtic Personal Names," *Beitrage zur Namenforschung* 41 (2006): 399–410.

15. Walter Wenzel, "Interrelations Between Lower Lusatian Place-Names and Personal Names," *Onoma* 36 (2001): 165–79.

16. Kirsi-Maria Nummila, "Occupational Designations Derived from Nouns + (uri) Among Our Personal Names," *Virittaja* 111 (2007): 543–66, <https://journal.fi/virittaja/article/view/40614/10040>.

17. Artur Lamaj and Valter Memishaj, "The Use of Personal Names in Albanian," *Cahiers Balkaniques* 32 (2001): 31–37; see also Isabelle Leglise and

people have a surname from the culture in which they reside and a given name chosen from the native language of the parents.¹⁸ In Western societies given names can derive from circumstances such as invasions of or trading with other cultures,¹⁹ conversions to Christianity,²⁰ pagan mythology,²¹ or outright coinage.²²

Regardless of the origins of names, their phonological features evolve over time. Names are shortened, combined, or spelled with variant letters until the same names can differ significantly.²³ The phonology of names may have personal as well as social significance. Native English speakers prefer, for example, female names that follow specific features (like ending in /i/ as in *Debbi* or /n/ as in *Sharon*) and male names that follow others (some ending in /r/ as in *Brenner* or in obstruents as in *Brad*); names will change or fall out of favor if they do not follow these features (such as *Ashley* and *Whitney* changing from boys' to girls' names). Other cultures prefer to keep the exact or very similar phonology to the pronunciation of the name in the borrowed language, even if it violates native language phonotactics.²⁴

In previous research, the authors studied the degree to which personal names differ in their phonology by examining a corpus of the 100 most prevalent male personal names in English in the 19th century,

Bettina Migge, "Language-Naming Practices, Ideologies, and Linguistic Practices: Toward a Comprehensive Description of Language Varieties," *Language in Society* 35 (2006): 313–39.

18. Michael Aceto, "Ethnic Personal Names and Multiple Identities in Anglophone Caribbean Speech Communities in Latin America," *Language and Society* 31 (2002): 577–608.

19. Freya Verstraten, "Naming Practices Among the Irish Secular Nobility in the High Middle Ages," *Journal of Medieval History* 32 (2006): 43–53.

20. Pavel Stefanov, "Bulgarian Personal Names of Romanian Origin in a Manuscript from 1720," *Spostavitelno Ezikoznaie/Contrastive Linguistics* 16 (1991): 27–30.

21. Aleksandra V. Superanskaya, "Russian Personal Names," *Folia Onomastica Croatica* 8 (1999): 191–200.

22. Betsy Rymes, "Naming as Social Practice: The Case of Little Creeper from Diamond Street," *Language in Society* 25 (June 1996): 237–60.

23. Julie F. Nemer, "Phonological Stereotypes and Names in Temne," *Language in Society* 16 (September 1987): 341–52.

24. Carol Hough, "Towards an Explanation of Phonetic Differentiation in Masculine and Feminine Personal Names," *Journal of Linguistics* 36 (March 2000): 1–11.

using the *phonotactic calculator*²⁵ created by Vitevitch and Luce.²⁶ This calculator determines the relative probability of each phoneme in a word occurring in the location that it does and also the probability of its occurring adjacent to the preceding and following sounds in the word (bifones or bi-phonemes as defined by Vitevitch and Luce). In addition, a word's probability is determined by examining its neighborhood density. Words with many phonological neighbors (*cap, cat, can, cash*) score higher on the probability calculator than words with few neighbors (*oriole, flask, etc.*). The calculator determines neighborhood density and sound location probability by comparing a selected word to calculations already performed on a corpus of English created by Kucera and Francis.²⁷ For example, in the word *box* (/baks/), the calculator would determine how probable it is that a word would start with the sound /b/ and be followed by the sound /a/ in the second position, how likely a word would have /a/ in the second position and have the sound /k/ following it, and so on. We found that phonotactic probabilities of the names in the census varied greatly.

In addition to varying at the sound level, personal names also differ when they are examined as whole units. When people buy plane tickets, their names are examined by name recognition software that searches for matches with names on no-fly lists but also identifies the background of the names with amazing accuracy by comparing them to databases containing millions of names.²⁸

Thus personal names come from a variety of sources, vary in their phonological features and properties, and vary when considered as whole units in comparisons such as databases. In considering the names created by Tolkien and the names in the Book of Mormon, we asked if a writer of fiction creating all the names in a novel could replicate this

25. Brad Wilcox, et al., "Identifying Authors by Phonoprints in Their Characters' Names: An Exploratory Study," *Names: A Journal of Onomastics* 61 (June 2013): 104–25.

26. Michael Vitevitch and Paul A. Luce, "A Web-Based Interface to Calculate Phonotactic Probability for Words and Nonwords in English," *Behavior Research Methods, Instruments, & Computers* 36 (2004): 481–87.

27. Henry Kucera, W. Nelson Francis, and John B. Carroll, *Computational Analysis of Present-day American English* (Providence, RI: Brown University Press, 1967).

28. "Overview of IBM InfoSphere Global Name Recognition," IBM Knowledge Center, accessed September 1, 2018, https://www.ibm.com/support/knowledgecenter/en/SSEV5M_4.2.0/com.ibm.iis.gnm.overview.doc/topics/gnr_gnm_con_gnmoverview.html.

variety: if one author could imitate the diversity found in a corpus of personal names from actual languages — past or present.

Names in Fiction

Some authors choose to name their characters using authentic names they have encountered in experience; found on internet lists; or noticed consulting newspapers, telephone directories, road signs, or tombstones.²⁹ Others invent unique names — especially when they create fantasy or science fiction. Sometimes these supposedly come from languages unknown to us or from worlds beyond our own. Drawn from authentic sources or invented, names used by authors of fiction are chosen to match the personality of the character or to bring up stereotypes or archetypes.³⁰ When interviewed about their methods of choosing names for their fictional characters, successful authors spoke of choosing names that held personal significance for them, doing research to find names that were unusual or represented a particular time period or culture, and choosing names with phonology that appealed to them or would possibly appeal to potential readers.³¹

Scholars who have studied the Voynich Manuscript over the years cannot identify the language (or code) in which it is written and can hazard guesses at content only from the illustrations. But as noted previously, they have been able to identify aspects of the authors' time period and nationality from the way the characters are grouped as words and what appear to be paragraphs — although they have no idea the sounds the characters and groupings might have made. They have even reconstructed linguistic rules and grammar from statistical analysis. One analyst claims to have figured out the meanings of 10 of the document's words using linguistics, grammar, and repetition patterns.³²

Similarly, research has demonstrated that authors writing in English or other known languages have individual biases toward using specific words and syntactic structures when they write. Their choices constitute

29. Sharon Black and Brad Wilcox, "188 Unexplainable Names: Book of Mormon Names No Fiction Writer Would Choose," *Religious Educator* 12, no. 2 (2011): 119–30.

30. Innocentia J. Mhlambi, "Acts of Naming: The Detective Plot in Masondo's Fiction," *South African Journal of African Languages* 27 (2007): 128–41.

31. Sharon Black and Brad Wilcox, "Sense and Serendipity: Some Ways Fiction Writers Choose Names," *Names: A Journal of Onomastics* 59, no. 3 (September 2011): 152–63.

32. Gannon, "10 Words in Mysterious Voynich Manuscript Decoded."

a “wordprint” (similar to but not as precise as a fingerprint) by which they can be identified.³³

Some criticize this technique because collecting sufficient data is usually difficult.³⁴ Nevertheless, this method of examining an author’s use of specific syntactic structures, type-token ratios, and other lexical features has been used regularly to identify or verify authorship of documents.³⁵ In fact, some scholars claim authors can be identified based on their use of function words alone (e.g., *then*, *why*, *the*, *if*, *of*, *but*, *have*, etc.).³⁶ Others have successfully verified or ruled out authorship on writing elements as simple as cross-textual comparisons of style markers such as variant forms of punctuation and spelling.³⁷ Scholars of the Voynich Manuscript were able to eliminate Roger Bacon as a possible author because no trace of an English wordprint emerged in their analysis.³⁸

An aspect of wordprints that has not been examined sufficiently in author attribution research is whether authors use some specific sounds (phonemes) more than others — consciously or subconsciously — when selecting or inventing names. Some research suggests they might do this and that their patterns may create a “sound print” or phonoprint.³⁹ This constitutes a fresh and unusual path of research that may merit more examination. Traditionally, words have been seen as the smallest building blocks over which authors have some freedom to choose. This new line

33. Jack Grieve, “Quantitative Authorship Attribution: An Evaluation of Techniques,” *Literary and Linguistic Computing* 22, no. 3 (2007): 251–70; see also John L. Hilton, “On Verifying Wordprint Studies: Book of Mormon Authorship,” *BYU Studies* 30, no. 3 (1990): 89–108; see also Andrew Q. Morton, *Literary Detection: How to Prove Authorship and Fraud in Literature and Documents* (New York: Scribner, 1978).

34. D. James Croft, “Book of Mormon ‘Wordprints’ Reexamined,” *Sunstone* 6, no. 2 (March 1981): 15–22.

35. David I. Holmes, “Authorship Attribution,” *Computers and the Humanities* 28, no. 2 (April 1994): 87–106; see also Farkhund Iqbal, et al., “E-mail Verification of Forensic Investigation,” (25th ACM SIGAPP Symposium on Applied Computing Sierre, Switzerland: ACM Press, 2010), 1591–98.

36. Antonio Miranda-Garcia and Javier Calle-Martin, “Function Words in Authorship Attribution Studies,” *Literacy and Linguistic Computing* 22 (March 2006): 49–66.

37. Ben Zimmer, “Decoding Your E-mail Personality,” *New York Times*, July 23, 2011, <http://www.nytimes.com/2011/07/24/opinion/sunday/24gray.html>.

38. René Zandbergen, “History of research of the Voynich MS,” *Voynich Manuscript* (website), last updated March 9, 2018, <http://www.voynich.nu/solvers.html>.

39. Brad Wilcox, et al., “Identifying Authors by Phonoprints in Their Characters’ Names: An Exploratory Study,” 104–25.

of research expands the fundamental unit of text into phonemes and proposes the possibility that we could produce a phonoprint that would differ from author to author. Despite that authors have fewer sounds with which to create words than they have words with which to create prose and poetry, there is some evidence that authors favor certain sounds over others when choosing or inventing names.⁴⁰ We recognize that much more research will need to be completed to establish a baseline with which valid and reliable comparisons can be made. Many works of fiction by a variety of authors will need to be examined. Nevertheless, this exploratory study was completed to see if further research might be justified.

Tolkien's Character Names

As Tolkien, a professor of Anglo-Saxon at Oxford, created languages based on some characteristics of natural languages, he deliberately used different sound systems for each of them, and he particularly enjoyed the names that evolved from these systems. He commented during a BBC radio interview that a “good name” gave him “great pleasure.” Although Tolkien claimed his names came from invented or ancient languages, sometimes he selected names already existing in Icelandic poems like *Voluspa* and *Gylfaginning*. For example, of the 13 dwarves’ names in Thorin’s company in *The Hobbit*, 12 come right out of *Voluspa*. Tolkien simply used the traditional Anglicization of the names. Other names are recognizable surnames in Great Britain such as Meriadoc and Faldor.

Tolkien once said that he sometimes started with a name: “Give me a name and it produces a story, not the other way about normally.”⁴¹ Sometimes he claimed his character names followed the patterns of invented languages, including phonotactics, and of the cultures he created for them. Other times he used names found in mythic poetry or his own experience.

Whatever the source of Tolkien’s names, this study analyzed character names from five different languages groups selected or created by Tolkien (elf, man, dwarf, hobbit, other). As few surnames or titles appear in the text, only first names were included. Names given to two or more characters were used only once. Of the 197 names found in

40. See Sharon Black, et al., “Absence of ‘Joseph Smith’ in the Book of Mormon: Lack of the Name Letter Effect in Nephite, Lamanite, and Jaredite Names,” *Religious Educator* 17, no. 2 (2016): 37–55; see also Brad Wilcox, et al., “Identifying Authors by Phonoprints in Their Characters’ Names: An Exploratory Study,” 104–25.

41. J.R.R. Tolkien, interview by Dennis Gerrold, *Now Read On*, BBC, January 1971, <https://www.realmofhistory.com/2017/10/28/rare-extended-edition-tolkien-bbc-interview/>.

Tolkien's writings, 14 were discarded because they were names of beings for whom there were only a few representatives (dogs, ravens, goblins, etc.). Therefore, 183 names were used in the final analysis.⁴²

Book of Mormon Names

The Book of Mormon includes 337 proper names and 21 gentilics (analogous forms), with 188 of them found in no other source. Joseph Smith purported that the large number of Book of Mormon names represent a diversity of cultures in ancient America (e.g., Jaredites, Nephites, Mulekites, Lamanites) and thus the names were derived from the language backgrounds of these cultures, which included Egyptian, Hebrew, and other Semitic languages. (Joseph Smith had no knowledge of or experience with any of them at the time the Book of Mormon was produced, although he studied Hebrew later in his life.) Of the 337 proper names in the book of Mormon, 149 are found in the Bible as well (e.g., Samuel, Isaiah, Gideon, Benjamin, Aaron, Noah, Shem, Timothy, and Jacob) and thus were excluded from this study.⁴³ When place names were also excluded, 162 unique names remain as those of people. Of these, 32 could not be clearly classified by culture, so they were not used in this study. This elimination left 130 single names without ranks or titles: "Typical of the ancient Semitic languages from which the Nephite record is [said to have been] derived, the Book of Mormon does not use surnames or attach modern titles to its names such as ... Professor, Reverend, Count or Earl."⁴⁴

Of the unique names in the Book of Mormon, 41 are mentioned only once. In contrast, the most prominent names are given often, some of them assigned to multiple characters — particularly descendants of the first recorded character with that name (e.g., Nephi, Helaman, Laman, Moroni, and Zoram). Nephi is mentioned 77 times, the unique name

42. "Characters," One Ring to Rule Them All: The Lord of the Rings Wiki, *Fandom*, last modified September 1, 2018, <http://lotr.wikia.com/wiki/Category:Characters>. See also *The Encyclopedia of ARDA: An Interactive Guide to the Works of J.R.R. Tolkien* (website), Glyphweb, accessed September 1, 2018, <http://www.glyphweb.com/arda/>.

43. Paul Y. Hoskisson, "An Introduction to the Relevance of and a Methodology or a Study of the Proper Names of the Book of Mormon," in *By Study and Also by Faith*, ed. John Lundquist and Shirley Ricks (Provo, UT: FARMS, 1990), 2:126–35.

44. Donald W. Parry, "The Book of Mormon: Integrity and Internal Consistency," in *Expressions of Faith: Testimonies of Latter-day Saint Scholars*, ed. Susan Easton Black (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 1996), 211, <https://publications.mi.byu.edu/fullscreen/?pub=1127&index=22>.

represented most frequently. Ammon appears in 51 references, and Moroni is mentioned 44 times.⁴⁵ Name pronunciations and spellings in this study were consistent with Skousen's work with the original manuscript.⁴⁶ Table 1 presents characteristics of names in the four Book of Mormon groups and the five Tolkien groups including the longest and shortest names in each group.

Table 1. Characteristics of the Names:
the Four Book of Mormon Groups and the Five Tolkien Groups.

Name Group	Number	Longest Name(s)	Shortest Name(s)
Book of Mormon Names	130		
Jaredite	34	Coriantumr (10 phonemes)	Ahah, Com, Emer, Ether, Kib, Kim, Kish, Lib, Omer, Shez, Shiz (3 phonemes)
Nephite	82	Kumenonhi (10)	Aha, Ammah, Gid (3)
Mulekite	6	Zarahemla (9)	Hem (3)
Lamanite	8	Zarahemnah, Zemnariyah (9)	Laman (5)
Tolkien names	183		
Dwarf	23	Azaghal, Dwalin, Faldor (6)	Oin (2)
Elf	47	Celebrimbor (11)	Osse (2)
Hobbit	18	Bandobras (10)	Bob (3)
Man	74	Bladothin, Ghan-Buri-Ghan (9)	Bill, Bor, Tom (3)
Other	21	Bregalad, Shadowfax, Skinbark (8)	Arod, Arroch, Azag (4)

45. It would be interesting to do a statistical study on the prevalence distribution of names within the text to see the probabilistic distribution they follow and how that compares to the probabilistic distribution found within fiction and records of authentic names, but this was not done at this time.

46. Royal Skousen, *The Book of Mormon: The Earliest Text* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2009).

Methods and Results

Given the exploratory nature of this study, we performed only two analyses to compare these two name sources in both consistency and variety of names. We included phonotactic probabilities and identification by language recognition software.

Phonotactic Probabilities

Our first analysis examined 313 names, 183 from Tolkien and 130 from the Book of Mormon, to determine how much the five groups of Tolkien names differed from one another in their phonotactic probabilities in comparison with the four groups of Book of Mormon names. The phonotactic probability calculator developed by Vitevitch and Luce, which is available online, provides probabilities by comparing the phonemes in each ordinal position of a given word to the standard American English frequencies.

Klattese, a computer-readable transcription method developed by Dennis Klatt, was used to enter each name phonemically into the calculator.

We examined individual phonemes because some vowel sounds in English, /i/ and /ī/ for example, are more common than diphthongs such as /ai/ or /oi/. Similarly, the consonant sounds /l/, /t/, /k/, and /n/ are more common than /j/ or /w/. We also looked at sequences of phonemes (bifones). The calculator gives probabilities of co-occurrence of phonemes: how frequently two given phonemes occur next to one another. For example, /bi/ occurs less frequently in standard American English than /br/.

In addition to phonemes and bifones, we examined overall word probabilities, which are also provided by the calculator. We emphasize that the phonotactic probability of an entire name doesn't reflect how often the name is used but how English-like it is. For example, regardless of how often the names Bilbo and Frodo appear in Tolkien's works, the average phonotactic probability of Frodo is lower (.0433) than that of Bilbo (.0518). We also emphasize that the purpose of the study was not to determine how English-like these names were. Rather, the phonotactic probabilities were used as a way to make quantitative comparisons between the names and examine the differences.

A nested two-way MANOVA was used to examine the overall difference between the two name sources, which was not significant, and also the differences among the name groups within each source, which were significant almost entirely due to differences in mean word length.

Dwarf names are shorter than other Tolkien names, and Jaredite names are shorter than other Book of Mormon names.

There were notable differences among the groups in their variety of name lengths, phoneme probabilities, and bifone probabilities. The Book of Mormon name groups have much greater in-group divergence than Tolkien names, which are more homogeneous. In this study we examined the nine name groups and differences are apparent between Tolkien names and Book of Mormon names — especially Jaredite names — which would be expected when comparing any two distinct sources.

The within-source comparisons, the language groups within each book, reveal additional differences between the texts. Although Tolkien claimed his character names were primarily based on different languages — real or invented — the phonotactic probabilities did not differ significantly. In the within-source comparisons among the five Tolkien languages, only one of the 10 language group comparisons (10%) is statistically significant (man versus elf). Among the four Book of Mormon name groups, four of the six variance ratios (67%) were significant (Nephite versus Jaredite; Mulekite versus Jaredite, Lamanite versus Jaredite, and Lamanite versus Nephite).

Results, shown in Table 2, present the averages of overall name probabilities of phonemes and bifones for the Book of Mormon and for Tolkien as well as the average word lengths for each.

Table 2. Average Phoneme and Bifone Probabilities and Word Lengths of the Names in the Four Book of Mormon Groups Compared to the Names in the Five Tolkien Groups.

Name Group	Average Phoneme Probabilities	Range of Phoneme Probabilities	Average Bifone Probabilities	Range of Bifone Probabilities	Average Word Length
Book of Mormon Names					
Jaredite	0.0426	Ether (.0050) to Kim (.0794)	0.0037	Ahah (.0000) to Moron (.0146)	5.059
Nephite	0.0435	Aha (.0082) to Corianton (.0731)	0.0034	Aha (.0000) to Manti (.0103)	6.28

Name Group	Average Phoneme Probabilities	Range of Phoneme Probabilities	Average Bifone Probabilities	Range of Bifone Probabilities	Average Word Length
Mulekite	0.0371	Muloch (.02764) to Hem (.0539)	0.0023	Muloch (.0005) to Hem (.0044)	5.667
Lamanite	0.0405	Tubaloth (.0334) to Laman (.0540).	0.0024	Zemnariah (.0014) to Antiomno (.0031)	7.125
Tolkien Names					
Dwarf	0.046	Azaghal (.0174) to Balin (.0618)	0.0038	Oin (.0001) to Nori (.0094)	4.348
Elf	0.044	Osse (.0122) to Sauron (.0792)	0.0032	Ingwe (.0004) to Indis (.0126)	6.191
Hobbit	0.0415	Angbor (.0203) to Peregrin (.0654)	0.003	Bungo (.0010) to Barliman (.0060)	6.222
Man	0.0429	Olwe (.0184) to Bill (.0737)	0.0036	Olwe (.0003) to Saruman (.0101)	6.203
Other	0.0381	Azag (.0098) to Felarof (.0566)	0.0024	Azag (.0002) to Wandlimb (.0052)	6.095

The between-source comparisons and the within-source comparisons for bifones showed a similar pattern to the phonemes, but the contrast between the Tolkien name groups and the Book of Mormon name groups was not as strong.

Language Recognition Software

The second analysis utilized language identification software. The first analyses focused on word parts — sounds and sound combinations. In this examination we looked at words as whole units, using IBM name recognition software to identify which languages seemed to be indicated

by each of the names. The classifier algorithm analyzes the spelling patterns in the names but also checks to see how closely they match IBM's archive of almost 800 million names. The software identification is based on modern languages, which are not relevant for this study since many of Tolkien's names are supposedly based on ancient languages and Book of Mormon believers claim that its names are also based on ancient languages. However, the software provides a "generic" response when a specific name shows no match with any known language.

Figure 1 gives a combined tabular and bar graph comparison of the number of generic and non-generic names for each name group, with their relative percentages. In Tolkien's works the highest percentage of generic names was 39.1% (Dwarfs), and the lowest percentage of generic names was 27.8% (Hobbits), a difference of 11.3%. In the Book of Mormon, the highest percentage of generic names was 50.0% (Mulekites), and the lowest was 20.0% (Jaredites), a difference of 30%. The chi square value for the Book of Mormon names was 5.189 with 3 degrees of freedom, and the chi square value for the Tolkien names was 0.850 with 4 degrees of freedom. Thus the Book of Mormon name groups were significantly more diverse than Tolkien's.

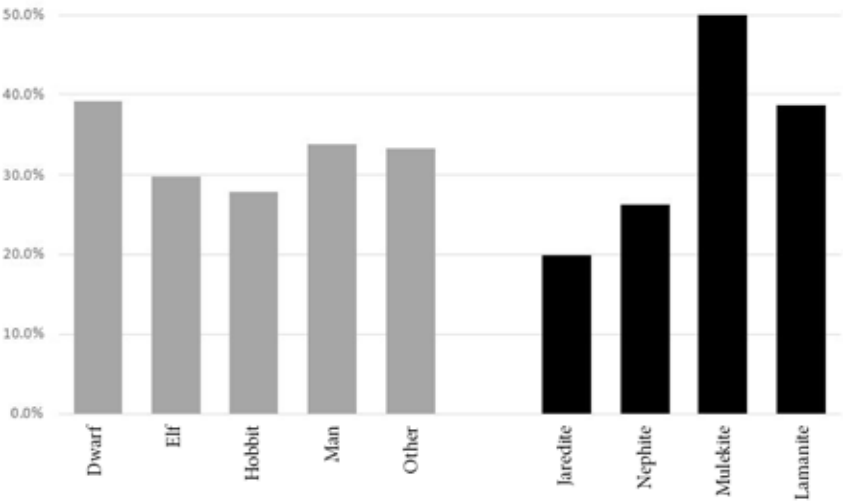
Discussion

Results suggest that Tolkien was unable to entirely escape his phonoprint when selecting or creating character names, even though he claimed he based them on or found them within distinct languages. The two analyses showed little differentiation involving his five major naming groups. A possible phonoprint of sorts seems to have surfaced in his names regardless of the language groups in which he placed them. This is consistent with the results of earlier research on Tolkien's possible phonoprint⁴⁷ and similar to the results from wordprint studies involving other authors of diverse characters such as Mark Twain. Even when Twain intentionally tried to create words (names) to represent different worlds, he was unable to change his own free-flow noncontextual word patterns successfully enough to simulate wordprints representing other peoples or cultures.⁴⁸

47. Wendy Baker, et al., "Naming Practices in J. R. R. Tolkien's Invented Languages," *Journal of Literary Onomastics* 3, no. 1 (July 9, 2014): 5–23.

48. See John L. Hilton, "On Verifying Wordprint Studies: Book of Mormon Authorship," in *Book of Mormon Authorship Revisited: The Evidence for Ancient Origins*, ed. Noel B. Reynolds (Provo, UT: FARMS, 1997), 227–28.

Figure 1. Bargraphs with Accompanying Frequency Tables Comparing the Percent of Generic Names for the Five Groups of Tolkien Names and the Four Groups of Book of Mormon Names.



Five Tolkien Name Groups				Four Book of Mormon Name Groups			
	Generic	Not Generic	Percent Generic		Generic	Not Generic	Percent Generic
Dwarf	9	14	39.1%	Jaredite	13	52	20.0%
Elf	14	33	29.8%	Nephite	39	110	26.2%
Hobbit	5	13	27.8%	Mulekite	3	3	50.0%
Man	25	49	33.8%	Lamanite	12	19	38.7%
Other	7	14	33.3%				

In contrast, in Book of Mormon names, a single author’s phonoprint does not emerge. Lamanite, Nephite, Mulekite, and Jaredite names have varied by group in the way one would expect names from different cultures to vary when looking at sounds within names and names as whole units. If the Book of Mormon names were created by an individual, they were created by a very different process or based on languages more different from each other and consistent within themselves than those created by Tolkien.

This article is not the first time aspects of Tolkien’s work have been compared to the Book of Mormon. Noel B. Reynolds considered the geography of the two sources and asked if the Book of Mormon describes “real places” or “fantasy geographies and civilizations such as Tolkien’s Middle Earth.” He then wrote of several places in the Book of Mormon

that can be positively identified in the middle east, explaining how they are described with an accuracy and detail that would have been beyond Joseph Smith's knowledge base.⁴⁹ Similarly, Randal A. Wright has asked, "If Tolkien could write *Lord of the Rings*, then why couldn't Joseph Smith write the Book of Mormon?"⁵⁰ He then answered his own question by detailing the many years that Tolkien spent writing his book compared to the relatively short time in which Joseph Smith produced the Book of Mormon. He also compared Tolkien's maturity and advanced education to Smith's youth and lack of formal education. Although the comparison between Tolkien's works and the Book of Mormon is not original, this study is the first in-depth comparison of the names found in these two sources.

Hugh Nibley demonstrated differences between Jaredite names in the Book of Mormon and other names that seem to have "Hebrew and Egyptian roots." He wrote, "the Jaredites and Nephites spoke entirely different languages, and even a cursory search will show that Jaredite proper names have a peculiar ring of their own."⁵¹ Although this study did not examine possible connections with ancient languages, it did reveal that Jaredite names are not the only group with a "ring of their own"; names from other Book of Mormon cultures have this as well. If Joseph Smith authored the book, he created phonetically independent name groups — something which Tolkien apparently was unable to do.

As linguistically talented as Tolkien was, he was not able to use different sounds and whole name units consistently according to the different invented languages from which they were derived (i.e., Quenya, Sindarin, Westron, etc.)⁵² — even though he was the creator of these languages. Consciously or subconsciously, it appears Tolkien could not escape his own natural leanings toward some phonemes over others as he invented or selected names. If Joseph Smith authored the

49. Noel B. Reynolds, "Locating the Book of Mormon Geographically and Culturally," in *Book of Mormon Authorship Revisited: The Evidence for Ancient Origins*, 375.

50. Randal A. Wright, *The Book of Mormon Miracle: 25 Reasons to Believe* (Springville, UT: Cedar Fort, 2014), 143.

51. Hugh W. Nibley, *Lehi in the Desert; The World of the Jaredites; There Were Jaredites* (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book; Provo, UT: FARMS, 1988), 242.

52. Baker, et al., "Naming Practices in J. R. R. Tolkien's Invented Languages," 5–23. This study identified Tolkien's possible phonoprint as being comprised mostly of these sounds (/b/, /r/, /n/, /l/, /a/, /æ/, /ɛ/) and the onsets /br/, /gr/, /gl/, and /r/ and the codas /n/, /m/, /l/, /r/, /nt/, and /rn/. Although not all the names he selected or invented followed this pattern, a surprisingly large number do, despite his conscious effort to select or invent languages that did not resemble each other.

Book of Mormon, he invented an incredible number of unique names without leaving evidence of a possible phonoprint — a flexibility that Tolkien, despite his incredible repertoire of sounds and symbols, was not able to accomplish.

Authentic names emerge from a variety of geographic, cultural, and ethnic origins, particularly within nations. Thus they show greater variance than fictional names created or selected by a single author. Although much more research needs to be done to establish the validity and reliability of using phonoprints for author identification, this exploratory study may open a door to a fresh line of research that could merit further investigation.

Conclusion: Phonics, Structure, and Meaning

Hugh Nibley wrote, “The evidence that will prove or disprove the Book of Mormon does not exist.”⁵³ Some questions cannot be answered accurately or reliably by tests and analyses. An international variety of linguists, cryptographers, botanists, physicists, and historians have been trying for 600 years to reason out explanations behind the Voynich Manuscript, sometimes referred to as the most mysterious book in the world.⁵⁴ Theories of its origin and authorship range from one of the lost tribes of Israel to the Aztecs⁵⁵, to a group of medieval scholars in an area near Europe — perhaps in Iran or Turkey.⁵⁶

Stephen Bax, a British professor of applied linguistics, used the methods of historic decoders of Egyptian hieroglyphics, who began with proper names: They searched for the known names of pharaohs to put symbols against sounds. Since Bax did not know the culture or geography affecting the manuscript, he began with words that by their relationship to the drawings seemed to name them — including seven plants and a constellation that he could identify. From names he moved to logically connected linguistic and semantic principles. He was eventually able to work out 10 words of text and sounds for

53. Hugh W. Nibley, *Since Cumorah* (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 1987), xiv.

54. Rich McCormick, “Decrypting the Most Mysterious Book in the World,” *The Verge*, February 28, 2014, <http://www.theverge.com/2014/2/28/5453596/voynich-manuscript>.

55. “600 Year Old Mystery Manuscript Decoded by University of Bedfordshire Professor,” University of Bedfordshire (website), February 14, 2014, <https://www.beds.ac.uk/news/2014/february/600-year-old-mystery-manuscript-decoded-by-university-of-bedfordshire-professor>.

56. McCormick, “Decrypting the Most Mysterious Book in the World”.

13 symbols.⁵⁷ Worldwide headlines hailed Bax as having decoded the manuscript — but many of us would not accept 10 words and 13 sounds as manuscript translation. Fortunately, our understanding of the Book of Mormon is based on a complete translation made possible by the gift and power of God.

Elaborate technological-statistical analyses have discerned linguistic, semantic, and cultural patterns as well as some author factors in the Voynich Manuscript, but they haven't come together into a complete explanation that will reveal either the language or meaning of this book. Similarly, analysis of linguistic, geographic, and cultural factors in the Book of Mormon, including phonemic patterns in its unique names, cannot prove that it is or is not a translation of an ancient record. Nevertheless, results of such investigations are interesting and can be meaningful to those who value the book.

Today's technological tools enable us to answer many questions and solve many mysteries. But the truthfulness of the Book of Mormon must be conveyed with experiences of faith. For some, the Book of Mormon rivals the Voynich Manuscript as the most mysterious book in the world, but the Voynich Manuscript is unreadable. The Book of Mormon is not. Its meaning has been accessible for many years and has been life-changing for millions of Latter-day Saints throughout the world.

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57. "600 Year Old Mystery Manuscript Decoded by University of Bedfordshire Professor"; McCormick, "Decrypting the Most Mysterious Book in the World."

early publications are primarily in the area of the psychology of language and psychoacoustics but more recently in the application of multivariate visualization and quantitative methods to a variety of research areas including names in the Book of Mormon. He is the author of several books, over a hundred other published works, and four commercially marketed graphical data presentation systems, one of which, Bibliostat, is in use by about two-thirds of the libraries in America.

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ET INCARNATUS EST: THE IMPERATIVE FOR BOOK OF MORMON HISTORICITY

Stephen O. Smoot

Abstract: *Some have come to insist that the Book of Mormon should be read as inspired fiction, which is to say that readers, including Latter-day Saints, should abandon any belief in the Book of Mormon as an authentic ancient text and instead should see it as an inspired frontier novel written by Joseph Smith that may act as scripture for those who follow his teachings. This paper provides reasoning to reject this proposition as not only logically incoherent but also theologically impotent.¹ It raises the objection that this position fundamentally undercuts the credibility of Joseph Smith. The Prophet's direct claims concerning the coming forth of the Book of Mormon as well as how the Book of Mormon presents itself to the world do not easily permit any leeway for a "middle ground" on this matter.*

The Book of Mormon must be read as an ancient,
not as a modern book. Its mission, as described by
the book itself, depends in great measure for
its efficacy on its genuine antiquity.
—Hugh Nibley

The Book of Mormon claims to be “an abridgment of the record of the people of Nephi, and also of the Lamanites ... [and] an abridgment taken from the Book of Ether” that was “written by way of commandment, and also by the spirit of prophecy and of revelation” (Book of Mormon Title Page). This has proven to be somewhat awkward for religious scholars

1. An earlier version of this paper appeared as Stephen O. Smoot, “The Imperative for a Historical Book of Mormon”, The Interpreter Foundation, Oct 20, 2013, <https://interpreterfoundation.org/the-imperative-for-a-historical-book-of-mormon/>.

who are comfortable in safely doting over neglected or long-forgotten religious texts that are considered little more than academic curiosities. When confronted with the book's claims to historicity, non-Latter-day Saint scholars are often compelled either to stake out a position on such or politely refrain by "bracketing" the question altogether, focusing on less volatile matters (such as reception history). Indeed, the touchy manner in which Book of Mormon historicity is often broached in contemporary academia calls to mind the quip once made by Jacob Neusner: "Religious experience in the third century is fascinating. Religious experience in the twentieth century is frightening or absurd."²

The Book of Mormon's origins being wrapped up with claims of angels and gold plates and seer stones and ancient Israelites sailing to the New World exacerbates an already uncomfortable situation for those who "want to salvage Joseph Smith's prophetic role ... by avoiding what they see as the embarrassing ramifications of his naked prose or the fragility of the book's historical claims." But why precisely have historians attempting secular approaches to Latter-day Saint history been so "hard-pressed to devise nonliteral readings" of the Book of Mormon? Whence this discomfort? The answer is obvious: "Joseph's prophetic writings [are] grounded in artifactual reality, not the world of psychic meanderings. It is hard to allegorize — and profoundly presumptuous to edit down — a sacred record that purports to be a transcription of tangible records hand-delivered by an angel."³

Even scholars who bracket Book of Mormon historicity, such as Grant Hardy in his de-historicized literary analysis of the text, have acknowledged this.

Joseph and his associates insisted from the beginning that the Book of Mormon was a translation from an authentic ancient document written in "Reformed Egyptian" on metal plates and buried by the last ancient author about AD 421. ... The strong historical assertions of the book seem to allow

2. Jacob Neusner, "Religious Studies: The Next Location," *Bulletin of the Council on the Study of Religion* 8, no. 5 (December 1977): 117.

3. Terryl Givens, *By the Hand of Mormon: The American Scripture that Launched a New World Religion* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2002), 80. Givens has reiterated this point elsewhere: "In a particularly pronounced way, the meaning and value of the Book of Mormon as a religious text are tied to a specific set of historical claims." Terryl Givens, foreword to *Mormon's Codex: An Ancient American Book*, by John L. Sorenson (Provo, UT: Neal A. Maxwell Institute for Religious Scholarship, 2013), xiv.

for only three possible origins: as a miraculously translated historical document, as a fraud (perhaps a pious one) written by Joseph Smith, or as a delusion (perhaps sincerely believed) that originated in Smith's subconscious.⁴

An honest reckoning of the claims made by Joseph Smith, to say nothing of the Book of Mormon itself, leads to an inescapable conclusion which I shall argue for in the following pages of this article: the historicity of the Book of Mormon is an imperative for the legitimacy of Mormonism as a theological, moral, and metaphysical system. The book not only must be chiefly read as a sacred history of God's dealings with a remnant of the house of Israel in ancient America but must also actually be such a history for it to carry any meaningful theological and moral legitimacy.

The Inspired Fiction Theory for the Book of Mormon

In response to what they see as overwhelming evidence against the Book of Mormon's historical authenticity, but in a wish to maintain that the book might still be "inspired" scripture in some sense, some have originated a theory that the Book of Mormon may not be historical yet somehow revelatory or inspired and therefore scriptural. For the sake of convenience, I call this the Inspired Fiction Theory (IFT) for the Book of Mormon.

Perhaps the chief architect of the IFT is Anthony A. Hutchinson, who in the early 1990s made, as far as I can tell, the first serious case for such.⁵ Hutchinson begins his articulation of the theory thus:

Members of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints should confess in faith that the Book of Mormon is the word of God but also abandon claims that it is a historical record of the ancient peoples of the Americas. We should accept that it is a work of scripture inspired by God in the same way that the Bible is inspired, but one that has as its human author Joseph Smith, Jr.⁶

For Hutchinson, there can be no question that the Book of Mormon is not a genuine historical text. He dismisses the work of Hugh Nibley, John Sorenson, and other Latter-day Saint scholars who have argued

4. Grant Hardy, *Understanding the Book of Mormon: A Reader's Guide* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2010), 6.

5. See Anthony A. Hutchinson, "The Word of God Is Enough: The Book of Mormon as Nineteenth-Century Scripture," in *New Approaches to the Book of Mormon: Explorations in Critical Methodology*, ed. Brent Lee Metcalfe (Salt Lake City: Signature Books, 1993), 1–19.

6. *Ibid.*, 1.

for the ancient authenticity of the Book of Mormon, lamenting that he cannot see any redeeming argument for historicity.⁷ Hutchinson further voices suspicion concerning the trustworthiness of the accounts provided by Joseph Smith and his closest associates (such as the Three and Eight Witnesses) for the coming forth of the Book of Mormon.⁸ Given the underwhelming evidence for Book of Mormon's antiquity and the "visionary character"⁹ of Joseph Smith's claims, Hutchinson insists that there were no real Nephites, no golden plates, and no angel Moroni outside of the fruitful imagination of the impressionable Palmyra seer.

But despite his insistence on the Book of Mormon's unhistorical nature, Hutchinson does not feel it necessary to totally abandon the book's spiritual power. "I believe the Book of Mormon to be the word of God because I am moved by its story and the story of its author, Joseph Smith the prophet, and the story of people brought together by its coming forth."¹⁰ All that is therefore needed to accept the Book of Mormon as scripture, Hutchinson believes, is to confess faith in a compelling story, regardless of whether that story actually ever happened.

Hutchinson is by no means alone in promulgating the IFT. When he is not busy casting doubt on the historical existence of Jesus of Nazareth,¹¹ Robert M. Price asks us to acknowledge Joseph Smith as the "inspired author" of the Book of Mormon.¹² "If Joseph Smith is to be considered not the excavator and translator but the author of the Book of Mormon," Price reasons, "the situation is far removed from that of some crude hoax or practical joke."¹³ But the non-historicity of the Book of Mormon apparently doesn't matter to Price, who feels it entirely proper to count the Book of Mormon as "scriptural" and Joseph Smith as "inspired" for no other reason than the noble intentions behind the grand scheme.

Joseph Smith, disillusioned by the strife and confusion of rival Christian sects, each of which claimed the authority of the Bible for its distinctive teachings, finally decided to cut the Gordian Knot of

7. Ibid., 8–16.

8. Ibid., 3–7.

9. Ibid., 7.

10. Ibid., 7.

11. Price is a well-known and outspoken "Jesus Mythicist" who denies the historical existence of Jesus.

12. Robert M. Price, "Joseph Smith: Inspired Author of the Book of Mormon," in *American Apocrypha: Essays on the Book of Mormon*, ed. Dan Vogel and Brent Lee Metcalfe (Salt Lake City: Signature Books, 2002), 321–66.

13. Ibid., 326.

Bible exegesis by creating a new scripture that would undercut the debating of the denominations and render them superfluous.¹⁴

Far from the conniving charlatan of the anti-Mormon polemics of yore, Joseph Smith, in Price's revisioning, was acting out of pure intentions. He meant well in fabricating new scripture, and, as such, can only be lauded. What's more, that Joseph Smith took the Bible as his prime source for fabricating new scripture only further shows his holy designs:

Smith's apparent, fundamental source material still survives: the Bible. Like the Gospel writers, ... Joseph Smith seems to have created new holy fictions by running the old ones through the shredder and reassembling the shreds in wholly new combinations. His method appears to be precisely that of the old rabbis and of the New Testament evangelists. So, not only did Smith do the same sort of thing biblical writers themselves did to produce new Bible text, he even did it the same way.¹⁵

Price feels no constraint in rhapsodizing on the Book of Mormon as inspired pseudepigrapha and Joseph Smith as its inspired author. This, Price explains, frees us from the discomfiture inherent in an obviously unhistorical Book of Mormon being held up as historical by decades of dogma in the The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints and opens up new vistas of scriptural exploration. Now the Book of Mormon can be read the way it should have been all along: as nonliteral, unhistorical, and fictitious. Were it not for the fact that he essentially calls Joseph Smith a creative liar, Latter-day Saints might well be pleased to see Price so favorably comparing their prophet to the (equally mendacious) authors of the Bible!

Then there is Scott Dunn, who makes the case for the Book of Mormon as a specimen of "automatic writing."¹⁶ Automatic writing is the "claimed psychic ability allowing a person to produce written words without consciously writing. The words purportedly arise from a subconscious, spiritual, or supernatural force."¹⁷ In this scenario, we are to understand that Joseph Smith was a psychic savant who channeled the

14. Ibid., 333.

15. Ibid., 347.

16. Scott C. Dunn, "Automaticity and the Book of Mormon," in *American Apocrypha: Essays on the Book of Mormon*, ed. Dan Vogel and Brent Lee Metcalfe (Salt Lake City: Signature Books, 2002), 17–46.

17. Wikipedia, s.v. "Automatic writing," last modified September 15, 2018, 03:27, https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Automatic_writing.

text of the Book of Mormon from an “intelligence” outside of himself.¹⁸ Rather than scandalize Latter-day Saints, Dunn muses on the possibility that “God use[s] automatic writing to help his prophets produce latter-day scripture.”¹⁹ If we view the Book of Mormon as the offspring of Joseph Smith’s (godly?) psychosis, “wholly or partially the result of [his] psychological processes,”²⁰ we can safely put it next to other impactful books that were likewise purportedly the result of automatic dictation, including *A Course in Miracles* by Helen Cohn Schucman, *Jane Eyre* by Charlotte Brontë, and *Jerusalem* by William Blake.

But what, exactly, leads Dunn to conclude that the Book of Mormon is the product of automatic writing? Nothing less than a commanding “number of parallels ... between Joseph Smith’s production of scripture and instances of automatic writing.”²¹ These parallels include

multiple authorship, use of archaic language, accounts of bygone historical figures, accurate descriptions of times and places apparently unfamiliar to the writer, narratives with well-developed characters and plot, accounts of various ministries of Jesus Christ, poetics, occasionally impressive literary quality, doctrinal, theological, and cosmological discussions, and even discourses by deity.²²

As if that weren’t enough to clinch the matter, Dunn draws attention to the dubious manner in which Joseph Smith created the Book of Mormon. Peering into a “crystal or stone,”²³ Joseph effortlessly dictated page after page of text at a breathtakingly fast pace without referencing notes or making corrections. This process, Dunn avows, is unmistakably characteristic of automatic writing. “Automatic writing ... provides a simple explanation of these circumstances,”²⁴ he insists. As with Hutchinson and Price, Dunn believes that his iteration of the IFT renders moot the question of the Book of Mormon’s contested origins, inasmuch as automatic writing can account for such things as “Smith’s scriptural productions repeating things he may have heard or overheard in conversation, camp meetings, or other [19th century] settings without any concerted study of the issues,” as well as the argument made by some

18. Dunn, “Automaticity and the Book of Mormon,” 19.

19. *Ibid.*, 36.

20. *Ibid.*

21. *Ibid.*, 26.

22. *Ibid.*, 30.

23. *Ibid.*, 31.

24. *Ibid.*, 34.

“that Smith was too ignorant and uneducated to create a book of such complex construction and profound teachings.”²⁵

In other words, with Dunn’s version of the IFT there is no need to debate whether Joseph pilfered Ethan Smith’s *View of the Hebrews* (a favorite candidate as a source of supposed plagiarism) or had at his disposal a copy of the Bible during the production of the Book of Mormon.²⁶ After all, automatic writing allegedly grants a medium the ability to unconsciously channel previously retained information through “quirk of memory” known as *cryptomnesia*.²⁷ This innocent memory bias would grant Joseph subconscious recall of, say, what he learned during his time scrutinizing the Bible or the holdings of the Manchester village library without turning him into a conscious fraud.

On the flipside, according to Dunn, it is irrelevant for Book of Mormon apologists to argue for the text’s complexity as a way to shore up its credibility, since automatic writing has also produced works that exhibit complexity and marks of antiquity. Dunn observes that “some apologists have claimed that evidence for the Book of Mormon’s ancient character ‘proves’ or validates its doctrinal teachings.” But “such claims,” he continues,

are clearly made in ignorance of automatic texts, many of which evidence historical and philosophical knowledge beyond that of the writer. Since the theologies of these other writings clash with the Book of Mormon and with each other, it is fallacious to suggest a connection between doctrinal claims of a book and the miraculous aspects of its contents.²⁸

As such, Dunn urges, readers need to stop fretting over the historicity of the Book of Mormon, or whether it has nineteenth century or ancient characteristics. What matters is solely the “inspiration” of the book, which, like other works written under similar circumstances, was produced through the marvel of automatic writing. And after all, what more could the faithful ask for than to have their prophet go from being a two-timing huckster to a literary bright like William Blake and Charlotte Brontë!

More recently Ann Taves, a professor of religious studies at UC Santa Barbara, has argued for what she calls the “materialization” of authentic Nephite relics out of a mundane act of fabrication on Joseph Smith’s

25. Ibid., 35.

26. Ibid., 34.

27. Ibid.

28. Ibid., 35.

part.²⁹ Wishing to bridge the seemingly impassible divide between those who dismiss Joseph as a conscious fraud and those who revere him as an inspired prophet,³⁰ Taves attempts to “open up some new options” by “playing with the idea of [the] discovery” of the gold plates not “as a literal recovery” of ancient artifacts but as an act of “skillful seeing.”³¹

In Taves’ formulation, Joseph began as a sincere visionary who materialized his subjective encounters with the divine through an act of pious concoction. “As a highly imaginative individual, prone to visionary experiences,” Taves writes, “Smith may well have believed he saw the plates in his visits to the hill.”³² This sincere religious or metaphysical conviction granted Joseph the conscientious fortitude to create “a representation of the plates” he saw in vision by forging his own set of plates.³³ Rather than engaging in deception, however, Taves believes Joseph faked the plates “in the knowledge that they would become the sacred reality that the Smith family believed them to be.”³⁴ Accordingly, the plates are not a dishonest forgery, but rather comparable to “the way a crucifix represents the crucifixion, an Eastern Orthodox icon is said to manifest the reality of the saint it depicts, the way Eucharistic wafers are thought to be transformed into the literal body of Christ, or the way that Mary ‘created’ Jesus in her womb.”³⁵ In fact, Taves even compares Joseph’s materialization of the plates to the process of the Lord making shining stones for the Brother of Jared in the Book of Mormon (Ether 3).³⁶

29. Ann Taves, “History and the Claims of Revelation: Joseph Smith and the Materialization of the Golden Plates,” *Numen: International Review for the History of Religions* 61, no. 2–3 (2014): 182–207; reprinted in *The Expanded Canon: Perspectives on Mormonism and Sacred Texts*, ed. Blair G. Van Dyke, Brian D. Birch, and Boyd J. Peterson (Salt Lake City: Greg Kofford Books, 2018), 93–119; Taves, *Revelatory Events: Three Case Studies in the Emergence of New Spiritual Paths* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2016), 50–65.

30. “The challenge, however, is not just to explain how [the plates] might have become real for Smith, but how they might have become real for him in some non-delusory sense. This shift in premises forces us to consider a greater range of explanatory possibilities and has the potential to expand our understanding of the way new spiritual paths emerge.” Taves, *Revelatory Events*, 51, emphasis in original.

31. Taves, “History and the Claims of Revelation,” 96–97.

32. *Ibid.*, 103.

33. *Ibid.*, 104.

34. *Ibid.*

35. *Ibid.*, 105.

36. Taves, “History and the Claims of Revelation,” 105–07; *Revelatory Events*, 60–62.

“In comparing the gold plates and the Eucharistic wafer,” Taves hastily clarifies, “I am not making an argument for the reality of ancient plates (or the real presence of Christ) but raising the possibility that when materializing the plates, Smith might have been thinking more like a good Catholic than a good Calvinist. The comparison, in other words, allows us to consider the possibility that Smith viewed something that he had made (metal plates) as a vehicle through which something sacred — the ancient golden plates — could be made (really) present.”³⁷ That may be well and good, but what about those who would insist that Joseph Smith’s sincere belief that he had plates given to him by an angel was merely a manifestation of a psychotic delusion? Taves anticipates this objection by arguing that “strictly speaking, from a psychiatric perspective, we can’t call Smith delusional” because “the distinction between ordinary belief and delusion turns on context, that is, on whether the beliefs make sense within the context of a culture or subculture.”³⁸ The oft-discussed “magic world view”³⁹ of Joseph Smith and his contemporaries affords the Prophet’s claims about angels and seer stones a contextual home that spares him the shameful reproach of being labeled “delusional,” according to Taves.⁴⁰

As such, Taves concludes, the testimony of Joseph Smith and others who affirmed the existence of the plates “should not be taken as testimony to the materiality of *ancient* golden plates but rather as testimony to the witnesses’ ability to see reality in the way Joseph Smith did, that is, as a supernaturally charged reality in which angels produced, transported, and ultimately withdrew a believed-in simulation.”⁴¹ For Taves, then, the experience shared by Joseph Smith and his closest family and friends with the coming forth of the Book of Mormon was not a miraculous recovery of an ancient record or conscious deception, but a process of turning what began as a personal “dream-vision”⁴² of Joseph Smith into a communal experience crafted through a process of materializing a sincerely believed religious artifice.

In a survey of these arguments, the commonalities between these and other renderings of the IFT become clear. First, in each recasting

37. Taves, *Revelatory Events*, 63.

38. Taves, “History and the Claims of Revelation,” 109.

39. D. Michael Quinn, *Early Mormonism and the Magic World View* (Salt Lake City: Signature Books, 1996).

40. Taves, “History and the Claims of Revelation,” 110.

41. Taves, *Revelatory Events*, 65, emphasis in original.

42. *Ibid.*, 55–56.

of this theory, Joseph Smith was never in the possession of ancient Nephite plates, or ancient Nephite Interpreters, or any other ancient Nephite artifacts, for that matter. These were either fabricated to bamboozle Joseph's family and friends or were just imagined altogether (or, in Taves' more charitable formulation, were fabricated and then out of an act of sincere religious conviction metaphysically alchemized into genuine Nephite relics). Second, nothing recorded in the Book of Mormon corresponds to historical reality. Third, the historicity of the Book of Mormon is irrelevant with regard to whether the book is "inspired." Scripture does not need to be historical to be from God, and that includes the Book of Mormon.

The Incoherence of the Inspired Fictionists

No matter how ingenious or sympathetic these attempts to deny the Book of Mormon's historicity and yet maintain its inspiration may be, they simply do not work. The logical flaws in these and other iterations of the IFT are manifold. "For a variety of reasons" which we shall now outline, "such efforts [to read the Book of Mormon as inspired fiction] may be well intentioned, but they are untenable."⁴³

Before anything else, it is necessary to point out that the IFT is problematic in that it begs the question of the Book of Mormon's non-historicity. In other words, proponents of the IFT must first assume that the Book of Mormon is not historical before they can proceed any further. This conclusion, however, is far from foregone and is in fact highly debatable. If the work of Latter-day Saint scholars in the past 50 years has proven anything, it is that a rigorous defense of the Book of Mormon's historicity can be and has been made in such a compelling manner that one must confront this body of scholarship and adequately account for it before one can propose any Inspired Fiction reading.⁴⁴ This is precisely what proponents of the IFT have *not* done. They have not adequately responded to the work of scholars writing on behalf of the Book of Mormon's historicity. With few exceptions, they have

43. Givens, foreword to *Mormon's Codex: An Ancient American Book*, xiv.

44. See Neal Rappleye, "Creating a List of 'Standard Works' on Book of Mormon Authenticity," Studio Et Quoque Fide (blog), October 25, 2013, <http://www.studioetquoquefide.com/2013/10/creating-list-of-standard-works-on-book.html>; Brant Gardner, *Traditions of the Fathers: The Book of Mormon as History* (Salt Lake City: Greg Kofford Books, 2015); John W. Welch et al., eds., *Knowing Why: 137 Evidences that the Book of Mormon is True* (American Fork, UT: Covenant Communications, 2017).

merely assumed or uncritically accepted the conclusion that the Book of Mormon is not historical.

The problems with the IFT's foundational assumptions aside, William Hamblin has succinctly summarized what is perhaps the most fatal logical inconsistency with this system:

1. Joseph Smith claimed to have had possession of golden plates written by the Nephites, and to have been visited by Moroni, a resurrected Nephite.
2. If the Book of Mormon is not an ancient document, there were no Nephites.
3. If there were no Nephites, there were no golden plates written by Nephites; and there was no Nephite named Moroni.
4. If there was no Moroni and no golden plates, then Joseph did not tell the truth when he claimed to possess and translate these nonexistent plates, and to have been visited by a resurrected man.
5. Hence, Joseph was either lying (he knew there were no plates or angelic visitations, but was trying to convince others that there were), or he was insane or deluded (he believed there were golden plates and angelic visitations which in fact did not exist).⁴⁵

The case against the IFT can be elucidated with this simple question, which proponents of such must answer: if the Book of Mormon isn't historical, then was Joseph Smith a deliberate liar when he said he had golden plates, and was visited by an ancient Nephite prophet, or was he delusional? Or was he perhaps a sincere liar, in that he came to believe in his own delusion? To these interrogatories a follow-up question may be asked: why would God choose a liar or a lunatic to bring about the Restoration? As Hamblin puts it,

If [those who read the Book of Mormon as inspired fiction] wish to maintain that the Book of Mormon is not an ancient document, but that Joseph Smith was somehow still a prophet, they must present some cogent explanation for Joseph's wild claims of possessing nonexistent golden plates and being visited by nonexistent angels.⁴⁶

45. William J. Hamblin, "An Apologist for the Critics: Brent Lee Metcalfe's Assumptions and Methodologies," *FARMS Review of Books on the Book of Mormon* 6, no. 1 (1994): 453.

46. Hamblin, "An Apologist for the Critics," 453.

Kent Jackson has made this point even more forcefully: “Relegating the Book of Mormon to inspired parable or morally uplifting allegory presents serious problems of logic.”

The book itself announces its historicity repeatedly. Can it really be true in any sense if it consistently misrepresents its origin? Joseph Smith also was consistent in maintaining that the book describes real events and real people. ... Can these sources be relied on for anything if they unfailingly misrepresent the nature of the “keystone” of the Latter-day Saint faith?⁴⁷

Inconveniently for proponents of the IFT, Joseph Smith’s insistence on the historicity of the Book of Mormon, as well as the reality of his encounter with the angel Moroni and his translation of the plates, was constant throughout his life. To ignore or obfuscate this fact is to wink at a foundational piece of evidence in assessing the nature of the Book of Mormon and Joseph Smith’s truth claims. The well-documented firsthand statements of Joseph Smith describing the coming forth of the Book of Mormon *must* be satisfactorily explained by the proponents of the IFT.⁴⁸

If we grant that Joseph Smith was the author — even the “inspired author” of the Book of Mormon — we must then ask why he would perpetuate falsehoods throughout his life concerning the coming forth and historicity of the Book of Mormon. Why would he keep up the ruse if he knew he was the author and not the prophetic translator of the Book of Mormon? Perhaps Joseph came to believe his own delusions, as some have argued.⁴⁹ But is a deluded though sincere mountebank someone we really wish to follow as a prophet? And should his ruse really be treated

47. Kent P. Jackson, “Joseph Smith and the Historicity of the Book of Mormon,” in *Historicity and the Latter-day Saint Scriptures*, ed. Paul Y. Hoskisson (Provo, UT: Religious Studies Center, Brigham Young University, 2001), 123. Givens agrees with Hamblin and Jackson: “The book’s unambiguous account of its own construction, as well as the historically defined reciprocity between Joseph Smith’s own moral authority as a religious leader and the sacred status of the book inseparably wedded to his claims and career, admits of no simple divorce [between the Book of Mormon’s authenticity and its historicity].” Givens, foreword to *Mormon’s Codex*, xiv.

48. For a collection of Joseph Smith’s statements on the historicity of the Book of Mormon, see Jackson, “Joseph Smith and the Historicity of the Book of Mormon,” 127–33.

49. Fawn M. Brodie, *No Man Knows My History: The Life of Joseph Smith, the Mormon Prophet*, 2nd ed. (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1971); Dan Vogel, *Joseph Smith: The Making of a Prophet* (Salt Lake City: Signature Books, 2004).

as the word of God? After a thorough look at not only the statements of Joseph Smith but also statements in the Doctrine and Covenants and the Book of Mormon itself, Jackson asks some hard questions which those who opt for the IFT routinely neglect:

Can the Book of Mormon indeed be “true,” in *any* sense, if it lies repeatedly, explicitly, and deliberately regarding its own historicity? Can Joseph Smith be viewed with *any* level of credibility if he repeatedly, explicitly, and deliberately lied concerning the historicity of the book? Can we have *any* degree of confidence in what are presented as the words of God in the Doctrine and Covenants if they repeatedly, explicitly, and deliberately lie by asserting the historicity of the Book of Mormon? If the Book of Mormon is not what it claims to be, what possible cause would anyone have to accept *anything* of the work of Joseph Smith and The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints given the consistent assertions that the Book of Mormon is an ancient text that describes ancient events?⁵⁰

Hutchinson attempts to circumvent this problem by insisting that the involvement of seer stones, angels, and visions in Joseph Smith’s narrative preclude any possibility of the gold plates being real.⁵¹ Taves likewise attempts to maneuver around this stumbling block for her thesis by downplaying the physicality or real-worldliness of the experiences of the Book of Mormon witnesses.⁵² But these arguments do not engage what was actually claimed by those involved in the coming forth of the Book of Mormon. For instance, the testimony of the Eight Witnesses is an obstacle that those who wish to banish the Book of Mormon to the purely metaphysical realm must overcome. Although IFT revisionists have tried to dismiss the experience of the Eight Witnesses as nothing more than subjective or visionary, Richard Lloyd Anderson has convincingly thwarted this tactic.⁵³ The experience of the Eight Witnesses complements the more visionary experience of the Three Witnesses and lends credibility to the claim that a physical set of plates “which has the

50. Jackson, “Joseph Smith and the Historicity of the Book of Mormon,” 137–38, emphasis in original.

51. Hutchinson, “The Word of God is Enough,” 6–7.

52. Taves, “History and the Claims of Revelation,” 101–02.

53. Richard Lloyd Anderson, *Investigating the Book of Mormon Witnesses* (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 1981), esp. 123–79; Anderson, “Attempts to Redefine the Experience of the Eight Witnesses,” *Journal of Book of Mormon Studies* 14, no. 1 (2005): 18–31.

appearance of ancient work” actually existed (Testimony of the Eight Witnesses).⁵⁴

Additional deconstruction of Hutchinson’s thesis in particular could be furnished, but for brevity’s sake it is needful here only to mention the work of Louis Midgley, who has provided a sustained critique of Hutchinson’s work.⁵⁵ Midgley’s rebuttal of Hutchinson (as well as his other counter-arguments to the IFT) is substantive, not to be passed over lightly by those who advocate the IFT.⁵⁶

Turning to Price’s contention that Joseph Smith was the inspired author of the Book of Mormon, the question of whether God would inspire a liar is a non-issue for Price, who is an avowed atheist.⁵⁷ Because there is no God, Price’s “inspiration” means anything except actual revelation. Indeed, Price seems to see the inspiration of the Book of Mormon in the same sense that one would see inspiration in the works of Shakespeare or Homer, i.e., nothing more than an excellent literary quality. “We ought to realize,” Price opines, “that for Joseph Smith to be the author of the Book of Mormon, with Moroni and Mormon as narrators, makes moot the old debates over whether Smith was a hoaxer or charlatan.”⁵⁸ By way of comparison, Price asks if Herman Melville and Shakespeare should also be considered hoaxers, because they too

54. See Steven C. Harper, “Evaluating the Book of Mormon Witnesses,” *The Religious Educator* 11, no. 2 (2010): 37–49; Gale Yancey Anderson, “Eleven Witnesses Behold the Plates,” *The Journal of Mormon History* 38, no. 2 (Spring 2012): 145–62; Steven C. Harper, “The Eleven Witnesses,” in *The Coming Forth of the Book of Mormon: A Marvelous Work and a Wonder*, ed. Dennis L. Largey, Andrew H. Hedges, John Hilton III, and Kerry Hull (Salt Lake City and Provo, UT: Deseret Book and Religious Studies Center, Brigham Young University, 2015), 117–32.

55. Louis C. Midgley, “The Current Battle over the Book of Mormon: ‘Is Modernity Itself Somehow Canonical?’” *FARMS Review of Books on the Book of Mormon* 6, no. 1 (1994): 200–54.

56. Louis Midgley, “‘Inspiring’ but Not True: An Added Glimpse of the RLDS Stance on the Book of Mormon,” *Journal of Book of Mormon Studies* 6, no. 2 (1997): 218–28; “‘To Remember and Keep’: On the Book of Mormon as an Ancient Book,” in *The Disciple as Scholar: Essays on Scripture and the Ancient World in Honor of Richard Lloyd Anderson*, ed. Stephen D. Ricks, Donald W. Parry, and Andrew W. Hedges (Provo, UT: Foundation for Ancient Research and Mormon Studies, 2000), 95–137; “No Middle Ground: The Debate over the Authenticity of the Book of Mormon,” in *Historicity and the Latter-day Saint Scriptures*, 149–70.

57. Louis C. Midgley, “Atheist Piety: A Religion of Dogmatic Dubiety,” *Interpreter: A Journal of Mormon Scripture* 1 (2012): 123–30.

58. Robert M. Price, “Prophecy and Palimpsest,” *Dialogue: A Journal of Mormon Thought* 35, no. 3 (2002): 69.

wrote their fictional narratives in first person, introducing new fictional characters in the process.⁵⁹

This argument, however, falls flat as soon as one realizes that Joseph Smith never claimed the Book of Mormon was fiction. He claimed, rather, to have translated by miraculous means an ancient record written on tangible golden plates given to him by an angel, an angel who for good measure was once an ancient prophet and in fact one of the principle authors of the very book! “To my knowledge,” Hamblin quips in response to Price, “Shakespeare never said that the resurrected Hamlet appeared to him in a dream and gave him a prewritten play *Hamlet* on golden plates. Shakespeare also never claimed to have been resurrected and ascended into heaven. Frankly, the two examples are not even slightly analogous.”⁶⁰

To insist on such mercurial definitions of “scripture” and “inspiration” as Price would have us do is to make these crucial concepts almost meaningless. To paraphrase Robert Alter, “[This] concept of [scripture] becomes so elastic that it threatens to lose descriptive value.”⁶¹ Within Latter-day Saint theology, what gives a text “inspiration” and makes it “scripture” is not its literary merit but when the text is created under the influence of the Holy Ghost (see Doctrine and Covenants 68:4). But Price does not believe the Holy Ghost is real. He may call any work of literary excellence “scripture” if he likes, but for him to call the Book of Mormon “scripture” while denying that it comes from God is to introduce a concept totally alien to the faith of the Latter-day Saints.

This is not to deny that works outside the modern canon can be beneficial or enlightening or perhaps even “scriptural” in a loose sense in that they might contain ideas and concepts that, from a Latter-day Saint perspective, are true and in harmony with what God has revealed. Indeed, there is a richness of truth and beauty to be found in works of art, literature, music, and film from multiple cultures and religious traditions. When Doctrine and Covenants 88:118 directs us to seek “words of wisdom” out of “the best books,” it doesn’t restrict these books to only the standard works of the Church. Latter-day Saints are therefore not by any means exclusionist when it comes to granting the presence of divine inspiration in many sources.⁶² But this is entirely different from what Price is getting at in his talk about the Book of Mormon’s being inspired fiction.

59. Price, “Prophecy and Palimpsest,” 68–69.

60. William J. Hamblin, “Priced to Sell,” *FARMS Review* 16, no. 1 (2004): 45.

61. Robert Alter, *The Art of Biblical Narrative* (New York: Basic Books, 1981), 15.

62. Compare the First Presidency’s 1978 declaration affirming that “the great religious leaders of the world such as Mohammed, Confucius, and the Reformers,

Nor does Dunn escape unscathed from criticism. Both Robert Rees and Richard Williams provide well-argued criticisms of Dunn's hypothesis that the Book of Mormon is the product of automatic writing.⁶³ Rees criticizes Dunn's double standard in uncritically accepting the accounts of other automatic scribes, while simultaneously questioning Joseph Smith's own account.

It is surprising that Dunn seems to take at face value the claims of other automatic scribes about the source of their manuscripts but doesn't seem to accept Joseph Smith's own account of his sources as valid. That is, if Dunn uncritically accepts the witness of writers of automatic texts regarding the processes by which they received their material, why question the source Joseph Smith claimed for the Book of Mormon?⁶⁴

For Dunn's hypothesis to work, he must unquestioningly accept the claims of others who produced texts by automatic writing but also unquestioningly reject Joseph Smith's own claims concerning the coming forth of the Book of Mormon. Additionally problematic are the numerous ways in which the Book of Mormon does *not* exhibit characteristics of automatic writing, including not just the actual verification of some of its historical claims, but also the nature of the experience of Joseph Smith and the others involved in the coming forth of the Book of Mormon.⁶⁵

Williams even goes so far as to argue that the parallels offered by Dunn are not real parallels at all:

Joseph Smith never invoked traditional spiritualist experiences or explanations, unlike spiritualists of the nineteenth century. When I was first contemplating writing this essay, I contacted a professional colleague of mine whose expertise is in the psychology of religion and who is well qualified in matters of spirituality and spiritualism in the history of

as well as philosophers including Socrates, Plato, and others, received a portion of God's light. Moral truths were given to them by God to enlighten whole nations and to bring a higher level of understanding to individuals." The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, "Statement of the First Presidency regarding God's Love for All Mankind," news release, Feb. 15, 1978.

63. Robert A. Rees, "The Book of Mormon and Automatic Writing," *Journal of Book of Mormon Studies* 15, no. 1 (2006): 4–17; Richard N. Williams, "The Book of Mormon as Automatic Writing: Beware the Virtus Dormitiva," *FARMS Review* 19, no. 1 (2007): 23–29.

64. Rees, "The Book of Mormon and Automatic Writing," 9.

65. Discussed in Rees, "The Book of Mormon and Automatic Writing," 12–15.

religion. His initial response to the automaticity hypothesis was that it seemed odd since Joseph Smith, unlike mediums and spiritualists of the nineteenth century, never invoked spiritualism as a source or influence. For most spiritualists, the channeling or mediumship is the crucial issue, but Joseph never made such claims. Rather, he consistently reported that the source of the message was the metal plates and that his own translation occurred by the gift and power of God; he was able to show the plates to several credible witnesses who testified of their existence.⁶⁶

Interestingly, this is not the first time Joseph Smith's alleged mental instability has been used to explain the origin of the Book of Mormon. As early as 1903, B. H. Roberts responded to I. Woodbridge Riley's hypothesis that Joseph Smith was an epileptic,⁶⁷ a bizarre theory that has from time to time resurfaced.

As for Taves, while she presents her version of the IFT with scrupulous politeness, it ultimately amounts to little more than a modified retelling of the pious-fraud theory made popular in recent years by Dan Vogel (whom Taves approvingly quotes throughout her own work). The problem with Taves' particular theory is twofold. First, she is able to make a case only for what she herself admits is a largely "conjectural"⁶⁸ reading of the historical evidence by obscuring what Joseph and his closest supporters believed about the coming forth of the Book of Mormon. Contrary to what Taves claims, there is not "too much conflicting evidence to come to a firm conclusion about what Smith really believed about the plates."⁶⁹ Besides Jackson's work cited above,⁷⁰ the recent analysis provided by MacKay and Dirkmaat, to name just one example, amply demonstrates that Joseph Smith left a crystal-clear account of how he recovered and translated the Book of Mormon and what such meant for him and his followers.⁷¹

66. Williams, "The Book of Mormon as Automatic Writing," 27.

67. B. H. Roberts, *Defense of the Faith and the Saints* (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 1907), 1:42–55.

68. Taves, *Revelatory Events*, 51.

69. *Ibid.*

70. Jackson, "Joseph Smith and the Historicity of the Book of Mormon," 123–40.

71. Michael Hubbard MacKay and Gerrit J. Dirkmaat, *From Darkness unto Light: Joseph Smith's Translation and Publication of the Book of Mormon* (Provo and Salt Lake City: Religious Studies Center and Deseret Book, 2015); reviewed in Stephen O. Smoot, "Telling the Story of the Coming Forth of the Book of Mormon," *Interpreter: A Journal of Mormon Scripture* 19 (2016): 67–82.

Taves' contention that the "materialization" of the gold plates is comparable to the Catholic Eucharist or the Orthodox icon might be appropriate if Joseph or any of his early followers ever claimed to understand the existence of the Book of Mormon plates in those terms, but in fact there is no evidence that any of them did. The only evidence Taves cites which might come close to satisfying this requirement is the early letter from Joseph's skeptical uncle Jesse Smith to the former's brother Hyrum.⁷² In this letter Jesse vehemently denies any particle of truth to his nephew's visionary claims, and dismisses Joseph's enterprise as a blasphemous outrage. At one point he speaks of Joseph "mak[ing] his own gods" and having "eyes to see things that are not."⁷³ Taves esteems this letter as "an extraordinarily rich passage that opens up ... lines of inquiry" into the direction she wishes to take her readers (that is, to her own version of the IFT).⁷⁴ This, however, hardly seems warranted. Instead of seeing Jesse Smith's letter as a sort of profound window into Joseph Smith's religious consciousness, as Taves does, it should instead be read in light of how most of Joseph Smith's contemporaries reacted to his claims: as a scornful dismissal of Joseph's truth claims.

This brings us to the second failing of Taves' thesis. To avoid the logical pitfall articulated above (how does Joseph Smith not come out as utterly delusional if he did not possess real ancient plates?) Taves attempts to categorize Joseph as something other than "delusional" as defined by current psychiatric standards. She insists, as seen above, that "the distinction between ordinary [religious] belief," such as those she determines were held by Joseph Smith, and "delusion turns on context, that is, on *whether the beliefs make sense within the context of a culture or subculture*."⁷⁵ So the question is whether Joseph Smith's claims (an angel came to him and gave him golden plates, which he translated with a seer stone) would have made sense within the context of Western New York in the mid- to late-1820s. Taves believes the answer is yes and cites Quinn as justification.⁷⁶

72. Jesse Smith to Hyrum Smith, 17 June 1829, reprinted in Dan Vogel, ed., *Early Mormon Documents* (Salt Lake City: Signature Books, 1996), 1:551–54.

73. Vogel, *Early Mormon Documents*, 1:552.

74. Taves, *Revelatory Events*, 52.

75. Taves, "History and the Claims of Revelation," 109, emphasis added.

76. It should be noted that Quinn's work on the early Mormon connection to the "magical world view" has itself not escaped considerable critique and deconstruction. See John Gee, "An Obstacle to Deeper Understanding," *FARMS Review of Books* 12, no. 2 (2000): 185–224; William J. Hamblin, "That Old Black Magic," *FARMS Review of Books* 12, no. 2 (2000): 225–393; Mark Ashurst-McGee, "A Pathway to Prophethood: Joseph Smith Junior as Rodsman, Village Seer, and Juedo-Christian

But this overlooks what I believe is an important piece of evidence: how most of those outside of Joseph Smith's immediate circle of family and friends reacted to the young seer's claims. In fact, even a cursory glance at contemporary reactions to the Book of Mormon reveals an unrelenting torrent of incredulity, derision, and mockery from Joseph Smith's neighbors. In June of 1829, the same month that Jesse Smith scorned his nephew for his visionary claims, the *Wayne Sentinel* spoke of "much speculation" swirling around "a pretended discovery, through superhuman means, of an ancient record, of a religious and divine nature and origin, written in ancient characters impossible to be interpreted by any to whom the special gift has not been imparted by inspiration." The article went on to report that "most people entertain an idea that the whole matter is the result of a gross imposition, and a grosser superstition."⁷⁷ Jonathon Hadley, a Rochester newspaperman who was consulted to possibly print the Book of Mormon,⁷⁸ dismissed Joseph Smith's report of the recovery and translation of the record as "the greatest piece of superstition that has come within our knowledge." The "account of this discovery was soon circulated," Hadley continues, and was "almost invariably treated as it should have been — with contempt." Those who did believe Joseph's story, such as Martin Harris, were disdainfully written off as "blindly credulous" dupes.⁷⁹

The pugacious Abner Cole, editor of the *Palmyra Reflector* who published pilfered extracts of the Book of Mormon before its full release in March 1830,⁸⁰ not only mercilessly lampooned the Book of Mormon with his satirical Book of Pukei,⁸¹ but did not hesitate to compare

Prophet" (Master's Thesis, Utah State University, 2000); Brant A. Gardner, *The Gift and Power: Translating the Book of Mormon* (Salt Lake City: Greg Kofford, 2011); Kerry Muhlestein, "Seeking Divine Interaction: Joseph Smith's Varying Searches for the Supernatural," in *No Weapon Shall Prosper: New Light on Sensitive Issues*, ed. Robert L. Millet (Salt Lake City and Provo, UT: Religious Studies Center, Brigham Young University, 2011), 77–91; Samuel M. Brown, "The Reluctant Metaphysicians," *Mormon Studies Review* 1 (2014): 115–31; Richard Lyman Bushman, "Joseph Smith and Money Digging," in *A Reason for Faith: Navigating LDS Doctrine and Church History*, ed. Laura Harris Hales (Salt Lake City and Provo, UT: Religious Studies Center, Brigham Young University, and Deseret Book, 2016), 1–6; Eric A. Eliason, "Seer Stones, Salamanders, and Early Mormon 'Folk Magic' in the Light of Folklore Studies and Bible Scholarship," *BYU Studies* 55, no. 1 (2016): 73–93.

77. Vogel, *Early Mormon Documents*, 2:218–19.

78. MacKay and Dirkmaat, *From Darkness unto Light*, 166–68.

79. Vogel, *Early Mormon Documents*, 2:221–22, emphasis in original.

80. MacKay and Dirkmaat, *From Darkness unto Light*, 206–12.

81. Vogel, *Early Mormon Documents*, 2:231–37.

Joseph Smith with “the most notorious impostors that have figured either in ancient or modern times.”⁸² *The Gem*, a paper out of nearby Rochester, announced the publication of the Book of Mormon with the excited headline “IMPOSITION AND BLASPHEMY!!” Joseph Smith’s claims, the paper indignantly proclaimed, were “in point of blasphemy and imposition, the very summit.”⁸³ The very man who typeset the Book of Mormon when it went to press in the fall of 1829, John Gilbert, himself deemed the book “a very big humbug.”⁸⁴ Finally, there is Alexander Campbell, who published the first serious and sustained critique of the Book of Mormon in his *Millennial Harbinger* in 1831. Fittingly for this present discussion, what word did Campbell use to summarize Joseph Smith’s claims? “Delusions.”⁸⁵ Thundered Campbell,

The [Book of Mormon] professes to be written at intervals and by different persons during the long period of 1020 years. And yet for uniformity of style, there never was a book more evidently written by one set of fingers, nor more certainly conceived in one cranium since the first book appeared in human language, than this same book. If I could swear to any man’s voice, face or person, assuming different names, I could swear that this book was written by one man. And as Joseph Smith is a very *ignorant* man and is called *the author* on the title page, I cannot doubt for a single moment that he is the sole author and proprietor of it.⁸⁶

This declaration, naturally, is accompanied by accusations that the Book of Mormon is an “impious fraud”⁸⁷ and Joseph Smith an “ignorant and impudent liar.”⁸⁸ Even those sympathetic enough to Joseph’s claims to examine the Book of Mormon with even a modicum of objectivity were initially taken aback by the strangeness of the circumstances surrounding its purported origin. Parley P. Pratt recalled his encounter with “an old Baptist deacon by the name of Hamlin” who “began to tell of a *book*,

82. Ibid., 2:241.

83. “Imposition and Blasphemy!! Money-Diggers, Etc.” *The Gem, of Literature and Science* 2, no.2 (May 15, 1830): 15.

84. Vogel, *Early Mormon Documents*, 2:551.

85. Alexander Campbell, “Delusions,” *The Millennial Harbinger* 2, no. 2 (February 7, 1831): 85–96; reprinted as *Delusions: An Analysis of the Book of Mormon* (Boston: Benjamin H. Greene, 1832).

86. Campbell, “Delusions,” 93.

87. Ibid., 91.

88. Ibid., 92.

a STRANGE BOOK, a VERY STRANGE BOOK! in his possession, which had been just published.” What made this book so strange? “This book ... purported to have been originally written on plates either of gold or brass, by a branch of the tribes of Israel; and to have been discovered and translated by a young man near Palmyra, in the State of New York, by the aid of visions, or the ministry of angels.”⁸⁹ Rather than immediately accept this account, however, Pratt first ventured to Palmyra “and inquired for the residence of Mr. Joseph Smith.” Only after interrogating Hyrum Smith, one of those involved in the coming forth of the Book of Mormon, and “duly weighing the whole matter in [his] mind,” did Pratt accept that “[Joseph’s claims] were true.”⁹⁰

“Imposition.” “Superstition.” “Humbug.” “Impostor.” “Delusion.” “Fraud.” These are hardly the reactions one would expect if in fact Joseph Smith’s claims were right at home in the religious and cultural environment of his Palmyra residence.⁹¹ It was precisely because Joseph Smith’s description of the coming forth of the Book of Mormon was so outrageous and extravagant to contemporary sensibilities that the entire affair was sneeringly written off as a superstition or a hoax by so many. It was precisely because Joseph Smith’s claims were so wild that Charles Anthon, as he remembered years after the event, ominously warned Martin Harris in the winter of 1828 that he was being taken in by a charlatan.⁹²

While it is true that Joseph did enjoy some early followers in New York (followers whom early opponents of Joseph Smith deemed just as delusional as their prophetic leader), the overwhelmingly skeptical reception the Book of Mormon received in its early years of circulation is, I believe, strong evidence against Taves’ argument. Fluhman observes that “the Book of Mormon served [nineteenth century] anti-Mormons as the quintessential sign of Smith’s fraud”⁹³ and “the glaring marker

89. Parley P. Pratt, *The Autobiography of Parley Parker Pratt* (New York: Russell Brothers, 1874), 37.

90. *Ibid.*, 38–39.

91. See further the commentary in J. Spencer Fluhman, “A Peculiar People”: *Anti-Mormonism and the Making of Religion in Nineteenth-Century America* (Chapel Hill, N.C.: University of North Carolina Press, 2012), 21–48.

92. Charles Anthon to E. D. Howe, 17 February 1834, reprinted in Vogel, *Early Mormon Documents*, 4:377–81; Charles Anthon to Thomas Winthrop Coit, 3 April 1841, reprinted in Vogel, *Early Mormon Documents*, 4:382–86; Charles Anthon to William E. Vibbert, 12 August 1844, reprinted in Erin B. Jennings, “Charles Anthon — The Man Behind the Letters,” *The John Whitmer Historical Association Journal* 32, no. 2 (Fall/Winter 2012): 171–72.

93. Fluhman, “A Peculiar People,” 39.

of his deception.”⁹⁴ This fact highlights just how abjectly absurd and, yes, delusional Joseph’s claims seemed to those who did not accept the reality of his angelic interviews or the existence of ancient plates. Taves might insist that we narrow down the “culture or subculture” of belief to include basically only the Smith family and a handful of some close friends to accommodate her theory. But in that case why should anyone give the Smith family any more credence than the Manson family?

Historicity as a Necessity for the Theological Vitality of the Book of Mormon

So far I have provided a critique of the IFT by directly challenging the arguments of its professors. I wish, however, to make several additional points. Let’s begin by asking a simple question: what is the purpose of the Book of Mormon? Why does the book exist? To answer this we turn to title page of the Book of Mormon, which Joseph Smith insisted was translated from the plates, and was not a modern composition.⁹⁵ According to the title page, the purpose of the Book of Mormon is threefold: (1) “to show unto the remnant of the house of Israel what great things the Lord hath done for their fathers,” (2) “that they may know the covenants of the Lord, that they are not cast off forever,” and (3) “to the convincing of the Jew and Gentile that Jesus is the Christ, the Eternal God, manifesting himself unto all nations.”

Focusing on this last purpose, Elder Jeffrey R. Holland affirmed,

From the title page to the book’s final declaration, this testament reveals, examines, underscores, and illuminates the divine mission of Jesus Christ as recorded in the sacred accounts of two New World dispensations (Jaredite and Lehite) written for the benefit of a third dispensation, the dispensation of the fulness of times. The Book of Mormon has many purposes, but this one transcends all others.⁹⁶

Brant Gardner explains that the Book of Mormon “emphasizes the Atoning Messiah’s mission. The structure of Mormon’s work emphasizes the Messiah, and at the end we have Moroni affirming that the purpose

94. Ibid., 35.

95. Joseph Smith, History, 1838–1856, vol. A-1, *The Joseph Smith Papers* <http://www.josephsmithpapers.org/paper-summary/history-1838-1856-volume-a-1-23-december-1805-30-august-1834/40>.

96. Jeffrey R. Holland, *Christ and the New Covenant: The Messianic Message of the Book of Mormon* (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 1997), 4.

of the Nephite preaching and particularly their records, has been to declare this supremely important message.⁹⁷ There is thus a fundamental difference between the Book of Mormon and other writings about Jesus, such as *Ben-Hur* or *The Last Temptation of Christ*. In the case of the Book of Mormon, the theological power of the text comes from its insistence that what it describes actually happened. When a resurrected, deified Christ is purported to have actually appeared to an assembly of ancient descendants of Israel on the American continent, the account is not to be treated with the same sort of perfunctory curiosity or amusement that one would expend on *The Da Vinci Code* or any other modern fictional account about Jesus. *Ben-Hur* and *The Last Temptation of Christ* never profess to be anything more than fictional accounts of the life and teachings of Jesus, even if they are based, in part, on the Gospel accounts of the life of Jesus.

Whatever principles they may convey, they pale in comparison to what the Book of Mormon testifies about Christ. It is all fine and good to read what a modern writer may imagine about Jesus. I am by no means disparaging the work of Lew Wallace or Nikos Kazantzakis. But it is an entirely different matter to read an account that purports to give a real history of Jesus's actions and teachings. Consider this example given by B. H. Roberts in 1909. In his important three-volume work defending the Restoration, Roberts quotes the following from John Watson:

Were a parchment discovered in an Egyptian mound, six inches square, containing fifty words which were certainly spoken by Jesus, this utterance would count more than all the books which have been published since the first century. If a veritable picture of the Lord could be unearthed from a catacomb, and the world could see with its own eyes what like He was ... that picture would have at once a solitary place amid the treasures of art.⁹⁸

I can't think of any New Testament scholar or any historian of Christianity or any faithful Christian, for that matter, who wouldn't be ecstatic to find authentic extra-biblical sayings of Jesus. It would likely revolutionize our understanding of the life and teachings of Christ, as Elder Roberts recognized:

97. Brant Gardner, *Second Witness: Analytical and Contextual Commentary on the Book of Mormon* (Salt Lake City: Greg Kofford Books, 2007), 1:55.

98. John Watson, *Life of the Master* (Toronto: William Briggs, 1901), 7, quoted in B. H. Roberts, forward to *New Witnesses for God*, vol. 2, *The Book of Mormon* (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 1909).

If [Watson's observation] be true, and I think no one will question it, then how valuable indeed must be ... the Book of Mormon! Containing not fifty, but many hundreds of words spoken by Jesus ... [and] the account of Messiah's appearance and ministry among the people, his very words repeated ... that we may better understand ... his teachings. ... It was mainly for this purpose that the Nephite records were written, preserved, and finally brought forth to the world.⁹⁹

It is its claimed historical authenticity that makes the Book of Mormon's testimony of Jesus so significant. That, to Roberts, is what makes the Book of Mormon a "new witness" for God. For if the Book of Mormon is historically authentic, then it contains historically authentic sayings of Jesus outside of the gospels. And not only that, it preserves a record of not just the historical existence of Jesus of Nazareth but Jesus the exalted Christ.

The ultimate purpose of the Book of Mormon — to prove unto all nations that Jesus is the Eternal God and has performed an infinite atonement — is frustrated if its story about him is not authentic history. "Jesus Christ did show himself unto the people of Nephi, as the multitude were gathered together in the land Bountiful, and did minister unto them; and on this wise did he show himself unto them." So says Mormon in his editorial introduction to the narrative in 3 Nephi 11–30. But if a resurrected Jesus's wounds were never really felt by a real group of ancient people (3 Nephi 11:14–15), and if he really didn't lay his hands on twelve Nephites and give them authority to administer ordinances (3 Nephi 18–19), or actually declare what the fundamental principles of his gospel were (3 Nephi 11:31–41; 27:13–22), then the witness of the Book of Mormon carries none of the theological power it proclaims to have.

Those spoken of in the Book of Mormon are portrayed as real individuals who reaped witnessed miraculous blessings by exercising faith in Jesus Christ. Their stories are not presented as pious fiction, but as fact. "God has not ceased to be a God of miracles," Moroni declared.

Behold, are not the things that God hath wrought marvelous in our eyes? Yea, and who can comprehend the marvelous works of God? ... And who shall say that Jesus Christ did not do many mighty miracles? And there were many mighty miracles wrought by the hands of the apostles. And if there were miracles wrought then, why has God ceased to be a God of miracles and yet be an unchangeable Being? And behold, I say unto you he

99. Roberts, *New Witnesses for God*, 2:36–37.

changeth not; if so he would cease to be God; and he ceaseth not to be God, and is a God of miracles. (Moroni 9:16–19)

Marvelous indeed are these phony miracles narrated in the Book of Mormon if they never happened.

Likewise, the dire warning given by Nephi at the end of 2 Nephi becomes toothless if Nephi did not actually exist, or if his testimony is nothing more than the product of Joseph Smith's imagination.

And now, my beloved brethren, ... Christ will show unto you, with power and great glory, that they are his words, at the last day; and you and I shall stand face to face before his bar; and ye shall know that I have been commanded of him to write these things, notwithstanding my weakness. ... And now, my beloved brethren, all those who are of the house of Israel, and all ye ends of the earth, I speak unto you as the voice of one crying from the dust: Farewell until that great day shall come. 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. For what I seal on earth, shall be brought against you at the judgment bar; for thus hath the Lord commanded me, and I must obey. Amen. (2 Nephi 33:10–15)

This impassioned plea from Nephi to remember and keep the words of Christ in the Book of Mormon means nothing if a real Nephi never said these words. For, if a real Nephi never existed, then a real Nephi will never meet us at the judgment bar of God, as he proclaimed would happen; and his imaginary words will not condemn us at the judgment of God, because they were never actually spoken.

The same goes for Moroni's own similar promise that he shall meet his readers "before the judgment-seat of Christ, where all men shall know that my garments are not spotted with your blood. And then shall ye know that I have seen Jesus, and that he hath talked with me face to face, and that he told me in plain humility, even as a man telleth another in mine own language, concerning these things" (Ether 12:38–39), as well as his concluding remarks at the end of the Book of Mormon.

And I exhort you to remember these things; for the time speedily cometh that ye shall know that I lie not, for ye shall see me at the bar of God; and the Lord God will say unto you: Did I not declare my words unto you, which were written by this

man, like as one crying from the dead, yea, even as one speaking out of the dust? I declare these things unto the fulfilling of the prophecies. And behold, they shall proceed forth out of the mouth of the everlasting God; and his word shall hiss forth from generation to generation. And God shall show unto you, that that which I have written is true. (Moroni 10:27–29)

If Moroni never existed, then these pronouncements become meaningless, for if the Book of Mormon is fictional, then we will no sooner meet a fictional Moroni at the judgment-seat of Christ than the fictional orphan Oliver Twist, the fictional Captain Ahab of the *Pequod*, or the fictional adulteress Hester Prynne.

Elsewhere Moroni writes, “Behold, I speak unto you as if ye were present, and yet ye are not. But behold, Jesus Christ hath shown you unto me, and I know your doing” (Mormon 8:35). Moroni then proceeds to detail an unflattering litany of sins and malfeasances he claims to have been shown in vision several centuries before their manifestation among the latter-day children of men: pride, greed, lust, pollution, unfaithfulness, and other vices. Moroni, after chastising his future readers for their transgressions, ends his woeful prognostications with a dreadful pronouncement: “Behold, the sword of vengeance hangeth over you” (Mormon 8:41). The entire chapter is a humbling read, which includes an earnest plea for us, the modern readers of the Book of Mormon, to repent and return to Christ. But what a sham this warning is if a real Moroni was not shown a real vision of what was to transpire in the last days. Any power, gravity or urgency captured in this chapter — directed by a pleading prophet to a morally decaying people — is swept away if it is fictional.

If what the Book of Mormon reports about Jesus and these other prophets is nothing more than fiction, then the Book of Mormon’s witness of Christ is no more a witness for Christ than any other fictional work. To view the Book of Mormon as nothing more than “inspired” or “inspiring” fiction like any other book would not only destroy the power of the Book of Mormon, but, as explained before, would also cast Joseph Smith in a highly unflattering light: that of a liar (conscious or otherwise) or a raving lunatic. Elder Holland recognized the implications of such, and forcefully admonished that

one has to take something of a do-or-die stand regarding the restoration of the gospel of Jesus Christ and the divine origins of the Book of Mormon. Reason and righteousness require it. Joseph Smith must be accepted either as a prophet of God or else

as a charlatan of the first order, but no one should tolerate any ludicrous, even laughable middle ground about the wonderful contours of a young boy's imagination or his remarkable facility for turning a literary phrase. That is an unacceptable position to take — morally, literarily, historically, or theologically.¹⁰⁰

Some might dismiss this stance as overly melodramatic, the pontifications of a dogmatic fundamentalist who lacks the prudence to read the Book of Mormon stripped of the crass literalism that shackles Mormon exegetes to a hermeneutic of naïveté and credulity. But the fact that lively debate surrounding the authenticity of the Book of Mormon has persisted for nearly two centuries should indicate that many more like Elder Holland have recognized the serious implications that attend the book's fraudulence or authenticity.

If we could indeed just read the Book of Mormon as "inspired" fiction, then one wonders why every criticism imaginable has been leveled against it since its publication. Why is this book so threatening? What is so scandalous about this book that writers of many philosophical and religious persuasions have mercilessly rained their rage and fury down upon it? If it is just another nice, inspiring fictional book about Jesus, then why the acrimonious denunciations of the Book of Mormon as a vile imposition? Why is the Book of Mormon currently opposed by an army of authorities who feel it a moral duty to expose the Book of Mormon for what it *really* is? The polemical strife which persists around the Book of Mormon forces us to ask the fundamental question: is this book what it claims to be? Did the stories it records actually happen? Did it come forth the way Joseph Smith said it did, or by some other fraudulent means? And, depending on how one answers these questions, what are the ramifications for the lives of millions of Latter-day Saints throughout the globe?

The Book of Mormon's Role in the Restoration

Terryl Givens has looked closely at the role of the Book of Mormon in Joseph Smith's larger restoration project and concludes that

the history of the Book of Mormon's place in Mormonism and American religion generally has always been more connected to its status as *signifier* than *signified*, or its role as a sacred sign rather than its function as persuasive theology. The Book of Mormon is preeminently a concrete manifestation of sacred

100. Holland, *Christ and the New Covenant*, 345–46.

utterance, and thus an evidence of divine presence, before it is a repository of theological claims.¹⁰¹

Or, as Givens writes elsewhere, what outrages rival Christian denominations to this day isn't so much "its content [of the Book of Mormon]," which Christians could hardly object to, "but rather its manner of appearing; it has typically been judged not on the merits of what it *says*, but what it *enacts*."¹⁰² For the Book of Mormon is undoubtedly the primary evidence for Joseph Smith's divine call. What more could a skeptical world ask for in the way of proof of a genuine prophet and seer than an unlearned frontiersman "[finding] through the ministration of an holy angel, and translat[ing] into our own language by the gift and power of God"¹⁰³ an ancient record written in "hieroglyphics, the knowledge of which was lost to the world"?¹⁰⁴ Perceptive scholars like Paul C. Gutjahr recognize this clearly. "The presence of a new sacred text testified to the special status and powers of Joseph, who had translated it, and in turn Joseph testified to the truth of the book through his continuing revelations from God," writes Gutjahr in a refreshingly honest and evenhanded non-Mormon treatment of the Book of Mormon. "Neither the Prophet nor the book would, without the other, wield the oracular power each enjoyed."¹⁰⁵

It is therefore upon the Book of Mormon that Latter-day Saints build their confidence in not only Joseph Smith as a prophet, but the divinity of Christ and his church. President Ezra Taft Benson taught that

the Church stand[s] or fall[s] with the truthfulness of the Book of Mormon. The enemies of the Church understand this clearly. This is why they go to such great lengths to try and disprove the Book of Mormon, for if it can be discredited, the Prophet Joseph Smith goes with it. So does our claim to priesthood keys, and revelation, and the restored Church. But in like manner, if

101. Givens, *By the Hand of Mormon*, 64, emphasis in original.

102. Terryl Givens, *The Book of Mormon: A Very Short Introduction* (New York.: Oxford University Press, 2009), 105, emphasis in original.

103. Joseph Smith, History, 1838–1856, vol. A-1, *The Joseph Smith Papers*, <http://www.josephsmithpapers.org/paper-summary/history-1838-1856-volume-a-1-23-december-1805-30-august-1834/267>.

104. Joseph Smith, Letter to James Arlington Bennet, 13 November 1843, *The Joseph Smith Papers*, <http://www.josephsmithpapers.org/paper-summary/letter-to-james-arlington-bennet-13-november-1843/2>.

105. Paul C. Gutjahr, *The Book of Mormon: A Biography* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2012), 61.

the Book of Mormon is true ... then one must accept the claims of the Restoration and all that accompanies it.¹⁰⁶

Without the historicity of the Book of Mormon, both its contents and the manner of its coming forth, Joseph Smith has no genuine prophetic qualification. When the historicity of the Book of Mormon, and by implication the historicity of the Restoration, is sacrificed on the altar of the IFT, Joseph Smith goes in an instant from being a “choice seer” (2 Nephi 3:7) chosen by God to reveal a new dispensation of the gospel to just another religious imposter; at best well-meaning but deluded, at worst a pathological liar. “It should be obvious,” writes Daniel C. Peterson, “that, if the Book of Mormon were false, little or nothing that is distinctive to our faith would stand. Joseph Smith’s prophetic mission and all of the other revelations that came through him would be called into question.”¹⁰⁷ It *should* be obvious, but for some inexplicable reason this straightforward truth seems to elude proponents of the IFT.

Conclusion: “God’s actual entry into real history”

The legitimacy of the most important theological claims of the Book of Mormon hinges on whether the attending story that conveys the doctrine actually happened. Its supremely important purpose, to testify that Jesus is the Eternal God and has performed an eternal and infinite atonement, relies entirely on whether the historical testimony of him provided in the pages of the book is authentic. The Book of Mormon, accordingly, must be historical and read as history in order for it to contain the fullness of the theological power it claims to have. If the Book of Mormon is not historical, and if it is read only as fiction, then any pretense to its being an additional witness for the divinity of Jesus in any worthwhile sense is obliterated.

The Inspired Fiction Theory in all its present articulations obscures the fact that Joseph Smith’s prophetic authenticity is entirely dependent on the historicity of the Book of Mormon and the story of its coming forth. The moment Joseph Smith claimed not only to be in the possession of physical golden plates given to him by a resurrected Nephite which he was able to translate by the gift and power of God, but also to have shown these plates to other witnesses is the moment he allowed himself no comfortable middle ground wherein we could divorce the historicity of these events from

106. Ezra Taft Benson, *A Witness and a Warning* (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 1988), 18–19.

107. Daniel C. Peterson, “The Keystone of Our Religion,” BYU Maxwell Institute, accessed February 18, 2013, <http://maxwellinstitute.byu.edu/publications/transcripts/?id=25>.

Joseph's prophetic credibility. Contrary to the contention of Loyd Ericson, "if it could be shown that the Book of Mormon was not a translation of an ancient text" the situation would not merely be one of reconfiguring our understanding of "its coming forth and the narratives surrounding it" but rather being logically compelled to dismiss Joseph Smith's claims to prophetic inspiration.¹⁰⁸ To abandon faith in the historicity of the Book of Mormon is to effectively abandon — whether intentionally or not — faith in Joseph Smith's sanity, honesty, and divine ordination.

To advance the IFT is to admit — unwillingly or not — that whatever else he was, Joseph Smith was a liar. No matter how much he's masked with trivialized adjectives like *inspired* or *pious*, he deceived people into believing false claims. He either lied or was deluded in claiming the angel Moroni delivered real golden plates for him to translate. For any Latter-day Saint who takes the truth claims of the Church seriously, this concession should be totally unacceptable and vigorously rejected. For what the IFT asks Latter-day Saints to concede is nothing less than the very heart and soul of the Church of Jesus Christ. Joseph Smith did not call the Book of Mormon the "keystone of our religion" for no reason.¹⁰⁹ He knew, as do millions of Saints throughout the world, that to abandon the truthfulness of the Book of Mormon is to see the arch of Latter-day Saint doctrine come tumbling down in a spectacular crash.

To read the Book of Mormon as inspired fiction is not only to violently wrest it out of both its ancient and modern *Sitz im Leben*, but is also to effectively neuter its theology. The grounding of Latter-day Saint faith and practice rests, in an inextricable measure, on the historicity of the Book of Mormon and the attending events surrounding the Restoration. What Joseph Cardinal Ratzinger (Pope Benedict XVI) argued about the Bible certainly holds true for the Book of Mormon:

It is of the very essence of biblical [or Mormon] faith to be about real historical events. It does not tell stories symbolizing suprahistorical truths, but is based on history, history that took place here on this earth. The *factum historicum*

108. Loyd Ericson, "Conceptual Confusion and the Building of Stumbling Blocks of Faith," in *Perspectives on Mormon Theology: Apologetics*, ed. Blair G. Van Dyke and Loyd Isao Ericson (Salt Lake City: Greg Kofford Books, 2017), 218.

109. Joseph Smith, *History of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints*, ed. B. H. Roberts (Salt Lake City: Deseret News, 1908), 4:461, extracted from Wilford Woodruff, Journal, November 28, 1841: "Joseph Said the Book of Mormon was the most correct of any Book on Earth & the key stone of our religion & a man would get nearer to God by abiding by its precepts than by any other Book."

(historical fact) is not an interchangeable symbolic cipher for biblical [or Mormon] faith, but the foundation on which it stands: *Et incarnatus est* — when we say these words, we acknowledge God’s actual entry into real history.¹¹⁰

We conclude with the simple, sobering declaration of Joseph Smith himself, which directly underscores the point I’ve labored to make in the pages of this article: “Take away the Book of Mormon and the revelations and where is our religion? We have none.”¹¹¹

Postscript: Answering Objections

When this paper originally appeared online in 2013, it generated lively discussion on the Interpreter Foundation blog and on other Latter-day Saint-themed blogs. I would be remiss if I did not at least briefly address a few of the more pressing objections which have been raised to my paper by commentators across the Internet.

Insisting on the absurdity of the IFT belittles those who lack faith in Book of Mormon historicity but want to remain active in the Church.

At no point in my paper have I questioned the sincerity of those who profess the IFT. Nor have I ever called for discipline against those who hold to such views while participating in the Church. I have, rather, striven to demonstrate the logical absurdity of the IFT and the dangerous implications I believe it has for what I believe is the core of Latter-day Saint faith if followed to its inevitable logical end. If individual members wish to remain active in the Church while holding to the IFT, I have no objection to such. I am not calling for any active Latter-day Saint who ascribes to the IFT to have his or her membership status called into question in any capacity. My admittedly adamant critique of an abstract ideology (the IFT) is not the same as my calling for members of the Church who may hold such views to resign their memberships or be ecclesiastically punished with disciplinary action.

Grant Hardy has affirmed that one must not believe in Book of Mormon historicity to be saved. As such, he disagrees with Smoot on the imperative for Book of Mormon historicity.

In a 2016 FairMormon Conference presentation, Grant Hardy spoke on the topic of “more effective apologetics” and offered thoughts on how Latter-day Saints might best defend the faith and answer sincere

110. Joseph Ratzinger (Pope Benedict XVI), *Jesus of Nazareth: From the Baptism in the Jordan to the Transfiguration* (New York: Doubleday, 2007), xv.

111. “Minutes and Discourse, 21 April 1834”, The Joseph Smith Papers, <http://www.josephsmithpapers.org/paper-summary/minutes-and-discourse-21-april-1834/2>.

questions from doubtful Church members.¹¹² During the question and answer portion of his presentation Hardy responded to questions about Book of Mormon historicity and the Inspired Fiction Theory thus:

Q. What about theories of the Book of Mormon as inspired fiction?

A. There are certainly problems with the historicity of the Book of Mormon, but the institutional Church can't and won't change. The historical claims of our Mormon scripture are more direct than those made by the Bible, and they are more central to the book's message — not just with regard to gold plates and angels, but also in the sense of bearing witness that God has a plan for human history, and that he intervenes rather dramatically from time to time (Christ appearing in the ancient Americas is very significant).

When people talk about “inspired fiction,” it's worth thinking harder about what they might mean. Perhaps that the Book of Mormon is a product of human genius, like other literary or religious works. Or it may be the product of general revelation, in which God or some higher power makes himself known to humans, who then communicate that encounter with the Divine through various scriptures such as Buddhist sutras or the Daodejing or the Bhagavad Gita or the Qur'an. Or there may be special revelation in which God inspired Joseph to create the Book of Mormon in such a way that it exemplifies specific truths of unique importance. In any case, however, we might ask, “Can faith in the Book of Mormon as inspired fiction be a saving faith?” My answer is, “Absolutely!” I believe that if someone at the judgment bar were to say to God, “I couldn't make sense of the Book of Mormon as an ancient American codex, given the available evidence, but I loved that book, I heard your voice in it, and I tried to live by its precepts as best I could,” then God will respond, “Well done, my good and faithful servant.”

For me, I expect to see the resurrected Nephi and Moroni at the judgment bar. It matters to me that they are real individuals. At the same time, I'm not sure that God will

112. Grant Hardy, “More Effective Apologetics,” (Presentation, FairMormon Conference, Provo, UT, August 4-5, 2016), <https://www.fairmormon.org/conference/august-2016/more-effective-apologetics>.

ask, “Did you believe the right things about the Trinity, Joseph Smith, the plan of salvation, and the nature of revelation,” let alone my opinions about polygamy, same-sex marriage, blacks and the priesthood, women’s ordination, politics, or Mormon history. Rather, I believe he will say, “Were you my disciple? Did you strive to know me better? Were you constantly trying to refine your ideas and actions in light of your growing understanding? Were you fully engaged in the Church? How did you treat those with different beliefs and values? And by the way, you were wrong on a number of things you felt strongly about.”

I believe that at the judgment day, when Mormons and ex-Mormons, Jews and Christians, Hindus and Buddhists, Muslims and Sikhs, agnostics and atheists are gathered together, we’re all going to be surprised in one way or another. In fact, I’m sure of it. If I’m not surprised, that would be a huge surprise.¹¹³

I actually agree with Hardy that, speaking strictly in terms of soteriology, affirming faith in the historicity of the Book of Mormon is not a prerequisite for salvation. The imperative of which I speak is not necessarily an intrinsically soteriological one, but rather a logical one which carries implications for whether one should have faith in Joseph Smith’s soteriology to begin with. Said another way, I am arguing that there is a logical imperative to believe Joseph Smith’s account of the coming forth of the Book of Mormon if you’re going to give his subsequent claims about the nature of God, Christ, salvation, and eschatology any credence at all. It logically does not make sense to profess that Joseph Smith’s soteriology is true when the claimed prophetic or revelatory foundation underlying the truthfulness of that soteriology is predicated on the reality of his most important truth claims. To put it simply: I am asking why we should for one moment believe anything Joseph Smith claimed about God and the fate of the human soul if his foundational truth claims are fraudulent.

Beyond this point, I disagree somewhat with Hardy when he says that affirming a correct religious worldview is irrelevant to individual salvation. The passages quoted above from Nephi and Moroni (2 Nephi 33:10–15; Moroni 10:27–29) make it clear that at the judgment there will be an accounting for whether the individual accepted or rejected the teachings of Book of Mormon prophets. This is especially true with regard to the

113. Ibid.

Book of Mormon's prophetic teachings concerning the nature of Jesus Christ and his gospel. So while I agree with Hardy when he stresses that the judgment will take into account not just ideological loyalty but also personal moral behavior, I feel like downplaying the importance of intellectually or mentally assenting to revealed truth which results in adherence to the principles and ordinances of the gospel should be avoided.

God is known elsewhere in scripture to utilize divine deception to impress certain points on the minds of believers (e.g., Doctrine and Covenants 19:5–12), so He therefore may have done the same by revealing a fictional Book of Mormon to Joseph Smith.

This objection fails on two counts. First, the issue with D&C 19:5–12 is not one of divine deception but rather divine equivocation. Equivocating the meaning of a word or phrase such as *endless torment* or *eternal damnation* “that it might work upon the hearts of the children of men” (v. 7) is not the same as outright falsehood. In this instance, God affirms that “endless torment” and “eternal damnation” do in fact exist, just not the way most Bible readers have thought because of their faulty reading of scripture which God left uncorrected for rhetorical effect. This is emphatically not the same thing as if God were to blatantly lie to someone by, say, conjuring illusory hallucinations of a resurrected Nephite angel and ancient golden plates in the mind said individual.

Second, this objection takes for granted that D&C 19:5–12, which was communicated by Joseph Smith in the summer of 1829, is in fact an authentic revelation from a higher power. But by the time Joseph Smith communicated this revelation he had been claiming to friends and family visitations of the angel Moroni for at least six years and had been claiming to have in his possession the golden plates for nearly two years. If Joseph was lying or deluded about his visitations with a non-existent Moroni for six years and his custody of non-existent or non-ancient plates for two years, then why should we take seriously for even one moment his word that this revelation came from God?

If the Book of Mormon must be read historically, then all scripture must be read historically to be consistent.

The main problem with this counter-argument is that it fails to take into consideration the importance of scriptural genre. Said briefly, literary scholars, including biblical literary scholars, emphasize that not all scriptural writings are the same category or genre of writing. Some purport to be historical narrative, some myth, others poetry, and others prophecy. The goal of the literary critic, and by extension the biblical critic at large, is to identify and classify which genre(s) a given scriptural text

falls under.¹¹⁴ Such is of utmost importance in determining how to exegete and read the text. As such, one would not read a biblical poem or myth the same way one would read historical annals. Different interpretive tools or methods must be enlisted to properly read these different genres.

Insisting that *all* scripture be uniformly read as the same thing or in the same manner is fallacious. One would not read the opening chapters of Genesis the same way one would read the opening chapters of 2 Kings or the opening lines of the book of Revelation or the opening section of the Doctrine and Covenants. So too with the Book of Mormon. Nephi's narrative preserved in his small plates should not be read the same way as Zenos's allegory preserved in Jacob 5 or Christ's sermons in 3 Nephi. As I have demonstrated at great length, as an overall comprehensive literary entity the Book of Mormon principally purports to be a historical narrative, even though subgenres (poetry, allegory, epic, and myth) are at times embedded within this narrative to draw out theological and moral points. This is why we may insist on reading the Book of Mormon as history while making no such insistence for, say, the book of Proverbs or the Creation account(s) in Genesis or other portions of scripture which do not purport to be history but rather something else.

Insisting on the imperative for a historical Book of Mormon is unhelpful or unreasonable because such applies a double standard to the Book of Mormon which one would not hold to other scripture.

An online satirical article titled "The Imperative for a Historical Book of Deuteronomy" aims to refute my thesis by using a sort of *argumentum ad absurdum*.¹¹⁵ The anonymous author of this piece means to demonstrate "that if we were to apply the same standards that are applied in his article for the Book of Mormon toward other scripture, like Deuteronomy for example, the arguments will not hold and other scriptures that are found to be non-historical will be dropped by those accepting the methods given in Smoot's article." The author of the article insists that "Historical criticism over the last few hundred years has shown beyond a shadow of a doubt that Moses did not write Deuteronomy, but was in fact written between 640 BCE and 550 BCE," and so asks if in

114. Richard N. and R. Kendall Soulen, *Handbook of Biblical Criticism*, 4th ed. (Louisville, KY.: Westminster John Knox Press, 2011), 74.

115. Anonymous, "The Imperative for a Historical Book of Deuteronomy," Worlds With End (blog), December 10, 2013, <http://www.withoutend.org/imperative-historical-book-deuteronomy/>.

fact “[the Book of Deuteronomy must] possess historicity ... in order to convey spiritual truth.”¹¹⁶

As clever as this article is (and I truly do appreciate its tongue-in-cheek novelty), it is wholly fallacious. For all his or her cleverness, the anonymous author of this piece did not stop to consider that attempts to compare the claimed authorship and recovery of Deuteronomy with that of the Book of Mormon are misguided on several points. David Larsen, a personal friend and colleague of mine, has recognized this. At the risk of being accused of intellectual sloth, inasmuch as I agree with every point he makes in his rebuttal, I reproduce his comment here in full:

There is very little that can be appropriately compared between Joseph’s claim that the Book of Mormon is an ancient record that he, himself, translated and the ancient tradition that Deuteronomy was written by Moses. We have Joseph Smith’s own statements on the matter, as well as those of his family and friends. We have no such statements from Moses or from the so-called Deuteronomists. We have no way of knowing who originally authored [Deuteronomy]. We have no witnesses that can claim to have seen Moses as he was writing the book or dictating it, nor any who have seen the original manuscript. So it does no good to call Moses a liar, nor the Deuteronomists or the Jews who later received the text. We can assume that someone, at some time, made claims that were not entirely truthful regarding the authorship of the text or parts of the text, but we could not blame later readers for being ignorant of the actual process of how things went down. But with the Book of Mormon, the story is completely different. Unlike with Deuteronomy, we do have a certain degree of access to the man that brought us this text. As far as I understand the matter, Joseph Smith did believe and teach that the Book of Mormon was of ancient origin. One perhaps could argue that Joseph was misled and that Moroni gave him a golden book that was not really of ancient origin but was an amalgamation of modern sources inscribed on gold plates (or insert your favorite theory), but you would have to then either argue that Moroni, a messenger from God, was being deceptive or that Joseph Smith himself made the whole thing up or was lying about many parts of the story. To me,

116. Ibid.

there is a difference between ancient pseudepigraphal texts and what they may be able to offer as far as spiritual and life lessons, and a modern prophet claiming to have had visions and being given a text through the gift and power of God. As Latter-day Saints, there is no real imperative to take all of the Bible and its claims as literal, historical or “true.” The claims of Joseph Smith regarding the Book of Mormon, however, are a completely different matter to us, theologically, and cannot be lumped together with books of the Bible. Perhaps for someone trained in biblical studies the difference might seem a technical one, but for believing Latter-day Saints, the difference is like night and day.

I would also point out that we do not necessarily need to see malicious intent in the ascription of Deuteronomy to Moses. There could be various reasons that individuals would want to attribute the book to Moses, but if you look at the case of some of the Psalms that are assigned to David, in the end I think that some of these authorial attributions are based simply on later editors’ beliefs, assumptions, and ignorance regarding the actual author of an older text. I’m not saying that this is the case with Deuteronomy, but we do see later redactors adding names into the text where they did not previously exist.

In the Church, we are encouraged to pray to God to gain a witness of the truthfulness of the Book of Mormon and one of the book’s ancient authors promises that we will receive a response. There is no such promise made for the Book of Deuteronomy, neither within its pages or from modern prophets. I don’t imagine that Jewish proselytes are encouraged to pray about the Book of Deuteronomy in this way. I do not mean, with this statement, to diminish anyone’s belief in Deuteronomy or in any other part of the Bible. This is a statement regarding the spiritual witness promised specifically in the Book of Mormon. In my mind, I equate reading the words of claimed ancient prophets and then praying to know if those words are true with a historical Book of Mormon. I do not feel — and this is my opinion and understanding — that God would give a witness of the truth of a book that merely claimed to be historical but was not. If the entire premise of the book was

a fabrication, I do not imagine that God would be in the business of confirming to people that the book was true.¹¹⁷

The biblical narrative describing the coming forth of the “book of the law” (Deuteronomy) during the reign of king Josiah is detailed in 2 Kings 22–23. If our anonymous author would kindly point to where this account claims from firsthand, personal experience that a resurrected Moses hand-delivered the scroll of the text he personally composed to the pious Josiah, who subsequently translated the scroll by means of supernatural aid, then I might be inclined to give the article some consideration. Until that time, the point our mysterious satirist tries but fails to make with this piece is unworthy of any further serious consideration.

Stephen O. Smoot graduated from the University of Toronto with a master’s degree in Near and Middle Eastern Civilizations. He previously graduated cum laude from Brigham Young University with bachelor’s degrees in Ancient Near Eastern Studies and German Studies. His areas of academic interest include the Hebrew Bible, ancient Egypt, and Mormon studies. He is an editorial consultant with *Interpreter: A Journal of Mormon Scripture* and blogs on Latter-day Saint topics at www.plonialmonimormon.com.

117. David Larsen, December 10, 2013, comment on Anonymous, “The Imperative for a Historical Book of Deuteronomy.”

WHY DID NORTHERN ISRAEL FALL TO THE ASSYRIANS? A WEBERIAN PROPOSAL

Taylor Halverson

Abstract: *This article is centered on possible causes for the fall of Israel and, secondarily, Judah. The topic is not new. The very destruction of these ancient kingdoms may be the cause for the production of much of the Biblical literature that drives our interpretive enterprise. My proposal is that Max Weber's socio-political theories of power and domination, sometimes called the tripartite classification of authority, may provide a fruitful lens by which to understand some of the reasons Judah persisted for more than a century after the fall of Israel. Specifically, I wish to investigate whether the lack of routinization of charismatic authority was a contributing factor in Israel's fall.¹*

Max Weber, the economist and sociologist famously known for his study *The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism*, delivered a lecture in the winter of 1918–1919 to the student club at Munich University entitled *Politics as a Vocation*.² In this lecture he provided succinct definitions of “politics,” “state,” and “legitimations of domination,” terms I believe can provide valuable perspectives when studying ancient Israelite government. I’ll review Weber’s definitions of politics, state, and legitimations of domination, and his three categories in the tripartite classification of authority (traditional, charismatic, and legal). I’ll then review Weber’s theory of routinization of authority. We’ll then be prepared to assess the Biblical evidence for the fall of Israel via

1. My PhD mentor, Dr. Steven Weitzman, first suggested this idea to me, which prompted this article.

2. Max Weber, “Politics as a Vocation,” (1921), quoted in H.H. Gerth and C. Wright Mills, *From Max Weber: Essays in Sociality* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1946), 77–128.

the lens of Weber's theories, to judge whether Weber's insights help us better understand why Judah persisted for more than a century longer than the Northern Kingdom.

Politics: Weber claims that politics "comprises any kind of *independent* leadership in action."³ Specifically, politics is "the leadership, or the influencing of the leadership ... of a *state*."⁴

State: Weber asserts "that a state is a human community that (successfully) claims the *monopoly of the legitimate use of physical force* within a given territory"⁵ and that the "state is a relation of men dominating men, a relation supported by means of legitimate ... violence."⁶ That is, the state asserts and supports the legitimation of domination.

Legitimations of Domination: Legitimations of domination are the forms of authority by which societies regulate domination. Weber explains that there are three pure types, what he calls the "tripartite classification of authority": traditional, charismatic, and legal. But, he concedes, these pure forms rarely exist in reality. Instead, they commingle with each other.

Traditional Authority: Traditional leadership claims authority from appeal to established and accepted traditions, which are reinforced by a head of a family or clan.

Charismatic Authority: Charismatic authority or leadership bases its authority on the gifts (*charisma*), personality, power, and appeal of the leader, and on his ability to attract and retain a loyal following. In a later writing, *Theory of Social and Economic Organization*, Weber further qualifies charisma as

endowed with supernatural, superhuman, or at least specifically exceptional powers or qualities. These are such as are not accessible to the ordinary person, but are regarded as of divine origin or as exemplary.⁷

Legal Authority: Legal authority derives its power from laws and bureaucracy. Legal leadership, Weber claimed, is the most common among the three forms of leadership because charismatic and traditional leadership

3. Ibid., 77.

4. Ibid.

5. Ibid., 78.

6. Ibid.

7. Max Weber, *Theory of Social and Economic Organization*, trans. A. R. Anderson and Talcot Parsons (New York: Oxford University Press, 1964), 358–59.

become “routinized” over time. Legal authority tends to provide far more social and governmental stability than do the other forms of authority.

We’ll return in a moment to the tripartite classification of authority and its relation to politics, the state, and the legitimation of domination. Before we do, I wish to elucidate Weber’s socio-political theory of the routinization of authority, for it is this theory that binds together the other concepts I’ve just introduced.

Routinization of Authority⁸

Charisma is fickle, capricious, transitory; it is ethereal and non-permanent. Yet ironically, for charismatic authority to survive it must become institutionalized. Charismatic authority must find a way through legal, rational, bureaucratic means to perpetuate itself. Otherwise, when the charismatic leader dies (or retires) so too does the authority, power, and domination that such charisma commanded. *Routinization of authority* is the process whereby charismatic authority survives by evolving into stable structures of rational, legal, institutionalized authority. When authority has become invested legally and bureaucratically, it no longer is subjected to the passing, spontaneous, uncontrollable whims of charisma.

An example of the routinization of authority from American religious history will help to illustrate this concept.⁹ Let’s take the case of the prophet Joseph Smith and the religious movement he inspired. By all accounts, and in the technical sense, Joseph Smith was a charismatic, and he built the Latter-day Saint religion on charismatic authority. Relative to his time and place, Joseph Smith garnered a large and powerful following. Joseph’s authority was not based on his learning or on existing institutions or by means of legal power. In fact, Joseph was largely shunned if not maltreated by the educational establishment, by the existing religious institutions, and by the legal structure of America from the small towns to the state and federal governments. However, by sheer personal gifts or charisma (from a Weberian perspective) he developed an impressive following of

8. This theory of “progression” from charismatic leadership to entrenched, legalized, rational, and bureaucratic leadership connects to the larger notion of “rationalization” prevailing in the era of Weber. “Rationalization,” in part connected to the idea of social evolution, proposes that societies advance and improve from primitive, to traditional, to legal/rationalistic societies. Each stage of society encourages and enhances a particular type of authority (e.g., rationalistic societies encourage and accept “legal leadership” far more readily than “charismatic leadership”).

9. For additional examples, please see E. Barker, *New Religious Movements: A Practical Introduction* (London: Her Majesty’s Stationary Office, 1989).

many thousands who were willing to give up family, home, possessions, and traditions to seek after his vision of Zion.

When Joseph Smith was killed in 1844, many thought that the religious movement of Mormonism would die with its charismatic prophet-leader. But this did not happen. Why not? Because Joseph Smith had spent many years routinizing his authority — developing institutions and “transferring” his charismatic power to others so that the movement would persist without him. Near the end of his life, Joseph Smith was quoted saying the following to the leaders he had appointed:

[N]ow if [my enemies] kill me, you have got all the keys, and all the ordinances, and you can confer them upon others, and the hosts of Satan will not be able to tear down the kingdom as fast as you will be able to build it up; and ... on your shoulders will rest the responsibility of leading this people, for the Lord is going to let me rest a while.¹⁰

Not surprisingly, upon Joseph Smith’s death there were challenges as to who would hold the authority of leadership. But for a majority of Latter-day Saints, it was clear that Brigham Young held the appropriate authority to lead the movement, as established by Joseph Smith. Under the able and lengthy tenure of Brigham Young’s leadership, the charismatic authority of Joseph Smith became institutionally finalized so that today the authority within the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints travels primarily along bureaucratic, institutionalized lines and not via charismatic mediators.¹¹ The transfer of power in the hierarchy of the church is remarkably stable. When a church leader passes away or is replaced, there is no bargaining, no campaigning, no jockeying for position. There is a long-standing policy about how power is transferred

10. “Trial of Elder Rigdon,” *The Latter-Day Saints’ Millennial Star* 5, no. 7 (December 1844): 104, <https://books.google.com/books?id=2sFNAQAAMAAJ&pg=PA104&lpg=PA104&dq#v=onepage&q&f=false>.

11. An interesting side note in the case study of charisma and The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints is that the church continues to embrace and promote charisma. A compelling argument can be made that though Joseph Smith’s original charismatic authority (in the sense that Weber defines it) has become institutionalized, there still is a lively amount of space in the church for charisma to flow along the lines of the establishment, even to the point of reshaping and restructuring the institution. Some would argue convincingly that this persistent spirit of charisma is an essential element to the continued vitality of the movement. Therefore, the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints demonstrates that there is a certain symbiotic relationship between charisma and the rationalization of authority on the continuum of routinization of authority.

from one individual to the next, from one generation to the next. In this regard, the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints truly has routinized the charismatic authority of Joseph Smith.

Biblical Textual Evidence for Weber's Socio-Political Theories in Ancient Israel

We'll press forward at this point to consider the theory of the routinization of authority and its relation to the political fortunes of the ancient kingdoms of Israel and Judah.

The primary textual evidence I employ in the investigation of ancient Israelite authority is the Deuteronomistic history with special emphasis on 1 and 2 Samuel and 1 and 2 Kings. Given that the sources are not simple literary history, as we might expect, but more of a historical theologizing, we must work with what is at our disposal. By understanding the purposes for which these books were written, we can listen to our sources carefully and hear the evidences that may provide insight to our questions.

1 and 2 Samuel are composite creations of a variety of memories and traditions cobbled together. The primary purpose of 1 and 2 Samuel are to justify kingship in Israel. 1 and 2 Kings are “interpretive commentary” on the royal history of Israel; these books are a theology of history.¹² Indeed, the very facts of history — that Northern Israel was destroyed and that later Jerusalem was sacked and the people of Judah taken into captivity — are interpreted by the writers and editors of 1 and 2 Kings to be causally related to the levels of kingly fidelity to Deuteronomistic prescriptions plainly described in Deuteronomy 17.

Deuteronomistic Prescription for Kingship

Deuteronomy 17:14–20 has long been considered the Deuteronomistic prescription for kingship or leadership, the thesis statement by which all Israelite rulers after the time of the judges were to be judged.¹³ In this passage — what I call the six commandments of Israelite kingship

12. Walter Brueggemann, *1 Kings* (Atlanta, GA: John Knox Press, 1983), 1–3; see also Brueggemann, *1 & 2 Kings* (Macon, GA: Smyth & Helwys Publishing, Inc., 2000).

13. It seems that Book of Mormon writers also judged their leaders following the prescriptions set forth in Deuteronomy 17:14–20. See Taylor Halverson, “Deuteronomy 17:14–20 as Criteria for Book of Mormon Kingship,” *Interpreter: A Journal of Mormon Scripture* 24 (2017): 1–10, <https://www.mormoninterpreter.com/deuteronomy-1714-20-as-criteria-for-book-of-mormon-kingship/>.

— the kings of Israel (and Judah) are commanded to do, or not do, the following things:

1. Do not acquire many horses
2. Do not return the people to Egypt (for horses)
3. Do not accumulate wealth (gold and silver)
4. Do not have many wives
5. Do write a copy of the book of the law for yourself
6. Do read the law (torah) every day

The positive commands (to write and read the law) are given so that the king will

1. Fear the Lord
2. Diligently keep the commandments
3. Practice equality in the kingdom

thereby securing that he and his descendants will reign long and prosperously on the throne of Israel.

In summary, then, this is the Deuteronomistic thesis of kingship. We see throughout the Books of Kings editorial comments that this Deuteronomistic passage clearly has inspired. For example, listen to the words of wisdom King David shares with his son and successor, Solomon.

Be strong, be [a man], and keep the charge of the LORD your God, walking in his ways and keeping his statutes, his commandments, his ordinances, and his testimonies, as it is written in the law of Moses, so that you may prosper in all that you do and wherever you turn. Then the LORD will establish his word that he spoke concerning me: “If your heirs take heed to their way, to walk before me in faithfulness with all their heart and with all their soul, there shall not fail you a successor on the throne of Israel.” (1 Kings 2:2–4)¹⁴

The Deuteronomists’ ventriloquistic use of David expresses in summary form the expectation that Israelite kings will keep God’s commandments and thereby qualify for God’s promises — perpetuity of their posterity as rulers in Israel. Kings of Israel and Judah were expected to exemplify religious fidelity. By so doing, they would guarantee the perpetuity of their house on the throne and by extension the prosperity and survival of their kingdom. We’ll see presently that the editors of

14. All scripture references in this paper are from the New Revised Standard Version.

Israel's theological history claim that Israel fell precisely because the kings failed to exemplify fidelity to God.

Deuteronomistic Judgment for Why Israel Fell

I'll turn now to the Deuteronomistic reasons for the fall of Israel. In what is a famous passage for shaping generations of interpretation as to why ancient Israel collapsed, we find in 2 Kings 17:7–23 the stinging Deuteronomistic judgment against Israel for infidelity. This passage includes two major themes of why Israel provoked God's anger: (1) they worshipped other gods, and (2) they walked in customs of other nations. According to this passage, ultimately the kings of Israel, specifically Jeroboam, are to blame for the fall of ancient Israel, or so says the editor of 1 and 2 Kings.

The editors of the Books of Kings assert that kingly infidelity to God was the root cause of political failure. In fact, the Books of Kings essentially serve as the compilation of evidence to demonstrate the validity of that theological thesis. In our Western world, which assumes the Cartesian dichotomy between the natural and supernatural worlds, such questions of God's intervention in the history of a nation, or broken covenants with God as a cause for a nation's demise, are difficult to investigate or validate according to modern norms of historical science. Therefore, my purpose is not to seek to validate or refute the Deuteronomistic thesis of Israel's fall. Instead, I wish to investigate if Weber's theory of the routinization of authority provides relevant insight as to why Israel collapsed.

We'll take this in stages. First, we'll look for Biblical examples of traditional authority and charismatic authority. Next, we'll discuss whether these examples demonstrate Weber's definitions of politics and state. We'll then study examples of two types of charismatic figures in the Bible (the prophet and the military judge), and we'll study how ancient Israel experienced a routinization of authority in at least one of these positions. As part of our investigation, we'll take a closer look at the covenants that served as the foundation for kingship in Israel and Judah. As a preview, we'll learn that Weber's socio-political theories provide an accounting for the influence conditional and unconditional covenants had upon Israelite politics.

Traditional Authority — Abraham

Let's begin with Weber's category of traditional authority. According to Weber, traditional authority is vested in a patriarchal figure. An obvious example from the Bible to consider is Abraham. Does Abraham fit into Weber's model?

Definitely. We have a story in Genesis 14 of Abraham gathering 318 of his trained servants to pursue in battle several kings who had abducted Abraham's nephew Lot. Abraham certainly exuded (1) politics — "independent leadership in action" — and (2) a state, because he claimed, by arming his own servants and successfully rescuing Lot, a monopoly of legitimate force in a given territory. Abraham's power and authority did not derive from special gifts or because of the structure and laws of a bureaucratic state. His was the authority of the father figure — the patriarch.

Charismatic Authority

When we search the Biblical record for examples of charismatic authority, two characters immediately come to mind: Israelite military leaders (i.e., redeemers or judges) and prophets.¹⁵

Gideon

One memorable charismatic military leader in early Israelite history is Gideon (see Judges 6–8).¹⁶ Like we saw with Abraham, Gideon also illustrates Weber's model of politics, state, and legitimate domination. To confront the Midianites, Gideon gathered an army of Israelites under the charismatic inspiration of God. In so doing, he exercised politics or independent leadership in action. He also claimed a monopoly on legitimate domination in a specific territory or state as evidenced by his success at driving out the Midianites by force. Because Gideon's authority was charismatic in nature his successes were temporary and transitory, only persisting as long as his charisma remained, "As soon as Gideon died, the Israelites relapsed. ... The Israelites did not remember the LORD their God ... and they did not exhibit loyalty to the house of Gideon in return for all the good that he had done to Israel" (Judges 8:33–35).

15. I recognize that there is a spectrum and nuance of underlying Biblical terms for prophets and prophetic figures. However, for the sake of brevity, I group all individuals who are working under the auspices of God's influence to promote his will in political or ethical realms as prophets. Prophets are authoritatively different than judges in that prophets do not directly wield political power, rather, they indirectly influence political power.

16. Another famous example of a charismatic redeemer is Samson, the striking figure who by virtue of his Nazarite vow would be overcome by the spirit of God to accomplish some great deed: "Then the spirit of the LORD rushed on him, and he went down to Ashkelon. He killed thirty men of the town, took their spoil, and gave the festal garments to those who had explained the riddle" (Judges 14:19). However, Samson doesn't fit into Weber's model as well as other examples because he acts independently and without the involvement of others to follow him.

The consequences of the charismatic model of leadership presented in the Book of Judges are well known. As soon as the charismatic military leader died, Israel wandered in political aimlessness until a new judge, having been charismatically imbued by God, arose. It might be significant to our conversation that the Deuteronomistic conclusion in the Book of Judges of the efficacy of charismatic authority is that “In those days there was no king in Israel; all the people did what was right in their own eyes” (Judges 21:25), a subtle hint that a bureaucratically faithful king, not a charismatic military leader, could provide social stability to keep the Israelites from wandering into apostasy.

Samuel

Not long after the purported era of Judges expired, charismatic authority was invested in the figure of Samuel, the kingmaker, who played the dual role of charismatic military leader and charismatic prophet.

Samuel — Charismatic Prophet

For a contextual reminder, Weber defined charisma as a

A certain quality of an individual personality, by virtue of which [an individual] is set apart from ordinary men and treated as endowed with supernatural, superhuman, or at least specifically exceptional powers or qualities. These are such as are not accessible to the ordinary person, but are regarded as of divine origin or as exemplary.¹⁷

From a prophetic standpoint, Samuel had this rare charismatic leadership. When he would hear the voice of the Lord, he shared those divine disclosures with others. Those who heard Samuel often followed him.¹⁸ Few other individuals in the Samuel narratives had this rare power.

But do Samuel’s prophetic powers fit Weber’s mold? I would argue yes. In 1 Samuel 15, Saul is the king. However, Samuel is the one who exercises political authority by virtue of his prophetic charisma commanding Saul (this is the politics) within a given territory (this is the state) to attack the Amalekites (the claim of the monopoly of force).

17. Weber, *Theory of Social and Economic Organization*, 358–59.

18. A few examples of Samuel hearing the voice of the Lord include 1 Samuel 3; 1 Samuel 8:7–9, 22.

Samuel — Charismatic Military Leader

Not only was Samuel a charismatic prophet but he also was a charismatic military leader. In 1 Samuel 7, Samuel displayed politics, “independent leadership in action,” by mustering the Israelite forces to battle against the Philistines. And he claimed through his military might the monopoly on legitimate violence within a given territory, the Israelite homeland that they fought to defend against Philistine incursions.

Routinization of Authority in the Bible

Now that we have seen several examples of Biblical individuals who fit Weber’s mold of traditional or charismatic authority, we will turn our attention to how and when Israel transitioned from charismatic rule to legal, bureaucratic, rationalized rule, the third type of authority in Weber’s tripartite classification.

1 and 2 Samuel narrates a transition from charismatic to bureaucratic authority in ancient Israel. Samuel began as a charismatic military, prophetic, and priestly ruler. He initiated the routinization of authority in Israelite society, responding to the insistent clamoring of Israelites seeking a king so that they could be like all other nations (1 Samuel 8:5), and at the prodding of God who had acquiesced to Israelite demands (1 Samuel 8:7–9).

In 1 Samuel 8, Samuel is old, and so he attempts to install his sons as judges. Previously, judges had arisen when the spirit of God rushed down upon them. Judges were not appointed by an existing leader. In this story, we see that Samuel was attempting to routinize charismatic authority into rationalized, bureaucratic authority. However, the people opposed Samuel, exclaiming that they preferred to have a king instead of Samuel’s corrupt sons as judges.

Though Samuel’s choice of how authority was to be routinized did not materialize, his actions did set in motion the social machinery of the routinization of authority, which eventuated in the installation of a king. And so it is with Samuel that the charismatic role of the military leader transitioned to the institutionalized authority represented by the king. Nevertheless, prophetic charismatic authority did not also become institutionalized. Instead, Samuel retained the charismatic authority of a prophet: through prophetic appointment, Samuel designated Saul as king (1 Samuel 10:1), and then with the same charismatic authority, he rescinded the appointment (1 Samuel 15:26) only to then charismatically transfer kingship to David (1 Samuel 16:12–13).

We must pay close attention to this interesting twist concerning the creation of kingship in Israel. The political institution of kingship was

based on charismatic prophetic appointment. In other words, when the routinization of authority changed the focus from charismatic judgeship to institutionalized kingship, other existing forms of charismatic authority did not also make the transition to institutionalized authority. Prophetic charisma retained its independence. In fact, it was prophetic charismatic authority that legitimated Israelite kingship. Hence, legalized kingship was based on charismatic prophets, and thus even kingship was not fully rationalized. The charismatic origin of Israelite kingship would prove to play a pivotal role in the level of how thoroughly and firmly rational authority became institutionalized in Israel.

Kingship in Ancient Israel — Reasons for the Fall

Clearly, forms of charismatic authority existed in early Israelite society in the person of the prophet and the military leader. When the routinization of authority occurred, the process was incomplete, leaving a situation in which one segment of society (the prophetic segment) retained a significant hold on charismatic power sufficient to determine and influence the political fortunes of the kingdom. Where charismatic authority persisted, social and governmental stability faltered. Where charismatic authority was more fully routinized, social and governmental stability became cemented.

To provide further evidence of these claims, we'll now focus on the role covenantal promises played in Israelite politics and the influence covenantal promises had upon the routinization of authority. As examples of covenantal promises to kings, we'll look at the founders of the two separate kingdoms of ancient Israel: Jeroboam and David. I will argue that the unconditional covenant for David and his descendants led to a more stable society because authority was more fully routinized, transitioning away from the less stable, more capricious nature of charisma. On the other hand, the conditional covenant prophetically delivered to Jeroboam at the founding of the kingdom of Israel set a precedent that led to political instability because charismatic authority restrained the full routinization of kingship to legal and stable bureaucratic authority.

Davidic Unconditional Covenant Leads to Routinization

Though Samuel had anointed David as king by prophetic charismatic authority, when Samuel died it was as though David needed legitimation from another charismatic prophet to confirm (or disavow) the kingly anointing. David received this legitimacy from the prophet Nathan via

one of the most historically and theologically pivotal covenants in the Old Testament — God's *unconditional* covenant to David in 2 Samuel 7.¹⁹

I will make for you a great name, like the name of the great ones of the earth ... and I will give you rest from all your enemies. Moreover the LORD declares to you that the LORD will make you a house. When your days are fulfilled and you lie down with your ancestors, I will raise up your offspring after you, who shall come forth from your body, and I will establish his kingdom. He shall build a house for my name, and I will establish the throne of his kingdom forever. I will be a father to him, and he shall be a son to me. Your house and your kingdom shall be made sure forever before me; your throne shall be established forever. (2 Samuel 7:9, 11–14, 16)

The fact that this covenant to David and his posterity was *unconditional* should invite us to look closely at how covenants influenced the political realm, particularly in relation to the need for prophetic confirmation of legal, bureaucratic authority.

The kingdom of David was thus founded on an unconditional covenant. There was to be no question of who was to hold power (though in practice there were several bumps in the road). The unconditional covenant required that charismatic authority be institutionalized, routinized, and rationalized. Significantly, the prophetic pronouncement of this unconditional promise — that David's posterity would constitute a perpetual reigning dynasty in Judah — effectively excluded future prophetic voices from having a vote in who would rule.

Yet, prophets did intervene in affairs of the state, outside of the usual oracular roles. However, at no point in the Biblical record does any prophetic voice in the kingdom of Judah rise up to call the king's political authority into serious question with the threat that the unconditional covenant was being revoked and that the dynasty was going to fail.²⁰ What does this mean? Prophetic charismatic authority still persisted, but as a force it became greatly circumscribed as a king-maker or king-breaker. Essentially, the unconditional covenant for David helped

19. For an excellent treatment of this unconditional covenant, see William M. Schniedewind, *Society and the Promise to David: The Reception History of 2 Samuel 7:1–17* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1999).

20. Jeremiah and Lehi might be exceptions but would require additional study to verify.

routinize the charismatic model of authority in Judah, contributing to the establishment of the conditions for a strong and stable government.

Conditional Covenant to Jeroboam Leads to Instability

On the other hand, the Northern Kingdom of Israel was established on *conditional covenants* and the charismatic double barrel of prophetic pronouncement (in the person of Ahijah) and judge-like military leadership (Jeroboam).²¹ When Ahijah delivered to Jeroboam the promise of the kingdom and a dynasty, there was a significant difference from the promise that David received: David's promise was unconditional; Jeroboam's promise was conditional.

I will take you, and you shall reign over all that your soul desires; you shall be king over Israel. If you will listen to all that I command you, walk in my ways, and do what is right in my sight by keeping my statutes and my commandments, as David my servant did, I will be with you, and will build you an enduring house, as I built for David, and I will give Israel to you. (1 Kings 11:37–38)

The fact that the Northern Kingdom of Israel was founded on a *conditional* covenant directly stunted the forward progress of the routinization of charismatic authority towards legal, rational kingship, which the kingdom of Judah so greatly enjoyed over the course of its four centuries of existence. Instead, in the north, there was always a question about who was to be king. Charismatic authority created a great deal of insecurity. In fact, charismatic prophetic authority amplified the insecurity. In the past, when a charismatic military leader arose to protect the people, it was clear who was in power. However, the kingdom of Israel was founded on prophetic confirmation, which had *not* made the transition from charismatic foundations. Therefore, since the covenant was *conditional*, at any moment a prophet could revoke the authority of

21. Jeroboam was certainly a popular, capable leader among the Northern tribes, rising from the ranks of the dust to high station in Solomon's construction projects. On his personal abilities alone Jeroboam may have been able to steer the northern 10 tribes away from the Davidic dynasty. However, with the prophetic intervention of Ahijah, Jeroboam's leadership destiny was cemented. Just as the Biblical record demonstrates with the founding of the United Monarchy under Saul and David, the charismatic military authority became routinized in the person of the king and reinforced by the establishment of a state. The king claimed a monopoly on the exercise of domination within given boundaries.

leadership from the king. Compounding this problem were the regular episodes of sedition and conspiracy against the king. Contrast this scene with that of Judah in the south, where there was a clear, *unconditional* prophetic mandate for one of David's posterity to sit on the throne of Israel. Certainly there were challenges to the Davidic throne, but those usually came from within the family, not from without.

During the time of the divided monarchy, there were nineteen kings in Northern Israel. Five of those kings had negative prophecies uttered against them, that they would be overthrown and their household destroyed. No kings of Judah had negative prophecies uttered against them that their dynasty would be overthrown. Two kings in Israel received positive prophecies, but these were conditional promises that were contingent on faithfulness to the laws of God. These are further signs of instability and the lack of the routinization of authority in the Kingdom of Israel. Additional evidence for the instability of the north is that of the nineteen kings that ruled, eight were murdered in military coups, one committed suicide, one died from injuries sustained in a fall, one was killed in battle, and one was taken into captivity. Only seven died from natural causes.

Contrast this with the kings of Judah. During the period of Northern Israel's existence, twelve kings of Judah ruled. Eight died from natural causes and four others died at the hands of would-be usurpers. No kings had negative judgments leveled against them, in terms of curses against their posterity. Rather, all the kings appear to partake of the unconditional covenant to David that, regardless of their actions, a Davidic descendant would rule Judah.

All of this is to say that the Kingdom of Judah was far more stable than the kingship of the Northern Kingdom of Israel, and the stability of the Southern Kingdom of Judah was derived, in part, because of routinized authority. Instead of having charismatic leaders run the show on the latest whims of the day, as appeared to be the case in the north, Judah had successfully transitioned. However, the north never did fully escape from the insecurity and instability of the charismatic model of authority. The conditional promise to Jeroboam may have cemented the charismatic, unstable approach to government and authority in the north. On the other hand, the unconditional promise to David may have cemented the transition from unstable charisma to the greater security of rationalized, legal authority.

Had charismatic authority been institutionalized and routinized fully in the north, then there likely would have been no question about

who held the monopoly of the legitimate use of force. When invading armies came to fight, the state could adequately defend itself because there was internal stability, because the state owned the right to the legitimate use of force. Instead, in the north, the authority of the king was called into question time and again. Indeed, the utter political chaos that engulfed Northern Israel in the years before the Assyrians invaded was one of the factors in their fall. Had there been no question about who held the right to authority, the king could have marshaled the people to support battle or submission. Unfortunately, the north was in such a chaotic mess, they could not muster the type of unity required to survive the Assyrian empire, which routinized authority normalizes.

Conclusion

We see in the Biblical record a clear case of political instability in the Northern Kingdom of Israel. Kingly authority appears to be perpetually in flux or in question. This was due in part, I believe, to conditional covenants and the failure to routinize charismatic authority into legal authority. In contrast, the Kingdom of Judah enjoyed, from an internal standpoint, a relative sense of political calm. The transfer of authority from one individual or generation to the next had become routinized in Judah and was not open to serious debate. Perhaps had Israel been founded on an unconditional covenant *and* had also routinized charismatic authority into legal kingship, the Kingdom of Israel may not have experienced such great instability at the very moment Assyria invaded. And perhaps then the kingdom could have endured several more generations of existence.

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MARJORIE NEWTON'S ACCOUNT OF THE FAITH OF THE MĀORI SAINTS: A CRITICAL APPRAISAL

Louis Midgley

Abstract: *Marjorie Newton's Mormon and Maori is a version of her 1998 thesis in which she rejects key elements of the Māori Latter-day Saint historical narrative. This contrasts with her earlier, faith-affirming Tiki and Temple. In Mormon and Maori Newton targets what she sees as Māori/missionary mythology. She has written for different audiences; one was for secular religious studies scholars, while the other was for faithful Saints. Midgley rejects Newton's claim that a Mormon American cultural imperialism requires Māori to abandon noble elements of their culture. Faithful Saints are liberated from the soul-destroying behavior that results from the loss of traditional Māori moral restraints. Midgley insists that Newton has little understanding of the deeper structures of Maori culture.*

Review of Marjorie Newton, *Mormon and Maori* (Salt Lake City: Greg Kofford Books, 2014). 248 pp. \$24.95 (paperback).

After Marjorie Newton's PhD was approved in February 1998, a potential publisher sent me a Xerox copy of her thesis.¹ I gave it careful attention. It turned out that my Māori friends had been right. At the Pioneers in the Pacific Conference held at BYU-Hawaii on 7–11 October 1997, at least two of them indicated that they doubted that

1. Marjorie Newton, "Mormonism in New Zealand: A Historical Appraisal" (PhD thesis, School of Studies of Religion, University of Sydney, 1998). Hereafter cited parenthetically as MNZ. When I refer to Newton's thesis in this essay, I have in mind her 1998 PhD thesis, and not her 1986 MA thesis.

she would do justice to the grounds and content of their faith. She would, they thought, ignore, downplay, or explain away matters sacred to them, and she would also be too critical of the way LDS mission presidents responded to the difficult issues they faced. They did not, however, make known how they came to know about her agenda.

I was also invited to evaluate her first effort to turn the two introductory chapters of her PhD thesis (MNZ, 1–84) into a history of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints² in New Zealand. There were, however, serious flaws in what I call “Newton’s Unpublished Manuscript,”³ one of which I will address in this appraisal of *Mormon and Maori*.

I was pleased when *Tiki and Temple* was published in 2012.⁴ It is a fine, faith-affirming narrative history of the Church of Jesus Christ in New Zealand. She begins her account in 1854, when the periodic visits by Latter-day Saint missionaries from Australia first began, and ends with the creation of stakes and the dedication of the Temple in Hamilton in 1958. Primarily, she tells the story of the conversion of Māori that began in 1882 and resulted in an essentially Māori community of Latter-day Saints in New Zealand.

While I have praised *Tiki and Temple*,⁵ I have also demonstrated that Newton has little grasp of Māori *tikanga* (culture). However, she warns her readers: “as an Australian, I am vulnerable to errors of fact and interpretation in both New Zealand and American history, and especially in Maori culture” (T&T, xiv). She also expresses her “hope that one day a Maori historian will produce a scholarly history of Mormonism in New Zealand that will remedy any omissions and defects in both my works. I also hope to see additional work done with the hundreds of

2. Hereafter “the Church of Jesus Christ” or “Latter-day Saints,” depending on context. I retain British spelling in quotations where appropriate.

3. This is a 510-page typed, double-spaced manuscript with no author identification, title page, introduction, or bibliography. It is divided into 15 chapters, each individually paged, and identified only by the dates covered in the chapter. For example, the first chapter is dated 1832–1877, even though there was no LDS proselyting activity in New Zealand until 1854. I will cite only language from “Chapter 2 —1878–1887” of “Newton’s Unpublished Manuscript.”

4. Marjorie Newton, *Tiki and Temple: The Mormon Mission in New Zealand, 1854–1958* (Salt Lake City: Greg Kofford Books, 2012). Hereafter cited parenthetically as T&T.

5. For my affirmative assessment of *Tiki and Temple*, see Midgley, *Journal of Mormon History* 40, no. 1 (2014): 253–56; and also Midgley, “Māori Latter day Saint Faith: Some Preliminary Remarks,” *Interpreter: A Journal of Mormon Scripture* 8 (2014): 45–65.

stories of New Zealand Saints, both Maori and Pakeha,⁶ that are still waiting to be told” (T&T, xiv). Some of this additional work is beginning to be published.⁷ In *Tiki and Temple* she says that she hoped she had been able to “convey a sense of the faith, courage, and dedication of the North American missionaries, and the corresponding faith, courage and dedication of their converts, whether Maori or Pakeha. It features the stories of pioneers of the Church in New Zealand, some of whom are otherwise uncelebrated” (T&T, viii).

Two years after *Tiki and Temple* was published, the bulk of her 1998 thesis was published as *Mormon and Maori*. In both these works she claims there has been much Māori/LDS missionary mythmaking as well as connivance in fabricating miracle stories. In addition, she claims that “American Mormon cultural imperialism” has required Māori Saints to abandon large portions of their culture. Hence, Marjorie Newton asserts in both her thesis and in *Mormon and Maori*, “The LDS Church’s success in New Zealand was not achieved without cost to the culture and traditional way of life (Maoritanga) of its Maori converts” (MNZ, v; M&M, xii).

In an effort to discover the source of her agenda, I have consulted all of Marjorie Newton’s publications.⁸ She has mastered library and archival research, and she is adept at telling a good story. When coupled with her truly remarkable tenacity, this explains her impressive publishing career. Why has she sought to challenge the traditional Māori Latter-day Saint historical narrative in 1998 and then in 2014, while her *Tiki and Temple*

6. Pākeha is the Māori word for European.

7. See Midgley, “Remembering and Honoring Maori Latter-day Saints,” *Interpreter: A Journal of Mormon Scripture* 21 (2016): 275–90. This is a review of Robert Joseph’s essay entitled “Intercultural Exchange, Matakite Maori and the Mormon Church,” in *Mana Māori and Christianity*, ed. Hugh Morrison, et al. (Wellington, New Zealand: Huia Publishers, 2012), 43–72; and also Selwyn Katene, ed., *Turning the Hearts of the Children: Early Mormon Leaders in the Mormon Church* (Wellington, New Zealand: Steele Roberts Publishers, 2014), which consists of 12 essays on early Māori Latter-day Saints. A second volume was published: Katene, ed., *By Their Fruits You Will Know Them: Early Mormon Leaders in the Mormon Church* (Wellington, New Zealand: Steele Roberts Publishers, 2017), which contains an additional 12 vignettes on early Māori Latter-day Saints. These are similar to some of Newton’s essays (items #5, 24, 25, and 27 in the Appendix, below).

8. See the Appendix, below, where I list all her publications. For what I have uncovered concerning the early roots of her publishing agenda, see Midgley, “Marjorie Newton on ‘The Mormons in Australia’ — A Retrospective Review,” *Interpreter: A Journal of Mormon Scripture* 27 (2017): 143–54. Hereafter cited as “A Retrospective Review.”

was faith-affirming? This constitutes a puzzle I have sought to solve by looking carefully at everything she has published.

Clues to solving this puzzle are found in a remark in *Mormon and Maori* about *Tiki and Temple*:

That book, addressed primarily to a Latter-day Saint audience, was honored by the Mormon History Association with its Best International Book Award for 2012. However, it does not deal with deeper or more scholarly issues. *Mormon and Maori* was originally written as a Ph.D. thesis (dissertation) for the School of Studies in Religion at the University of Sydney and is accordingly a *more objective and more academic* examination of the interaction of Mormonism and Maoritanga. (M&M, vii, emphasis added)

In *Tiki and Temple*, she indicates, she “does not attempt to address the recent scientific debate over Maori origins or current LDS teachings on the subject, but rather explains what the Mormon missionaries believed and taught in their own day and how those teachings resonated with their Maori converts” (T&T, xiv). This appears to be her own justification for publishing both a faith-affirming account of Māori Latter-day Saints and also a “more objective and more academic” account in which she challenges the traditional Māori Latter-day Saint historical narrative as “faithful history,” fashioned by “Mormon apologists,” and hence mythical, fictitious and false.

Māori Saints and Mormon Cultural Imperialism

Newton correctly claims that “many Maori today, including stalwart Church members, want their culture to survive and feel that it exemplifies true Christian principles — not just the outward symbols displayed for tourists, but the deepest Maori values” (M&M, 180), some of which she mentions. However, the “deepest Maori values” constitute what Māori scholars tend to call *tikanga* — that is, the traditional “right” or “correct” ways of living,⁹ and not *māoritanga*, a word that tends to identify the ordinary or usual way things actually are, since the word *māori* means “ordinary,” or “usual.” A century back, *māoritanga* began to mean “culture” in the sense of the usual way Māori behave. Colonization radically challenged and also eroded Māori *tikanga*.

In her concluding remarks in *Mormon and Maori*, Newton opines that “for a small minority” of Māori Saints, “the costs of being a Maori

9. See Cleve Barlow, *Tikanga Whakaaro: Key Concepts in Maori Culture* (Auckland, New Zealand: Oxford University Press, 1998).

Mormon may be too high” (M&M, 180). Why? In her thesis she claims that: “The Mormon Church still speaks with an American voice in its foreign missions and stakes ... Although the Mormon Church may not demand ‘cultural suicide’ from its converts, New Zealand Mormons, in common with all members of the international LDS Church, are implicitly expected to commit what Rana Kabbani termed ‘cultural treason’ if they wish to identify fully with Mormonism” (MNZ, 353).

At the end of her thesis she highlights issues with American cultural imperialism, a crucial version of which is “Mormon cultural imperialism” (MNZ, 316–56). She clearly has a dim view of the impact of American culture outside of the United States, an example of which is the following:

What remains to be seen is how much the present blurring of cultural differences in the industrialized world will trivialize cultural tensions; if American “pop” culture, variously referred to as “Coca-colonization” or the “McDonald’s culture,” continues to conquer the world at its present pace, preservation of *Maoritanga* or any other culture may become an academic question. (MNZ, 355.)

My own review of all 29 of Newton’s publications suggests that it is not individual Americans, some of whom she knows and likes, who ground her concern about “cultural conflict.” Instead, she seems deeply concerned about the enormous social and economic changes that have, especially since WW II, opened large parts of the world to a mixing and blending of cultures. Additionally, she is certain that an alien American church has increasingly insisted that Māori pay a high cultural price if they desire to be faithful Latter-day Saints.

However, in the penultimate paragraph in *Mormon and Maori*, she grants that most Saints do not see it her way:

Nevertheless, despite the problematical issues described in this book, the Mormon Church has grown steadily in New Zealand in both numbers and status until it now occupies a respectable place in New Zealand society ... While there are many thousands of recent converts, there is also a considerable base of multi-generation Maori families strengthening the LDS Church in New Zealand. Most find spiritual satisfaction and happiness in Church attendance, participation in Church programs, and the Mormon way of life (M&M, 181).

She adds the following lament: “Most New Zealand Mormons, both Maori and Pakeha, accept Church teachings unquestionably and remain untouched by

deeper or more difficult issues” (M&M, 181) in both her thesis and in *Mormon and Maori*. I will address these difficult issues she refers to later.

Newton’s Agenda

In her thesis, Newton focuses on what she calls “cultural conflict” between Māori ways and what was brought to them by American Saints. There is little or none of this in *Tiki and Temple*, but it is a major focus of *Mormon and Maori*. In its Preface she insists that

never before have their leaders and missionaries faced the problems associated with socialising converts from such a wide spectrum of cultures. Resurgent nationalism and indigenisation philosophy in many nations also pose problems for Mormon leaders, and recent attempts to strip the LDS Church of its American cultural overtones have been only partially successful. Thus, the history of Mormonism’s impact on its Maori converts and their culture is surprisingly relevant to the wider Church today (M&M, xi.)

Concern about Mormon cultural imperialism thus seems to be the key to both her thesis and *Mormon and Maori*. I therefore sought signs of this concern — and hence her agenda¹⁰ — in what she published on Latter-day Saints in Australia beginning in 1984. This led to “A Retrospective Review,” the published version of her 1986 MA thesis. I sought signs of her concern about “Mormon cultural imperialism” in what she published about the Church of Jesus Christ in Australia. There are some signs of this agenda, though fewer than in her 1998 PhD thesis.

What I have also discovered is that when Newton tells the truly heroic story of the long, very difficult struggle to bring the Church of Jesus Christ to Australia and then later to New Zealand, there is no sign of her concern about a clash between American and native Australian and New Zealand cultures. In her excellent essays on Australian Latter-day Saints (see items 1, 4, 5, 9, 15, 21, and 23 in the Appendix), there are no signs of concern about Mormon cultural imperialism. However, in several other essays on the Church of Jesus Christ in Australia (see items 3, 6, 7, 8, and 13 in the Appendix, below) there is an overt concern about cultural conflict.

10. Some people may read the word *agenda* as being used pejoratively, as somehow implying that I believe Newton has nefarious ulterior motives underlying *Mormon and Maori* or some of her other writings. It is important to understand that is not the way I use the word in this review, and I specifically decry any such implications.

The difference might be either her intended audience or the venue in which she sought to publish. The cultural imperialism about which she complains only seems to rise to the fore when she is discussing the sudden expansion of The Church of Jesus Christ in Australia that began in the decade after World War II. However, concern about cultural conflict becomes dominant when she discusses the faith of Māori Saints.

Some Bungling

In *Mormon and Maori* and in her thesis, she grants that faithful Māori Latter-day Saints are not troubled by what she pictures as the increasingly nefarious impact of Mormon American cultural imperialism. Hence, she hopes that what she calls “those fringe-dwelling New Zealand Latter-day Saints,”¹¹ Pākehā or Māori, who question what they see as Mormon cultural imperialism might ponder this conclusion: “It is only possible ... to travel in one direction ... Any possibility of return has been preempted by the journey itself” (MNZ, 356; M&M, 181).

Newton uses this quote from a scholar speaking of another time and place and people. It is taken out of context from a book by Anthony Pagden. I will provide the context. Pagden is describing the opinions of Denis Diderot (1713–1784), a French Huguenot and hence a staunch Calvinist, who was briefly a Protestant missionary in Brazil.¹² The full passage, with the language quoted by Newton in italics, follows:

Fluid and ultimately porous though Diderot's cultures may have been, they were also thought of as integral and discrete. *It is only possible, as we have seen, to travel in one direction. As with Lery's Norman translators, any possibility of return has been pre-empted by the journey itself.* At best he (or she) who has undergone the trial of travel will be condemned, like Gulliver, to perpetual isolation from those who had once been his fellows. (Pagden, 172)

Pagden's point seems to be that the difficult experiences of the first Europeans to encounter the indigenous peoples in America and the Pacific led to a personal “trial by travel,” which included getting there

11. Those Newton labels “fringe-dwelling Latter-day Saints” are those I label “cultural Mormons.”

12. Anthony Pagden, *European Encounters with the New World: From Renaissance to Romanticism* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1993). Henceforth cited parenthetically as Pagden. Pagden is a distinguished professor of political science at the University of California at Los Angeles.

(and then getting back home again) and also communicating what they had experienced to others.

Writers like Diderot came to believe that cultures, though porous, are not commensurable, which they also believed “was underpinned by the concept of providential order in which all humans should be in harmony with nature” (Pagden, 172). This may also entail the assumption that God does not want a fluid mixing of cultures. Pagden also indicates that Johann Gottfried Herder, a German nationalist, thought that “religion” might somehow “unite all peoples” (Pagden, 172).

Why focus on Newton’s concluding paragraph? It illustrates the problem she has when she shifts from narrations, which she does remarkably well (see Appendix items 1, 2, 4, 5, 9, 15, 19, 20, 21, 22, 23, 24, 25, 27, and 28), to analyses and arguments, which she does not, in either her PhD thesis or *Mormon and Maori*. She is very skilled at archival research, and she can tell a good story, but she becomes unreliable when she speculates about abstractions like “cultural conflict.”

A Passion to Publish; Hitting Some Snags

When Newton’s PhD thesis was approved in February 1998, the Institute for Polynesian Studies, which published her *Southern Cross Saints*,¹³ was no longer publishing books. She had to seek a publisher interested in publishing a book challenging key elements in the Māori Latter-day Saint historical narrative, suggesting that “Mormon cultural imperialism” was harming Māori Saints and making claims about Māori/Mormon mythmaking.

She sought the assistance of the Pacific Area President at the time, Elder Bruce Hafen.¹⁴ He suggested that she approach Ron Esplin, then director of the Joseph Fielding Smith Institute.¹⁵ As a favor to Elder Hafen, Esplin assigned Richard Jensen to have a look at her thesis, which then underwent peer review. Newton was urged to turn the first two chapters of her thesis (MNZ, 1–84) into a narrative history of the faith of Latter-day Saints in New Zealand, which she immediately did. Her

13. Newton, *Southern Cross Saints: The Mormons in Australia* (Laie: Institute for Polynesian Studies, 1991). *Southern Cross Saints* is the published version of her MA thesis. See items 3 and 6, in the Appendix, below.

14. Nothing suggests that Elder Hafen read Newton’s thesis.

15. Until 2005 the Smith Institute was located at Brigham Young University, when it was absorbed by the Church History Department in Salt Lake City, where attention has been on the Joseph Smith Papers project and very closely related projects.

510-page first draft then underwent peer review and was rejected for publication. She was then more strongly urged to fashion an accurate account of the faith of Māori Saints, which was published more than a decade later as *Tiki and Temple*.

Newton explains how she came to write *Tiki and Temple* in the following way:

My completed dissertation,¹⁶ entitled “Mormonism in New Zealand: A Historical Analysis”¹⁷ was to be published by the Joseph Fielding Smith Institute for Church History at Brigham Young University, Provo. When it was suggested that I should write a chronological history of the New Zealand Mission first, publication of the dissertation was delayed until the manuscript of *Tiki and Temple* was completed. Both books were still in the early stages of copy-editing when the institute was closed in 2005. (M&M, xiii)

She describes *Tiki and Temple* as the “second of my studies of the Latter-day Saints in New Zealand” (T&T, xiv), even though it was published two years prior to *Mormon and Maori*. That book represented the ideological core of her more objective doctoral thesis, “Mormonism in New Zealand: A Historical Appraisal,” which was written for the Religious Studies Department¹⁸ of the University of Sydney (1998, forthcoming from Greg Kofford Books) (T&T, xiv).

Confusion over Hagoth

In *Mormon and Maori*, Newton advances what she believes is the primary reason why some Māori, beginning in 1882, rapidly became faithful Latter-day Saints:

16. A *dissertation* in the United States is a *thesis* in Australia.

17. The actual subtitle of her PhD thesis is “A Historical Appraisal,” and not “analysis.” It is both rather common (and very painful) for authors to garble little details with which they are intimately familiar. An observant reader will note that footnote 2 of Midgley, “A Retrospective Review,” indicates that Newton’s PhD thesis was completed in the History Department at Sydney University. But I also explained how she came to transfer to the School of Studies of Religion, when no one in the history department would encourage or embrace her proposal to write about the faith of Māori Latter-day Saints.

18. Eric J. Sharpe (1933–2000), who supervised Newton’s PhD thesis, was the inaugural professor of religious studies in the School of Studies of Religion at Sydney University, which he founded in 1977. For the relevant details drawn from her own accounts, see Midgley, “A Retrospective Review,” 150.

Undoubtedly the Mormon doctrine that had the greatest impact on Maori conversion and that underlay most other reasons for the appeal of the Mormon message for Maori, was the belief that Polynesians are descendants of the expatriate Israelites of the Book of Mormon and are therefore eligible for the redemptive blessings promised to scattered Israel. (M&M, 12)

I consider it a “red flag” when I see words like *undoubtedly* begin what should be an inductive argument intended to yield a conclusion. Newton provides no textual evidence to support her assertion about what is presumably beyond doubt. Instead, she claims that LDS missionaries believed that “Book of Mormon prophecies ... would be fulfilled, and the Lamanites on the isles of the sea, like those in the Americas, would be regenerated” (M&M, 12, emphasis supplied). However, what some LDS missionaries may have believed is not necessarily evidence for her opinion about what had “the greatest impact on Maori conversion.”

She introduces, in the next paragraph, what she claims is a widespread belief that the Māori are the very remote descendants of Hagoth (M&M, 13). I must stress that Hagoth, who is mentioned briefly in Alma 63:5–8, was a Nephite shipbuilder and mariner — both he and his associates are specifically said to be Nephites; they are not Lamanites. In addition, Hagoth, we are told, built an “exceedingly large ship ... and launched it forth into the west sea” (v5), and “many Nephites ... did enter therein ... and took their course northward” (v6). “This man built other ships” (v7). “And ... one other ship also did sail forth” (v8). Newton states: “It was upon the basis of this fragmentary Book of Mormon story [in Alma 63:5–8] that Mormon missionaries found success among the Maori” (M&M 13).

She also claims that a “prior widespread acceptance by Maori of Christian speculation about their Israelitish origin provided a fertile field in which the Mormon missionary message flourished” (M&M, 13). There was, in fact, some Pākehā (European) speculation about the Māori being a remnant of Israel. Māori also tended to see their own very dim situation resulting from the ravages of colonial intrusion explained in stories found in the Old Testament, which had been made available to them by Christian missionaries. She then asserts that,

Although many Mormons (including many Maori Mormons) think that the LDS Church is unique in its belief that Polynesians are related to Native Americans and that both are remnants of Israel, such beliefs were neither new nor unique when the Book of Mormon was published in 1830. (M&M, 12–13)

However, she neglects to mention that Pākehā speculation about the Māori being a very remote remnant of ancient Israel did not link them with any indigenous peoples in America. Instead, the belief that the Māori are somehow linked to America is a unique Latter-day Saint belief, rooted in the idea that they are at least partly the descendants of Nephite mariners mentioned in the Book of Mormon.

At least 25 times in the first chapter of *Mormon and Maori*, when Newton refers to Hagoth, she identifies him and his associates as Lamanites, even though twice she correctly identifies Hagoth and those mariners as Nephites (M&M, 12, 32). She seems to ignore the fact that Hagoth was *Nephite* in her argument that, by teaching the Māori that they were *Lamanites*, LDS missionaries clashed with what she calls *maoritanga*, and thereby challenged both Māori traditions about their own origins as well as recent secular speculation about such matters.

Wrongly Insisting on “Lamanite Descent”

Mormon and Maori ends with a chapter entitled “Mormon and Maori?” (M&M, 149–81). The chapter title is an interrogative that signals that there is a radical tension between being a Latter-day Saint and being a Māori. However, she grants that

for the majority of today's Maori Latter-day Saints, many of whom are third-, fourth-, or fifth-generation descendants of early Maori converts who accepted the Mormon gospel because of *this teaching*, *Lamanite descent* is still a fundamental element of their self-identification. (M&M, 180, emphasis supplied)

The fact is that Māori Latter-day Saints actually both venerate and read the Book of Mormon. She knows this is the case, since she quotes Grant Underwood as follows:

To this day, Maori Latter-day Saints cherish the Book of Mormon as *their* story, the account of their people in distant antiquity before they sailed their *waka* (canoes) to Aotearoa. The American missionaries may have carried it to them and the American *Pakeha* Joseph Smith may have translated it, but for well over a century it has been read as the story of *their* ancestors. (M&M, 180)¹⁹

The Book of Mormon was read by the older Māori I knew in 1950–1952 as “their story” in the sense that it was a tribal history

19. Quoted by Newton from Underwood, “Mormonism, the Maori and Cultural Authenticity,” *Journal of Pacific History* 35, no. 2 (2000): 140.

whose narrative was very much like their own; they had long been and still unfortunately were much like the people described in the Book of Mormon. They knew and understood its contents better than any LDS missionary,²⁰ including myself. When I encountered Māori in 1950, they were not pious stuffed-shirts; even though they knew they were of Nephite descent, they would say that, much like naughty missionaries, they sometimes misbehaved like Lamanites. They were often adept at seeing how stories and prophetic teaching were woven together and then how those teachings applied to their own tribal identities.

Why would Māori, for whom the Book of Mormon is “their book,” incorrectly see themselves as having “Lamanite descent” when there is exactly nothing in that book to justify such a belief? Gina Colvin, who was raised as a Latter-day Saint but who has now become an Anglican, is the only Māori of whom I am aware who muddles Hagoth with the Lamanites.²¹ However, she could merely be following Newton’s lead on this matter.

Confused by the Debate over DNA

Why make those Nephite mariners who sailed away into the “west sea” into Lamanites, when the language found in Alma 36 mentions only Nephites? Newton seems to insist on the Māori being Lamanites because doing so fits her own misunderstanding of the recent debate over DNA and the Book of Mormon. Much of this controversy was advanced by two former Latter-day Saints, neither of whom are population geneticists.²² Newton appears to use the opinions of the Australian “molecular biologist and ex-Mormon Simon Southerton” (M&M, 27) to justify rejecting her own false idea that Māori believe that they are Lamanites, which is

20. See Midgley, “A Singular Reading: The Maori and the Book of Mormon,” in Davis Bitton, ed., *Mormons, Scripture, and the Ancient World: Studies in Honor of John Sorenson* (Provo, UT: Foundation for Ancient and Mormon Studies, 1998), 245–76. Hereafter cited as “A Singular Reading.” See also Midgley, “A Māori View of the Book of Mormon,” *Journal of Book of Mormon Studies* 8, no. 1 (1999): 4–11, 77. Hereafter cited as “A Māori View.”

21. See Gina Colvin, “Mormon and Maori by Marjorie Newton,” *Journal of Mormon History* 42, no. 1 (January 2016): 242–46. Colvin states: “In Chapter 1, Newton provides an astute and fearless treatment of the complexities and contradictions associated with the Lamanite/Hagoth mythologies” (242–43). One can excuse Peter Lineham, who is neither a Latter-day Saint nor Māori, for thinking that Māori Saints see themselves as Lamanites. See his essay entitled “The Mormon Message in the Context of Maori Culture,” *Journal of Mormon History* 17/1 (1981):80–85 (under the heading “The Appeal of the House of Israel Doctrine”).

22. Both Simon Southerton and Thomas W. Murphy are strident and discredited critics of the Church of Jesus Christ.

scattered around two chapters in *Mormon and Maori*. In addition, she may not realize that it is a mistake to take seriously Simon Southerton's polemic about the Book of Mormon (M&M, 27, 31, 178–79). Finally, the Book of Mormon provides the correct answer to her question: “Nephites or Lamanites?” (M&M, 32–33),²³ which she then ignores.

Newton claims that “many Mormon apologists” fashioned a Mesoamerican limited geography for the Book of Mormon as a result of DNA studies (see M&M, 27–28). The fact is that John Sorenson (and others) were advocating a Mesoamerican (and hence a limited) geography for the Book of Mormon long before the debate over DNA began. She does not seem to know that the argument for both a limited geography and a Mesoamerican location for the events depicted in the Book of Mormon flowed from very careful attention to the geographical clues in the Book of Mormon. This led to what John Clark called an “internal map,” which turned out to be consonant with a portion of Mesoamerica.²⁴

In this same section of *Mormon and Maori*, Newton indicates that “orthodox Mormons are still expected to subscribe to the literal historicity of the Book of Mormon. ‘On this we draw a line in the sand,’ stated Mormon Apostle Jeffrey Holland in 1994” (M&M, 33). Then she adds the following:

Tied to acceptance of the historicity of the Book of Mormon is the uncanonised Mormon belief about Polynesian origins. The recent scholarly debate over conclusions reached by scientists researching the DNA of Native Americans and Polynesians — that they are unrelated — has added another layer to the unquestioning faith required of those Maori Mormons aware of the arguments and counter-arguments presented. (M&M, 33)²⁵

Newton argues that belief in literal descent from Nephites adds another “layer of unquestioning faith required of Maori Saints.” Having to “subscribe to the literal historicity of the Book of Mormon” is already

23. Civility prevented Māori and other Latter-day Saints from pointing out to Elder Spencer Kimball that Hagoth mariners were Nephites.

24. See John E. Clark, “A Key for Evaluating Nephite Geographies,” *Mormon Studies Review* 23, no. 1 (2011): 13–43. A version of this essay and the core of Clark’s argument was first published in 1989 and was available nine years prior to the completion of Newton’s thesis and 25 years prior to the publication of *Mormon and Maori*.

25. Those with faith in God should be always seeking greater understanding, and this seems to me to require questions, the answers to which are available in the “best books” and also by genuine prayer. Hence, Newton’s assertions about “unquestioning faith” seems a bit quirky.

presumably a sufficient burden. Removing this additional burden would thus be a blessing to Māori and other Polynesian and Native American Saints, if indeed it has been disproved by Southerton and Murphy.

Her argument in the first chapter of *Mormon and Maori* seems to be that, by allowing the publication of an essay by John Sorenson in 1984 in which he sets out a limited geography,²⁶ the Brethren have thereby set in place the grounds for rejecting the belief that the Māori are in any way children of Lehi. Hence it is both foolish and unnecessary for the Brethren to continue to urge Māori Saints to seek the prophetic promises available to Lehi's remote descendants. She also insists that Māori were badly misled when they were identified as "children of Lehi" in their Temple dedication prayer.

The flatly false assertion that DNA studies by Southerton and Murphy led John Sorenson to fashion a limited geography for the Book of Mormon leads to the following:

Coupled with increasing scientific evidence of multiple migrations to America, and continuing lack of archaeological and linguistic evidence for the existence of Book of Mormon peoples in the Americas, many Mormon apologists began to re-examine traditional assumptions about the Book of Mormon." (M&M, 27)

However, increasing "evidence of multiple migrations to America" only enhances the plausibility of the three migrations to America described in the Book of Mormon.

What Newton described in 2012 as the "recent scientific debate over Maori origins or current LDS teachings on the subject" (T&T, xiv) thus turns out to be the debate over DNA and the Book of Mormon. Without being aware of what Latter-day Saint geneticists have published about population genetics and the Book of Mormon, she insists that the Brethren ought to officially jettison any idea that remote descendants of Lehiites exist outside a limited area in Mesoamerica. She makes this claim based on what she believes is a false belief about Māori origins, supported by DNA evidence, but she misunderstands what Mormon apologists have written in response about DNA and the Book of Mormon.

Despite her comments about Book of Mormon historicity, she does not deny that there were Lehiites. Instead, she seems to assume that Southerton has only proven that remote descendants of Lehi cannot now be *outside the limited area of Mesoamerica*. This false assumption seems to be why she takes exception with John Sorenson's argument for

26. See John Sorenson, "Digging into the Book of Mormon," *Ensign* (September 1984): 27–37.

a limited geography (see M&M, 27–28) with what she sees as official approval and also for a Mesoamerican location of the bulk of the events depicted in the Book of Mormon.

She insists that because the Brethren seemingly approved John Sorenson's limited geography, they now can and should officially jettison the idea that there are any remote descendants of Lehitese outside of a limited area in Mesoamerica. She wrongly assumes that no Lehitese could ever have traveled outside of the area where they initially lived. In addition, she does not address the fact that Southerton's attack was on the historical authenticity of the Book of Mormon and hence was not an argument that confines Lehitese and their remote ancestors to a limited area. She also argues that the belief that some of the remote ancestors of the Māori (and other Polynesians) were Nephite mariners would be easy to officially jettison because it never has been canonized. However, it is texts that are canonized, not interpretations of texts.

Newton attempts to respond to Southerton's claim "that LDS leaders, faced with unanswerable scientific data about Native American and Polynesian origins, are trapped in a situation in which they cannot make fundamental doctrinal changes without damaging the faith of millions of adherents" (M&M, 178). She does so by asserting that "[a]ccepting a changed perspective on their origins may be difficult, but not devastating, for the majority of Maori Saints" (M&M, 180). She then mentions that some past practices, like taking the sacrament emblems only with the right hand, have been abandoned without the Saints even noticing (M&M, 178–79).

She also claims that a "formal retreat" from the teachings that some of the ancestors of the Māori were Lamanites through Hagoth, "would in no wise mean that Maori were not Israelites in the eyes of the Mormon Church" (M&M, 180). However, in her own assessment of the early Pākehā speculation about Māori origins, she debunks the belief that the Māori could actually be a very remote remnant of ancient Israel (see M&M, 13–15).

Trashing the Māori Latter-day Saint Historical Narrative

In *Tiki and Temple*, Newton relies on textual sources that include accounts of divine manifestations to Māori. For instance, she relies heavily on the remarkable contemporary account written by William Bromley,²⁷ who arrived in Auckland, New Zealand, in December 1880 to serve as

27. Bromley's detailed diaries and other manuscripts have been published as Bromley, *None Shall Excel Thee: The Life and Journals of William Michael Bromley*, ed., Fred Bromley Hodson (Yorba Linda, CA: privately printed, 1990). Hereafter cited as *None Shall Excel Thee*.

Australasian Mission President. He had been instructed by the Brethren to take the gospel to the Māori. He struggled to do this. Some of his very few fellow missionaries made some unwise and even bizarre efforts to reach and teach the Māori, which Newton describes in detail, often following Bromley's diary.

These efforts all failed, until on 5 April 1881, Bromley set apart William McDonnell, who had joined the Church of Jesus Christ in Auckland after he arrived in New Zealand from Ireland, to be a missionary to the Māori. He also blessed McDonnell to learn the Māori language, which he immediately began to do.²⁸ On 18 October 1881, McDonnell baptized Ngataki, who was the first Māori to join the Church in New Zealand.²⁹ However, the real breakthrough came later. On 17 December 1882, Thomas Levis Cox³⁰ who was born in England in 1845 and who, with his family, had moved to New Zealand where he became a Latter-day Saint, invited Bromley to spend Christmas with him in Cambridge, which is 91 miles from Auckland and 14 miles south of Hamilton.

Bromley indicates that, as a result of didactic dreams, McDonnell also made the journey to Cambridge for Christmas. McDonnell arrived unexpectedly at the Cox residence before breakfast on 24 December. After breakfast they set out to contact some Māori who were camped near Cambridge.³¹ Later that day they met Hare Teimana, who desired a blessing for his very ill daughter, which was given. Teimana also told McDonnell that he had been visited by the Apostle Peter, who was dressed in white clothing, and who showed him the three Latter-day Saints—that is, Bromley, Cox and McDonnell—in a vision, so that he recognized them as agents with Apostolic authority.³² Hare Teimana, his wife, and one other adult were baptized in the Waikato river on Christmas Day, 1882.

McDonnell then returned to Auckland, but Bromley soon summoned him back to Cambridge to interpret for other Māori anxious to hear the

28. *None Shall Excel Thee*, 123, 310.

29. *Ibid.*, 147, 311. McDonnell, who was in charge of the graving (dry) dock in Auckland, met Ngataki as part of his work.

30. Thomas Cox had previously been a member of the Auckland Branch, where he constantly quarreled with William McDonnell, who was the branch president. The Cox family shifted to Cambridge, where Thomas Cox hoped to make a living as a bootmaker.

31. *None Shall Excel Thee*, 293.

32. *Ibid.*, 294–95. Some slightly differing, mostly trivial details in this story depend upon whether one follows Bromley's contemporary account or on the later reminiscence of McDonnell and/or Cox. One should keep in mind that only McDonnell could communicate with Teimana in Māori, Cox could only record later what he remembered McDonnell telling him and Bromley about what Teimana said.

LDS missionary message, which took place on Sunday, 31 December 1882. On the following day, six more baptisms took place. These and additional conversions led to the establishment of the first Māori LDS branch, which was located in tiny Waotu, 18 miles south of Cambridge.

One cannot fashion even a murky narrative of the very first conversions of Māori to the Church of Jesus Christ in New Zealand without mentioning the encounter of Bromley, Cox, and McDonnel, who served as translator with Hare Teimana, and those subsequent baptisms. However, in her thesis, Marjorie Newton made some critical factual errors. For instance, in her thesis, she located those crucial events at least once in Huntly (MNZ, 15), which is 35 miles north of Cambridge, but also on the Waikato River. She also missed other details of that important event.

In the section entitled “The First Maori Branch” in “Newton’s Unpublished Manuscript,” she wrote the following:

In August 1882, Thomas and Hannah Cox, English emigrants who joined the Mormon Church in Auckland in 1880, moved to Cambridge in the Waikato, where Thomas set up business as a boot and shoemaker. Here they became friendly with the local Maori tribe. Seeing an opportunity, they invited President Bromley to spend Christmas with them. On Christmas Eve, a Sunday, they were joined by McDonnel, and the three men spent the evening preaching to a group of Maori. Later that evening, after discussing Mormon doctrine in a chief’s home, they laid hands on and blessed his sick daughter who quickly recovered. On Christmas Day in 1882, the Maori chief Hare Teimana, his wife Pare and another Maori, possibly Hare Katere (Harry Carter) were baptized in the nearby river. (“Chapter 2 – 1878–1 887,” 29.)

Some of the more problematic details in this paragraph include the following:

- Newton presents no evidence that Teimana was a Māori “chief.”
- Neither Bromley nor Cox could understand Māori. Without McDonnel, they could have only passed out some leaflets that McDonnel had previously managed to have translated into Māori.

- On 24 December 1882, McDonnel arrived at the Cox home before breakfast, after which they set out to contact Māori camped near Cambridge.³³
- On 24 December 1882, those three fellows did not discuss “Mormon doctrine” with Teimana. Instead, he told McDonnel how he had come to recognize them as authorized agents for the Apostle Peter, and asked them to bless his very ill daughter — she had not eaten in days — which they did.
- On 25 December 1882 (Christmas Day), when the three Latter-day Saints visited Teimana again, his daughter was recovering nicely — she had even eaten some strawberries. Then McDonnel explained to Teimana, his wife and probably Hare Te Katere (Harry Carter) what being baptized entailed, prior to that being done that evening in the Waikato River. Other interested Māori observed the baptism.

After quoting Bromley’s descriptions of the baptism of Teimana, his wife and perhaps Hare Te Katere in the Waikato River, Newton indicates that “McDonnel’s version of the story portrayed his visit to Cambridge and subsequent teaching of the chief and his family solely as the result of inspiration and the happenings of one day” (“Chapter 2 — 1878–1887,” 30). She then argues that “[t]he Cox family deserves more credit for the first successful introduction of the Restored Gospel to the Maori people” (“Chapter 2 — 1878–1887,” 31). Her reason for celebrating Thomas and Hannah Cox’s role in the first “successful introduction of the Restored Gospel to the Maori people” is that Samuel Cox (1871–1967), who was the oldest son of Thomas and Hannah Cox, and presumably “a witness to the events” (when he was barely eleven), wrote a letter in 1957 in which he claimed that his father “had become very friendly with the three Maori” who were baptized on Christmas Day in 1882. They were, he claimed, “already prepared for and waiting for baptism when Bromley and McDonnel arrived

33. These Māori seem to me to have been camped near Cambridge to conduct business with the Maori Land Court. The Crown required Māori, among other things, to register private land ownership of what had previously not been private property in the pre-colonial Māori world. This would explain why the first Māori LDS Branch was in Wautu, which is 18 miles south of Cambridge, since that was where they came from.

in Cambridge" ("Chapter 2 — 1878–1887," 30).³⁴ This letter was written 75 years after the events that took place in December 1882.³⁵

In her PhD thesis, she tells a slightly different version of this important story. She begins by mentioning that Bromley "set apart" McDonnel "to take the Mormon message to the Maori," after which he eventually baptized Ngataki (MNZ, 15), then writes:

Fifteen months later, Bromley and McDonnel baptized several Maori *near Huntly*. McDonnel's story of the December 1882 visit there implies that he was suddenly inspired to follow the mission president, who was visiting Church members Thomas and Hannah Cox in the Waikato town; that, meeting the Maori who had been prepared by a vision, he and Bromley taught them the gospel that evening (24 December) and baptized the first of them on Christmas Day. (MNZ, 15, emphasis supplied)

Then Newton adds that Samuel Cox "later stated that his father had become very friendly with the local Maori tribe and that the three baptized were already prepared and waiting when Bromley and McDonnel arrived in Cambridge" ("Chapter 2 — 1878–1887," 30). In this account, Newton uses this letter, written 75 years after the events it presumably describes, to trump Bromley's detailed contemporary diary and the later reminiscences of William McDonnel and Thomas Cox, Samuel's father.

A Step Forward

Those who were then at the Smith Institute must be praised for insisting that Marjorie Newton produce the much more accurate narrative history that was eventually published as *Tiki and Temple*. In this book she correctly indicates that Māori Saints were prepared by their own prophets for their initial encounters with the message of Latter-day Saint missionaries. She even included a slightly more accurate version of the story about Hare Teimana's encounter with (or dream of) the Apostle Peter (T&T, 32–33). She explains that Māori "prophets" played a role in generating a Māori community of Saints (see T&T, 23–24, 37, 41–43).

34. In "Chapter 2 — 1878–1887," Newton cites "Samuel Cox, letter to Relief Society Magazine Editors and Association, dated Pocatello, Idaho, 13 March 1957. Typescript copy inserted in the Manuscript History of the Church in New Zealand between 22 June and 13 July 1880" (31n73). This letter was somehow inserted in the Manuscript History between items dated 22 June and 13 July 1880, 17 months prior to the events that took place late in 1882.

35. Craig Foster provided expert assistance in tracking down details about Samuel Cox.

However, in her first attempt to fashion a narrative account of the faith of Māori Saints, she never mentions Arama Toiroa, Paora Potangaroa, or other Māori seers.

Downplaying Specific Prophecies

In her thesis, Newton addresses the claim that Mormons cite Māori prophecies as evidence of the divine preparation of the Maori people. She claims that the prophecies merely foretold a rather vague, generalized list of items and insists that Mormon apologists have not confronted the fact that “few of these items are characteristic of Mormonism” (MNZ, 275). She casually mentions that the true messengers “would be recognized because they would pray with their arms raised to the square” (M&M, 3; cf. MNZ, 275). What she does not indicate is that in Paora Potangaroa’s *He Kawenata*,³⁶ which he dictated in 1881, he specifically mentions that the true messengers would pray with their right arms to the square. When those Latter-day Saint missionaries who turned up in the Wairarapa in 1883 prayed with their right arms raised to the square, they were immediately recognized as true messengers from God. (During my life, as a young boy, this mode of prayer was not uncommon for blessing the emblems of the sacrament.)

The prophetic proclamation by Arama Toiroa in 1830 was that the true messengers would raise both arms over their heads when they prayed, which is how Alma Greenwood, Ira Hinckley, and William Stewart prayed at Korongata/Bridge Pa where some who were familiar with Toiroa’s prophecies then lived. This, and several other very distinctive behaviors, quickly led to the conversion of those at Korongata and then elsewhere among those familiar with Toiroa’s words.

Newton uses the expression, “variously foretold,” in relation to these prophecies, which obscures the fact that different Māori seers provided very specific indications that the true messengers had arrived for their own people. It was not a “one size fits all” sort of thing.³⁷ She has jumbled together several proclamations of Māori *Matakite* in an effort to dismiss the role they played in the conversion of Māori Saints. This she did in both her theses with essentially the same language. However, the

36. Keep in mind that *kawenata* (covenant, testament) is a loan word from English.

37. If in doubt, then please watch Robert Joseph, “Māori Responses to the Mormon Church — A Commentary,” YouTube video, 1:13:05, posted by The Interpreter Foundation, Aug 8, 2017, <http://interpreterfoundation.org/maori-responses-to-the-mormon-church/>.

specific details of the account are essential in assessing what Professor Robert Joseph identifies as the “Māori Latter-day Saint historical narrative.”³⁸

Failure to Fully Consider Alternative Viewpoints

I have previously called attention to an essay by Robert Joseph,³⁹ a Latter-day Saint scholar who set out significant new details about those whom Latter-day Saints, including Marjorie Newton, have called “prophets,” but whom the Māori call *Matakite* (seers). They played a crucial role in preparing some Māori *iwi* (tribes) for Latter-day Saint missionaries and their message.⁴⁰ Newton is fully aware of Professor Joseph’s essay, the contents of which challenge her writings in Chapter 8 of her thesis (MNZ, 271–77) and in the beginning of *Mormon and Maori* (M&M, 2–3).

In fact, in *Mormon and Maori*, Newton cites Professor Joseph’s essay in her bibliography (M&M, 200) and then quotes portions of the opening paragraph of his essay, where she indicates that he “has summarized some ... often overlooked consequences of the imbalance resulting from the introduction of Western culture into colonial New Zealand” (M&M, 159).

Professor Joseph began his essay with a Māori prophecy. His English translation read as follows:

Behind the tattooed face, a stranger stands,
He will inherit the world — he is white.⁴¹

What followed was a detailed account of some of the Māori seers who played a crucial role in the story of the faith of Māori Saints. Newton, however, does not seem to be even aware of the names of some of these Māori *matakite*. In addition, though she quotes language out of context from Professor Joseph’s essay, she never hints that he provided valuable new information on the Māori seers who opened the way for the Latter-day Saint missionaries and their message.

Instead of engaging Professor Joseph’s evidence and arguments, Newton only quotes portions of the opening paragraph of his essay, where he introduces the actual cultural context in which seers opened the way for Māori to become faithful Latter-day Saints. I will quote the entire paragraph, with the portions she quotes in *italics*:

38. Joseph, “Intercultural Exchange,” 51, 58, 62, and 63.

39. Midgley, “Remembering and Honoring,” 279–84.

40. Joseph, “Intercultural Exchange,” 43–72.

41. See Joseph, “Intercultural Exchange,” 43, for the source of this prophecy.

According to Ngati Whatu sources, the prophecy above was uttered by their tribal tohunga matakite (seer), Titahi, who foretold the bittersweet arrival of the Pakeha and the subsequent impacts of European contact, which thrust the Māori world view into a state of perilous imbalance as had been prophesied. *Land and natural resources loss through unjust wars, confiscations and their legal machinations wreaked havoc on the relationship between people and the natural environment. The forcible individualisation of land, property and world values in the Native Land Court disturbed the balance between members of kin groups.* Introduced diseases and addictive substances — alcohol, tobacco, coffee, tea and sugar — decimated tribal populations, and undermined Māori health and well-being. Christianity damaged in many ways the connection between the people and the gods, *and the individualistic and economic assumptions of European capitalism and Western liberalism destroyed traditional reciprocity economics, the equilibrium between kin, the physical and metaphysical world, the environment and the fundamental obligations to past, present and future generations.*⁴²

None of the relentless, bleak unraveling of the traditional Māori way of life was the work of Latter-day Saint missionaries, or of the quirks of mission presidents or missionaries, or the result of “the inadequacy of LDS Church policies for non-Western indigenous converts” about which Newton complains. The unraveling of the traditional Māori way of life was well on its way when LDS missionaries suddenly found Māori who were prepared for them and their message by their own seers, and in various other stunning ways. Newton tends to ignore, downplay, or explain this away in her presumably “more objective and more academic” thesis and in its published version, but not in *Tiki and Temple*.

Latter-day Saint missionaries made contact with Māori many years after the radical degradation and decline of their world was in full swing. It was, as Joseph points out, “the bittersweet arrival of the Pakeha” that provided the context for truly remarkable cultural interchange that took place between the Māori and Latter-day Saint missionaries in which both were (and still are) blessed. In the dismal situation in which the Māori found themselves by 1880, with rapid decline well on its way, and a desperate scramble to preserve Māori resources and identity, some were

42. Ibid.

anxious for answers to the evils they faced. Then Māori *matakite* opened the way for the Latter-day Saint message. What those missionaries offered, among other things, was a genuine revival of Māori moral discipline. Faithful Saints were thereby shielded from the very attractive but also soul-destroying beliefs, practices, vices, and addictions made available by their British colonizers. These base behaviors even now have much of the Māori world teetering on the rim of an abyss. The fact is that faithful Māori Saints, in the face of the growing degradation that many Māori face, have become much better Māori. In addition, Latter-day Saint missionaries who enter their charmed world have also become more solid Saints.

Finally, at the risk of being seen as immodest, I must point out that, in addition to not genuinely engaging the work of those Newton clearly denigrates as “Mormon apologists” (MNZ, 275)—that is, those who advance “the Mormon faithful history interpretation” (M&M, 1) of the grounds and contents of the faith of Māori Saints — she has ignored two of my own essays. The first of these was published in 1998,⁴³ shortly after her PhD thesis was approved; the second was published in 1999, while my wife and I directed the Lorne Street LDS Institute in Auckland, New Zealand.⁴⁴

Some Concluding Comments

In her thesis, as I have demonstrated, Newton strives to expose the clash between an alien American church and Māori culture; she also opines about the “role of myth in Maori Mormonism” (MNZ, vi). She strives to demythologize the “faithful history” version of the faith of Māori Saints advanced by “Mormon apologists.” Her chapter entitled “Mormon Legends in New Zealand” (M&M, 79–110) is a sustained and also strained effort at debunking what she claims is clumsy, crude embellishment and/or outright fabrication of accounts of miracles (M&M, 89–107).

She describes what she labels “three legends” that “provide classic case studies of the way religious myths grow, develop, and become entrenched” (M&M, 79). Then, under the chapter subheading “Implications for the Church,” she asks: “What, then, can be made of an apostle, later president of the LDS Church” (she has in mind Elder David O. McKay) “promoting a story that was, it appears, at worst fabricated, at best exaggerated?” (M&M, 107). Her conclusion is that the stories she strives to debunk in Chapter 3 of *Mormon and Maori* “fit the category of ‘myth’ rather than history” (M&M, 110). This is also,

43. Midgley, “A Singular Reading,” 245–76.

44. Midgley, “A Māori View,” 4–11, 77.

as I have demonstrated, her “objective” stance on Māori Saints being providentially prepared for the Church of Jesus Christ by their own seers.

Newton ends her assessment of what she considers mythmaking by quoting what Eric J. Sharpe, the religious studies professor who supervised her thesis, once said on a radio station about a famous Australian historian with whom he strongly disagreed on political issues: “history written for propaganda purposes ... is bad history. There is no easier way to bear false witness than to misrepresent those who are no longer able to defend themselves, merely in order to comfort the true believers” (M&M, 112). This is, of course, the reason that every effort ought to be made to give serious attention to the Māori Latter-day Saint historical narrative.

Addendum

In this essay I have not addressed Marjorie Newton’s comments about the Māori *Io* cult or its close relationship with the initiation that elite Māori men once underwent in a *whare wānanga* (house of learning). I have previously shown that *Tiki and Temple* would have been improved by a careful study of what was imparted in those *wānanga*, since those so initiated were both able to grasp what Latter-day Saint missionaries presented and to assist in their efforts to take their message to other Māori. The reason, of course, is that what they had been taught meshed so well with what they heard from Latter-day Saint missionaries.⁴⁵

Appendix: Marjorie Newton’s Writings⁴⁶

1986

1. “Pioneering the Gospel in Australia,” *Ensign* (October 1986): 32–41. This series of essays consists of Part One, “New Light on the First Missionaries,” 32–34; Part Two, “Hunted, Fished and Gathered,” 38–35; Part Three, “The First Half of the Twentieth Century,” 38–41.

45. See Midgley, “Remembering and Honoring,” 286–89. See also my essay entitled “Maori Latter-day Saint Faith,” *Interpreter* 8 (2014): 57–62, as well as my review of *Tiki and Temple* in the *Journal of Mormon History* 40/1 (2014): 253–56.

46. I appreciate Lavina Anderson’s providing me with a copy of “CV–Marjorie Newton,” which brought to my attention three items with which I was not previously familiar. I have also located an essay by Lynda Bakker and Majorie [sic?] Newton, “Temple Crowns in Australia,” *Ensign* (September 1984): 77–78. Marjorie Newton may have co-authored this item.

2. *Latter-day Saints in Bankstown* (Bankstown, New South Wales, Australia: privately printed, 1986). This was published by a Committee of Saints in the Bankstown Ward of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints for the Bankstown New South Wales Diamond Jubilee.
 3. "Southern Cross Saints: The Mormon Church in Australia" (MS honors thesis, History Department, University of Sydney, 1986).
- 1987**
4. "The Gathering of the Australian Saints in the 1850s," *BYU Studies Quarterly* 27, no. 2 (Spring 1987): 67–78.
- 1990**
5. "Rosa Clara: Bravery on the Pacific," *Ensign* (August 1990): 54–55.
- 1991**
6. *Southern Cross Saints: The Mormons in Australia* (Laie, HI: Institute for Polynesian Studies, 1991). This is the published version of Newton's MA thesis (item 3).
 7. "Almost Like Us: The American Socialization of Australian Converts," *Dialogue* 24, no. 3 (1991): 9–20.
 8. "Mormonism becomes a Mainline Religion: An Australian Viewpoint," *Dialogue* 24, no. 4 (Winter 1991): 74–78.
- 1992**
9. "Father of Joseph's Daughter: John Murdoch," *Journal of Mormon History* 18, no. 2 (Fall 1992): 177–93.
 10. *Hero or Traitor: A Biographical Study of Charles Wandell* (Independence, Missouri: Independence Press, 1992).
- 1993**
11. Review of an exhibit called "Come, Let Us Rejoice" (the Relief Society Sesquicentennial Exhibition at the Museum of Church History and Art, Salt Lake City), March 1992–February 1993, in the *Journal of Mormon History* 19, no. 1 (Spring 1993): 177–80.
- 1996**
12. "'Seduced Away': Early Mormon Documents in Australia," *BYU Studies Quarterly* 35, no.3 (1995): 149–90.
 13. "Towards 2000: Mormons in Australia," *Dialogue* 29, no. 1 (Spring 1996): 193–206.
 14. "From Tolerance to 'House Cleaning': LDS Leadership Response to Maori Marriage Customs, 1890–1990," *Journal of Mormon History* 22/2 (Fall 1996): 72–91.
- 1997**
15. "Australia's Pioneer Saints," *Ensign* (February 1997): 44–51.

1998

16. "Mormonism in New Zealand: A Historical Appraisal" (PhD thesis, School of Studies of Religion, University of Sydney, 1998).

1999

17. Review of The Journals of William E. McLellin, 1831–1836, in the *Journal of Mormon History* 25, no. 2 (Fall 1999): 245–48.

2000

18. Review of New Mormon Studies CD-ROM (by Smith Research Associates, 1998), *Journal of Mormon History* 26, no. 1 (Spring 2000): 203–205.

2002

19. "My Family, My Friends, My Faith," *BYU Studies Quarterly* 41, no. 1 (Spring 2002): 141–46. (This is a personal essay that won second prize in a *BYU Studies* contest in 1996.)

2008

20. "The Gathering of Australian Saints (Mormons) in Australia," in *Proclamation to the People: Nineteenth-century Mormonism and the Pacific Basin Frontier*, Laurie F. Maffly-Kipp and Reid L. Nielsen, eds. (Salt Lake City: University of Utah Press, 2008), 185–97.
21. "Nineteenth Century Pakeha Mormons in New Zealand," in *Proclamation to the People: Nineteenth-century Mormonism and the Pacific Basin Frontier*, Laurie F. Maffly-Kipp and Reid L. Nielsen, eds. (Salt Lake City: University of Utah Press, 2008), 228–54.
22. "The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints (Mormons) in Australia," in *Encyclopedia of Religion in Australia*, ed. James Jupp (Cambridge University Press, 2009), 375–79.

2012

23. *Tiki and Temple: The Mormons in New Zealand, 1854–1958* (Salt Lake City: Greg Kofford Books, 2012).

2014

24. *Mormon and Maori* (Salt Lake City: Greg Kofford Books, 2014).
25. "'Hope in the Gospel': Rosa Clara Friedlander Logie (1837–1913)," in *Women in the Latter-days, Volume 2: 1837–1913*, eds. Richard E. Turley and Brittany Chapman (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 2014), 196–209.
26. "Her Very Presence Is a Sermon: Mere Mete Whaanga," in *Women in the Latter-days, Volume 3: 1846–1870*, eds. Richard

E. Turley and Brittany Chapman (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 2014), 252–62.

27. “Give of Myself to the End’: Polly Tuawatea Deven Duncan,” *Women in the Latter-days, Volume 4: 1871–1900*, eds. Richard E. Turley and Brittany Chapman (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 2014), 82–96 (endnotes at 317–20).

2017

28. (With Tina Dill), “Matthew Cowley: Beloved Apostle of the Pacific,” *Church History, The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-Day Saints*, May 30, 2017, <https://history.lds.org/article/matthew-cowley-beloved-apostle-of-the-pacific?lang=eng>.

Louis Midgley (*Ph.D. Brown University*) is an emeritus professor of political science at Brigham Young University, where he taught the history of political philosophy, which includes efforts of Christian churchmen and theologians to identify, explain, understand and cope with the evils in this world. Dr. Midgley has therefore had an abiding interest in both dogmatic and systematic theology and the alternatives to both. His doctoral dissertation was on the religious socialist political ideology of Paul Tillich, a once famous German American Protestant theologian, most famous for his systematic theology which is a radical elaboration of classical theism. Dr. Midgley’s encounter with the writings of Leo Strauss, an influential Jewish philosopher/intellectual historian drew his attention to the radical challenge posed by what is often called modernity to both the wisdom of Jerusalem, which is grounded on divine revelation, and also the contrasting, competing wisdom of Athens, which was fashioned by unaided human reason. Dr. Midgley has an interest in the ways in which communities of faith have responded to the challenges posed by modernity to faith in God grounded on divine special revelation.

“BY SMALL MEANS”: RETHINKING THE LIAHONA

Timothy Gervais and John L. Joyce

Abstract: *The Liahona’s faith-based functionality and miraculous appearance have often been viewed as incongruous with natural law. This paper attempts to reconcile the Liahona to scientific law by displaying similarities between its apparent mechanisms and ancient navigation instruments called astrolabes. It further suggests the Liahona may have been a wedding dowry Ishmael provided to Lehi’s family. The paper displays the integral connection Nephi had to the Liahona’s functionality and how this connection more clearly explains the lack of faith displayed by Nephi’s band during the journey than traditional conceptions of its faith-based functionality.*

“Yet I will say with regard to miracles, there is no such thing save to the ignorant — that is, there never was a result wrought out by God or by any of His creatures without there being a cause for it. There may be results, the causes of which we do not see or understand, and what we call miracles are no more than this — they are the results or effects of causes hidden from our understandings ... [I]t is hard to get the people to believe that God is a scientific character, that He lives by science or strict law, that by this He is, and by law He was made what He is; and will remain to all eternity because of His faithful adherence to law. It is a most difficult thing to make the people believe that every art and science and all wisdom comes from Him, and that He is their Author.”
— Brigham Young¹

The Liahona, a navigational and revelatory instrument described in the Book of Mormon, is perhaps the greatest historical enigma of the ancient account. Its miraculous appearance and ostensibly spiritual operation have often been met with derision by individuals who are critical of the Book of Mormon's historical plausibility. Indeed, as stated in the words of Hugh Nibley, "The Liahona has given rise to endless merriment and mockery among critics of the Book of Mormon; only the shining stones of the Jaredites can equal it as a laugh-getter."² Perhaps as a response to these criticisms, a surprising number of authors have attempted to correlate aspects of the Liahona's functionality with known scientific principles.³ With minor variation, the majority of these previous apologetic works have suggested parallels between the Liahona's navigatory features and geomagnetic navigation devices. While the present work also attempts to reconcile the Liahona's functionality with historical navigation devices, it challenges traditional conceptions of both the Liahona's magnetic and faith-based functionality. Textual and cultural evidence seem to suggest the Liahona may in fact have been a star-based navigation instrument, one similar in function to that of an astrolabe.

A Note on Magnetism

In the interest of establishing the need for the present work, a few critiques about the predominant theory of a geomagnetic Liahona are warranted. A chapter from the book *Re-exploring the Book of Mormon*, entitled "Lodestone and the Liahona," written by Robert F. Smith provides a functional reference to the theory.⁴ Smith proposed that the navigational properties of the Liahona may have functioned on "geomagnetic principles," while the revelatory aspects of the device were faith-based and wholly outside the realm of scientific discovery.⁵ Smith and other proponents of the theory have thus articulated what might be termed a "hybrid model" wherein the navigatory and revelatory features of the device operated on two disparate principles (i.e., magnetism and faith). While Smith's work and others comparable to it have attempted to scientifically explain the Liahona's *navigatory* features, the theory of a hybrid-model Liahona does little to address historical or scientific critiques of the device, as both its origin and revelatory properties still appear to have operated outside the realm of modern scientific discovery.

Furthermore, a device functioning on geomagnetic principles is a remarkably poor fit for the device and type of journey described in the text itself. Magnetic compasses are valuable only insofar as an individual has a map or comparable knowledge of a region to provide accurate

positional information to couple with directional information derived from a magnetic compass.⁶ Whereas Nephi may have been able to receive some sort of cartographic information via revelation, the text seems to suggest such was not the case. When the company begins to follow the Liahona, they seem wholly dependent upon it for directional guidance.⁷ When the text does record communication from the Lord directly, the content of the message is almost exclusively chastisement or other information not directly related to navigation.⁸ Additionally, the Lord seems careful to direct questions regarding directional information back to the ball.⁹ It appears significant that the Lord communicates some types of information through revelatory means while leaving navigational communication to the Liahona. This pattern may suggest that the Liahona was less of a revelatory device and more of a navigational device than is traditionally assumed. Indeed, a careful reading of the text indicates the Liahona was used to communicate only information that can be derived from a naturally functioning astrolabe (e.g., the direction of travel, the location of water,) while other information (how to build a ship, moral chastening, where to find ore, etc.) were communicated via revelatory means.

Astrolabe Technology

To understand the textual parallels between the Liahona and astrolabe technology, one must first understand the basic functionality of ancient astrolabes. Stated simply, an astrolabe is an astronomical instrument capable of providing navigational information using the position of the sun or stars.¹⁰ Functioning as an analog computer, an astrolabe physically models the visible universe by storing information about star placement on the astrolabe itself.¹¹ By manipulating this static model to match the conditions of the sky at a present location, information about physical location can be derived.

Although celestial navigation was common among ancient peoples long before the astrolabe,¹² the invention and distribution of the astrolabe provided a far more structured approach than previous methods.¹³ In essence, the astrolabe standardized and solidified mathematical positional computation into a singular instrument, which later evolved into modern navigational instruments such as the quadrant and the sextant.¹⁴ Although no effort will be made in this work to articulate the exact mathematics that allows an individual to derive locational information from such instruments, it should be understood that astrolabes provide positional information only as the user is able to manipulate and read the device. If the Liahona functioned on similar principles, it would have been subject to

the *operation* of Nephi and Lehi, rather than the party passively following instructions provided by the ball. Several nuances of the Book of Mormon text suggest this model to be a more accurate description of the Liahona than traditional perceptions.

Dating of Astrolabe Technology

The origins of astrolabe technology have been traditionally attributed to Greek astronomers in 200 BCE – 100 BCE.¹⁵ However, as no functional astrolabes or expositions on true astrolabe technology have survived from this period, scholars have long recognized that the inference is tenuous and largely conjectural.¹⁶ This traditional dating is largely predicated on what appears to be the emergence of stereographic projection during this time period, a mathematical mapping function whereby a sphere (such as the night sky) is mapped onto a two-dimensional plane.¹⁷ This mathematical innovation is necessary for the production of the most common archaeological form of astrolabe, the planispheric astrolabe, a flat instrument utilized in Europe and the Middle East throughout the Middle Ages. As such, the treatises of Hipparchus of Nicaea (180 BCE – 125 BCE), which articulate the concept of stereographic projection, have often been used as the *terminus post quem* for the dating of astrolabe technology. However, in the words of Robert T. Gunther, the founder of the Museum of Science at Oxford, which currently houses the world's largest collection of astrolabes, there are several "trains of evidence which point to a far earlier date for the invention."¹⁸ Gunther himself suggests that stereographic projection may instead have had its

origins in the constellation mapping performed by Eudoxus of Cnidus (409 BCE – 356 BCE).¹⁹

While the planispheric astrolabe is the most common form of astrolabe from an archeological perspective, there is considerable question as to whether it is the earliest.²⁰ Ancient peoples from many geographic regions have displayed an ability to use star motion and mathematical computation for navigational purposes long before the



Figure 1. Planispheric Astrolabe. Image used under Create Commons License; https://commons.m.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Astrolabe_planis%C3%A9rique_closeup800x600x300.jpg. Accessed September 30, 2018.

invention of stereographic projection.²¹ Whereas Greek and Arabic planispheric astrolabes model the hemispherical night sky on a two-dimensional plane, the historical record also attests to devices that used “azimuthal equidistant mapping,” or the process of mapping the night sky onto a spherical object.²² Because these spherical or “melon shaped” astrolabes (to which the Liahona would be most similar)²³ do not require stereographic projection, they are mathematically less complex than their planispheric counterparts, and devices functioning on similar principles may have pre-dated both Eudoxus and Hipparchus.²⁴ This would suggest that the earliest functioning astrolabes were most likely of the spherical variety, and the true genesis of astrolabe technology may then be much earlier than conservative estimates dictate. Indeed, the most recent archaeological evidence suggests that primitive astrolabe technology may date at least to the Babylonians, circa 650 BCE, and possibly several thousands of years earlier.²⁵ As such, it is entirely possible that a spherical device functioning on astrolabic principles may have existed at the time of Lehi.

Origin of the Liahona

Before comparing the functionality of the Liahona and ancient astrolabes, a discussion of the textual episode of the Liahona’s appearance is warranted. After being commanded to leave Jerusalem, Lehi appears to have traveled the entire first portion of his journey unaided. His previous knowledge of the region was sufficient to allow his family to travel a significant distance from civilization while securing food, water, shelter, and other essential amenities for their journey.²⁶ Mid-expedition, the Lord felt the need to provide an additional means of navigation to supplement whatever resources Lehi had previously used to navigate the Judean wilderness. But where did such an instrument come from? What forces deposited such a valuable device outside the tent of a traveler in the middle of the Judean wilderness precisely as he was to begin the lengthier and more dangerous portion of his journey?

While the appearance of the Liahona has received no scholarly treatment to my knowledge, anecdotal origin theories typically ascribe the placement of the Liahona at Lehi’s tent door to some form of heavenly messenger. Some individuals have gone as far as to suggest the instrument was both forged and placed at the tent door by God himself. These suggestions appear to stem primarily from a possibly misinterpreted portion of scripture: “the ball, or compass, which was *prepared for my father by the hand of the Lord ...*” (2 Nephi 5:12, emphasis added). To grasp the meaning of this passage it is imperative to note other scriptural uses of the phrase, “hand of the Lord.”²⁷ Virtually every other use of the

expression in the Book of Mormon describes a situation, circumstance, or event *orchestrated* by God rather than describing something physically performed by God himself.²⁸ Nephi uses an almost identical expression in an earlier portion of his record to describe the “much fruit” and “wild honey” found in the land Bountiful, two objects not created by God directly but instead naturally occurring materials (1 Nephi 17:5). Ezra Taft Benson, the 13th president of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, used the phrase in a modern context to describe the Book of Mormon itself, an object assumed to have been smelted, engraved, and buried by human hands. Referencing its miraculous preservation, President Benson stated, “[The Book of Mormon] was *prepared by the hand of the Lord* over a period of more than a thousand years, then hidden up by Him so that it would be preserved in its purity for our generation.”²⁹ With such evidence that both ancient and modern prophets have used this phrase almost exclusively as a figurative expression, it seems unwise to interpret the expression in this context in a literal fashion. Consequently, the most reasonable explanation for the creation of the Liahona and for its placement at Lehi’s tent door is that both were the result of human volition.

Important to this argument is the fact that, by his own admission, Nephi’s account is both incomplete and spiritually oriented (1 Nephi 6:2–6; 19:2–7). His record is admittedly devoid of detail concerning specifics recorded in his other account, descriptions not deemed spiritually noteworthy, or situations not applicable to the reader. Nephi emphasizes that his record is to be a collection of spiritual happenings, designed and written to “show unto you that the tender mercies of the Lord are over all those whom he hath chosen, because of their faith, to make them mighty even unto the power of deliverance” (1 Nephi 1:20). This at least explains, in part, the dearth of information surrounding the Liahona’s functionality and appearance. Rather than cloud his message by detailing the Liahona’s mechanisms in too much specificity, Nephi appears to focus his writing on convincing the reader that God was integrally involved in leading his family to the Promised Land. Interestingly, Nephi never states or speculates how the Liahona appeared. Not until 2 Nephi 5:12 does Nephi even suggest that it was “prepared for my father by the hand of the Lord.” When the Liahona first appears in the narrative, Nephi makes no claim that the creation, appearance, or function of the device was a display of God’s power, but instead seems to emphasize the *timing* of the Liahona’s appearance as the true miracle.³⁰

The most logical suggestion for the origin of the Liahona, then, is that its appearance was in some way tied to the figure of Ishmael, a character

who enters the narrative almost simultaneously with the Liahona. The text also provides a plausible motive for Ishmael's giving the device to Lehi, as the verses preceding the first reference to the Liahona mention one of the most important customs of ancient Jews, the marriage covenant. No detailed examination of Jewish marriage customs will be attempted here, but even cursory understanding of Jewish dowry ritual provides a logical and natural explanation for the appearance of the Liahona. In 1 Nephi 16:7, Nephi details the marriage of his brothers and himself to the recently arrived daughters of Ishmael. Although the account is again vague, it can be reasonably assumed that the party may have attempted to observe the marriage customs of the day. The tradition that the father of the bride gives a dowry to the groom or his father was a common practice among ancient Jews.³¹ Because of the antiquity of the record, little information is available concerning the details of the practice in the day of Lehi. However, this practice was performed by at least some Jews who predated Lehi, as specified in the marriage accounts contained in Genesis 24:59–61; 29:24, 29; Judges 1:15; and 1 Kings 9:16.³²

As several of Ishmael's daughters married several of Lehi's sons, it is plausible that Ishmael would have given a collective dowry to Lehi, the father of the grooms, to distribute among the newly formed households. The giving of a dowry in the desert, away from society, would have severely limited the form in which the dowry could be given. Monetary compensation or a dowry of land was certainly not an option. Neither would food be a viable dowry, as food obtained by the party appears to have been communal.³³ Instead, an object that provided value in desert travel would seem a more appropriate option. An astrolabe is precisely such an instrument. As Ishmael appears to have been a trader or merchant,³⁴ it is certainly possible he had access to such a device. The appearance of the Liahona almost immediately following the arrival of Ishmael, and then directly following the marriage of Ishmael's children, provides at least reasonable textual evidence that the Liahona may have been part of or the entirety of a dowry Ishmael gave to Lehi. In such a case, Lehi's "great astonishment" (1 Nephi 16:10) at finding the ball in front of his tent would be astonishment that Ishmael adhered to Jewish customs that Lehi determined impractical or impossible given their current circumstances.

Comparative Functionality: Liahona and Astrolabes

The first parallels between a spherical astrolabe and the Liahona are the similarities in appearance and composition. Nephi describes the Liahona as “a round ball of curious workmanship; and it was of fine brass. And within the ball were two spindles; and the one pointed the way whither we should go in the wilderness” (1 Nephi 16:10, emphasis added). The description of a spherical astrolabe now housed in the Oxford Museum of the History of Science bears striking similarities: “it is a *finely worked* decorative object. *The brass globe* is made of two hemispheres that neatly screw together ... The enclosing rete, which must rotate smoothly on the perfectly round sphere, *is also of brass.*”³⁵ The parallels in description are remarkable, as the fine brass workmanship and the spherical shape of the astrolabe perfectly correlate to Nephi’s description. Nephi also describes the ball as having two “spindles” which were “within the ball.” While this description is often believed to denote pointers similar to those of a magnetic compass, it might also accurately describe the dually rotating retia — the net or cage-like portions of the astrolabe that rotate on a pivot or axle to represent the position of constellations in the night sky. These retia are literally *within* the ball, as they form the housing of the device, and each rotates in a manner that may accurately be described as a spindle. Additionally, it is not uncommon for portions of these retia to be described as “pointers,” in reference to



Figure 2. Astrolabe, Museum of the History of Science, Oxford University. Inventory number 49687 from Syria, 1480/1 (A.H. 885). Image used under Create Commons License; https://commons.m.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Spherical_astrolabe_2.jpg. Accessed September 30, 2018.

their function of pinpointing important information on the underlying globe that could be utilized to calculate the time of day at different latitudes.³⁶ An additional parallel between Nephi’s description of the Liahona and a spherical astrolabe is *where* upon the ball Nephi says writing occurs: “And it came to pass that I, Nephi, beheld the *pointers* which were in the ball ... And there was also written *upon them* a new writing, which was plain to be read ...” (1 Nephi 16:28–29, emphasis added). Nephi states that the writing appeared “upon them [the spindles/pointers],” which is a curious place if the rest of the spherical instrument functioned as a casing for magnetic directional pointers. However, as can be seen in

figure 2, writing on spherical astrolabes is prominently placed on the retia or spindles of the device.

More impressive than appearance are the numerous similarities of function the astrolabe and Liahona share. One of the principal uses of the astrolabe is to triangulate direction. The Liahona too appears to have allowed Nephi to determine the direction the party was traveling (1 Nephi 16:13). After the Liahona appears, Nephi can accurately describe the direction of travel to the intercardinal direction "south-southeast," whereas prior to the Liahona's appearance, his descriptions of direction are definitively vague (see 1 Nephi 2:4–5). If the Liahona merely pointed toward the next destination, as has been traditionally assumed, it would be odd for the device to also convey directional information based on the cardinal directions. Astrolabes, however, allow location to be calculated in latitude and longitude using the position of the sun, constellations, or individual stars. Particularly useful in desert travel, these computations allow precise locational and directional calculation without relying upon landmarks, which are often nonexistent in desert terrain. It also allowed travelers to record the exact locations of water sources, infinitely increasing their ability to traverse the desert by allowing them to find the same point on a subsequent journey. Gazetteers including the location of these water sources were often stored on the astrolabe itself or on analog disks that could be interchanged dependent on region.³⁷ These disks, created from the knowledge of traders, nomads, or other explorers familiar with the area, contained star charts, details about the area, and even the coordinates for water sources located nearby. This information would allow someone like Lehi to locate water in a region he had never before traveled. Note Nephi's words: "And we did follow the *directions of the ball*, which led us in the *more fertile parts of the wilderness*" (1 Nephi 16:16, emphasis added). The most fertile places in the desert are locations where the presence of water allows for the growth of plant life. Traders – possibly Ishmael himself – who had followed the same route Lehi took across the peninsula would have discovered and recorded the location of these oases on the Liahona prior to Lehi's journey. Because astrolabes could be used to record (and subsequently rediscover) an almost limitless amount of regional information, it should be noted that a Liahona functioning on astrolabic principles is equally compatible with any proposed reconstruction of Lehi's route of travel from Jerusalem to Bountiful.³⁸

One of the greatest challenges in desert travel, and one shared by Lehi's caravan, is locating sources of food for the journey. As game in the desert primarily congregate near water, being able to locate oases also

would allow a party to locate possible hunting grounds to supplement their stores of food. Nephi and Lehi's use of the Liahona to locate food thus provides another valuable correlation between the Liahona and an astrolabe. The textual incident that illustrates this connection can be found in 1 Nephi 16:18–32. After Nephi breaks his bow and is unable to find food for several days (1 Nephi 16:18–19), Nephi constructs another bow but is unsure where to go to find game to hunt. His initial faith-based response is to inquire of his father, who in turn inquires of the Lord where to go to find food (1 Nephi 16:23–24). Rather than providing the information directly, the Lord curiously responds by telling Lehi to look upon the ball for information.³⁹ Lehi does so, and as he looks upon the ball he discovers writing that provides Nephi with directions to a place where he could obtain food.⁴⁰ It is clear from the text that until this time (several weeks, if not months from Nephi's description),⁴¹ previous writing had been found on the ball but had caused no particular stir.

Instead, in this episode “new writing” is discovered, the content of which made it worth mentioning (1 Nephi 16:29). Because a word for word description of the writing is not provided, some misconceptions regarding the information conveyed have arisen. To correctly understand the content of the message contained on the ball, it is important to remember the question that had been asked and was subsequently answered by the writing. After reading the inscription, the text states that Nephi “did go forth up into the top of the mountain, *according to the directions which were given upon the ball*. And it came to pass that [he] did slay wild beasts, insomuch that [he] did obtain food for [their] families” (1 Nephi 16:30–31, emphasis added). The ball appears to have told Nephi where a water source was located and where, inherently, he could find game to hunt. If such is the case, some explanation must be given for why the writing on the ball caused Lehi to “quake and fear exceedingly” (1 Nephi 16:27).

As water generally flows to the lowest topographical point in any given region, directions provided by the ball specifying that a water source would be found at the top of a mountain would have seemed counterintuitive to Lehi and his party. This irregularity may have been the cause of Lehi's consternation because if water was not indeed located at the place specified by the ball, the party was likely to starve. The “appearance” of new writing on the ball is not incongruent with the functionality of an astrolabe. As calculations are made at different times of day or night, the rete of the astrolabe is turned to accurately mirror the visible position of the referential celestial body. As the rete is manipulated, different portions of the underlying globe or disks become

visible, possibly revealing previously unseen writing.⁴² Subsequently, as Nephi or Lehi calculated the party's location at different times of the day, month, or year, different portions of the disks could be read, and the writing would be changed "from time to time," a very literal reading of Nephi's phrase (1 Nephi 16:29). This interpretation does not necessarily preclude traditional understandings that the writing on the Liahona may have contained spiritual guidance. Indeed, ancient astrolabes have a long history of spiritual application:

Astrolabes had blended uses, from scientific to what we would today consider spiritual. They have a strong history in Islam as a tool to find both the direction of prayer toward Mecca — known as the Qibla — as well as the five times of prayer required throughout the day, as stated in the Quran. They later became popular amongst Europeans during the Middle Ages as an astrological tool ...⁴³

In addition to being used for astrological divination, writing on astrolabes often contained religious maxims, scriptural verses, or other spiritually pertinent information along with geographical information.⁴⁴ These common spiritual uses provide at least some corroboration with Nephi's claim that the Liahona provided "understanding concerning the ways of the Lord." Additionally, it is possible the "understanding" Nephi derived from the writing was a more appreciative awareness that the Lord often utilizes ordinary means to answer the prayers of his children. Nephi and Lehi, who appear to have relied tremendously on revelation to direct their lives, may have gained a more profound understanding of this "way of the Lord," as when they expected an answer to come via a direct revelatory experience, their attention was directed back to a physical device.

Internal Workings of the Liahona

Opponents may refute this theory, citing 1 Nephi 16:28 as evidence of the miraculous nature of the Liahona: "And it came to pass that I, Nephi, beheld the pointers which were in the ball, that they did work according to the faith and diligence and heed which we did give unto them." This verse is often associated and correlated with Alma 37:40: "And [the Liahona] did work for them according to their faith in God; therefore, if they had faith to believe that God could cause that those spindles should point the way they should go, behold, it was done; therefore, they had this miracle, and also many other miracles wrought by the power of God, day by day." What

readers often fail to realize is that these two accounts do not actually agree about many aspects of the Liahona's functionality.

There are three distinct differences between the account of the Liahona as provided by Nephi and the account provided by Alma: (1) the workmanship of the device, (2) the functionality of the device, and (3) the name of the device.⁴⁵ In attempting to reconcile the differences between the two accounts it is important to note that Alma's account was written nearly 500 years after Nephi and his family left Jerusalem. If the Book of Mormon is treated as a cultural or historical text, Nephi's account should be given primacy in any attempt to reconstruct the Liahona's functionality.

When Nephi first encounters the Liahona he states that he "... beheld upon the ground a round ball of curious workmanship; and it was of fine brass" (1 Nephi 16:10). It seems that while Nephi was impressed with the quality of the workmanship of the Liahona, its physical appearance was not evidence of its miraculous nature. Consider for instance, that Nephi uses a nearly identical phrase to describe his own labors building a ship: "... and we did work timbers of *curious workmanship* ... And it came to pass that after I had finished the ship ... my brethren beheld that it was good, *and that the workmanship thereof was exceedingly fine*" (1 Nephi 18:1, 4, emphasis added). Furthermore, Nephi seems to be more impressed with the workmanship of Laban's sword than with the workmanship of the Liahona.⁴⁶ While Nephi certainly recognizes the excellent quality of the Liahona and may not be able to replicate it despite his own considerable metallurgical skills,⁴⁷ he does not appear to view the workmanship of the object itself as miraculous. Indeed, the most applicable definition of "curious" from the 1828 Webster dictionary is "wrought with care and art; elegant; neat; finished." Alma, on the other hand, is far more impressed by its appearance: "And behold, *there cannot any man work after the manner of so curious a workmanship.*"⁴⁸ This subtle, yet significant change in description about the Liahona's workmanship is highly indicative of a shift in cultural understanding about the Liahona, its origins, and its functionality.

This cultural shift regarding the Liahona is further apparent when comparing Nephi and Alma's description of the Liahona's functionality. Nephi's descriptions of how the Liahona functioned found in 1 Nephi 16:28 must be viewed in the context of Nephi's journey up to that point. If Nephi and his family had been following the Liahona's direction for weeks without questioning, it seems odd they didn't discover the Liahona functioned according to faith, diligence, and

heed to the commandments of God until Nephi broke his bow. In fact, this conception can be derived only from Nephi's words when viewed in conjunction with the passage in Alma. Nephi states that the ball functioned according to the faith, heed, and diligence they gave *unto the pointers of the ball*, not the commandments of the Lord.⁴⁹ This is fundamentally different from Alma's claim that the Liahona functioned or failed based on their "... faith *in God*" (Alma 37:40, emphasis added). Nephi never states that the ball ceased to work if they did not have faith in God. In fact, in Nephi's account the party's faith is exclusively tied to the conditions of the journey, not whether the ball provided them directions. This can be seen in the words of Nephi:

And it came to pass that the Lord was with us, yea, even the voice of the Lord came and did speak many words unto them, and did chasten them exceedingly; and after they were chastened by the voice of the Lord they did turn away their anger, *and did repent of their sins, insomuch that the Lord did bless us again with food, that we did not perish.* (1 Nephi 16:39, emphasis added)

Here, Nephi equates disobedience with an inability to locate food, not with a Liahona that ceased to function. This mentality is mirrored when the party is on the ship crossing the sea, and Nephi's brothers begin to grow careless. Nephi's admonishment to them is that a storm may arise because of their revelry, not that the Liahona will cease to function (1 Nephi 18:10).

If the Liahona functioned based on the attention and care that Nephi's party gave to the ball itself, one might still ask why Nephi describes the process using the words "faith, heed, and diligence." Joseph Smith, the translator of the Book of Mormon, said, "[w]e understand that when a man works by faith he works by *mental exertion* ..." ⁵⁰ Mathematical computations are an integral aspect of astrolabe navigation, matching the "mental exertion" Joseph Smith described. "Diligence" is defined in the 1828 Webster dictionary as: "Steady application in business of any kind; constant effort to accomplish what is undertaken; *exertion of body or mind without unnecessary delay or sloth.*" In the same dictionary, "heed" is defined as: "To mind; to regard with care; *to take notice of; to attend to; to observe.*" Attention paid to calculations, the exertion of body and mind to follow the directions provided, and the trust placed in the accuracy of the directions of the ball certainly qualify as exercising faith, heed, and diligence.

If the Liahona was indeed a gift from Ishmael, Ishmael would have been the primary navigator for the party until his death. Nephi and Lehi would have had to learn from Ishmael how to perform the calculations

necessary to find the next water source in the wilderness, and then the party had to trust that the calculations were correct. It is interesting that Nephi's first true description of the ball's mechanisms comes a short time before the death of Ishmael.⁵¹ It is quite likely Ishmael became seriously ill prior to his death, a fact that may have severely limited his ability to manipulate the device, thus necessitating Lehi and Nephi's assistance. These conditions would not only explain Nephi's belated discussion of the device's functionality, but also explain the consternation the party experienced at following the directions of the ball, which seems to occur only after Ishmael's death. Indeed, as the narrative progresses, the party seems to have *more* difficulty following the directions of the ball, not less, despite their continued success. While Nephi appears to be an integral part of the company throughout the narrative, he does not appear to take primary responsibility of navigating the party until after the death of Ishmael. This is shown in the text as complaints and accusations about Nephi's leading the company occur a long while after the appearance of the Liahona and only after Ishmael has been buried (1 Nephi 17:20). This view is also strongly supported by the interesting complaint of Ishmael's family at his death:

And it came to pass that the daughters of Ishmael did mourn exceedingly, because of the loss of their father ... saying: Our father is dead; yea, and we have wandered much in the wilderness, and we have suffered much affliction, hunger, thirst, and fatigue; and *after all these sufferings we must perish in the wilderness with hunger.* (1 Nephi 16:35, emphasis added.)

This complaint is unique in several aspects. First, with Ishmael dead, odds of survival for the party actually increased, as there would be more food and water for the company with one fewer dependent. Second, the caravan could then move faster without an aged and possibly ill member to worry about. Instead, it appears that Ishmael's daughters are convinced the death of their father would bring about their deaths as well. It would seem that they, along with other members of the party, were skeptical that Nephi and Lehi could correctly utilize the Liahona to guide them to their destination. This fear would be wholly unfounded if the Liahona worked in the strictly faith-based manner assumed by most Book of Mormon readers. When the party ceased to trust Nephi's calculations and did not follow the directions of the ball (in other words, exercising their faith) they were "afflicted with hunger and thirst," substantive evidence of difficulty locating a water source (Alma 37:42). Additionally, they "did not progress in their journey ... or did not travel

in a direct course” — also suggestive of a difficulty in locating the next oasis to make their base camp — and were instead “driven *back...*” (presumably to the last known water source) “and therefore they were *smitten with famine* and sore afflictions, to stir them up in remembrance of their *duty*” (Mosiah 1:17).⁵² Each of these observations correspond well with the assertion of Chadwick “that the great majority of the ‘eight years in the wilderness’ is to be counted after Nahom.”⁵³ The relative inexperience of Nephi and Lehi in utilizing the Liahona to direct their journey is a plausible explanation for both the inflated length of time spent in the wilderness after Nahom and the navigatory difficulties the party appears to have experienced only after the death of Ishmael.

Further evidence that Nephi may have used mathematical computations in the working of the Liahona is found in his brothers’ accusations:

And Laman said unto Lemuel and also unto the sons of Ishmael: “Behold, let us slay our father, and also our brother Nephi, *who has taken it upon him to be our ruler and our teacher*, who are his elder brethren...behold, we know that he lies unto us; and he tells us these things, and *he worketh many things by his cunning arts, that he may deceive our eyes, thinking, perhaps, that he may lead us away into some strange wilderness.* (1 Nephi 16:37–38, emphasis added)

First, Nephi’s brothers seem to suggest that Nephi has only recently “taken it upon him[self]” to become some sort of leader on the journey. The “cunning arts” of which Nephi is accused are a natural description of astrolabic navigation techniques by anyone unfamiliar with trigonometric computation. Later, after following the Liahona for *eight years*, Laman and Lemuel are still plagued with doubts, and in their minds it is easy to confuse Nephi’s leadership in the desert with God’s workings of the Liahona. This confusion would be borderline psychotic if the Liahona in fact successfully and repeatedly functioned in a clearly spiritual way. It is far easier to explain the actions and attitudes of Laman and Lemuel if Nephi was indeed utilizing a naturally functioning navigation device to lead the party.

Nephi’s Manipulation of the Liahona

Perhaps the most convincing episode that provides evidence that the functionality of the Liahona was directly tied to Nephi’s manipulation occurs when the Liahona is used in the journey across the sea. One of the most useful functions of an astrolabe is that the techniques used for calculating position on land are also applicable to sea travel;

indeed, variations of the astrolabe have been used in sea navigation for thousands of years.⁵⁴ After using the Liahona for nearly a decade (1 Nephi 17:4), before setting out into the ocean for the final portion of their journey, the Lord tells Nephi: “*After* ye have arrived in the promised land, ye shall *know* that I, the Lord ... did bring you out of the land of Jerusalem” (1 Nephi 17:14, emphasis added). This statement suggests that the guidance of the Liahona after eight years was still not viewed as conclusive evidence that God was directing their path. Instead, crossing the sea to an uncharted land would provide the evidence necessary to prove that God was the one leading the party. This is consistent with the fact that all previous cartographical information contained on the Liahona would have been recorded on the device by its previous owners. As such, Nephi’s using the device to navigate to an unrecorded location would be a powerful display of God’s involvement. Perhaps the requisite navigational information for the journey was an example of the “great things” the Lord showed Nephi (1 Nephi 18:3).

After traveling on the water for an unspecified period, a portion of Nephi’s party began to revel in the success of their journey. Nephi’s brothers and other members of the band began to “dance, and to sing, and to speak with much rudeness” (1 Nephi 18:9). The most offensive part of their festivities occurs when they commit the unthinkable act of “forget[ting] by what power they had been brought thither” (1 Nephi 18:9). Even after following the Liahona for eight years, possibly because of the natural means by which the Liahona functioned, it was easy for members of the party to forget that God was leading them. It is also interesting to note that although at this moment the party had ceased to exercise the traditional definition of “faith, heed, and diligence,” Nephi gives no indication that the Liahona had ceased to function. In fact, there is never a specific account in Nephi’s narrative to this point that details an instance of the Liahona’s ceasing to operate. Nephi warns his brothers that they need to repent of their iniquity, but his warning is not that the Liahona will cease to function. Instead, he is worried that a storm may arise and sink the ship (1 Nephi 18:10). Laman and Lemuel’s response to Nephi’s concern is telling: “We will not that our younger brother shall be a ruler over us” (1 Nephi 18:10). Again, the focus of their complaint is that Nephi is somehow in charge of the expedition, and in retaliation they bind Nephi. Nephi then records: “The Lord did suffer it that he might show forth his power” (1 Nephi 18:11). Nephi viewed his bondage as an episode the Lord allowed to demonstrate more effectively that indeed God, not Nephi, was leading the party. Nephi stated that as soon as he had been bound, “the compass, which had been prepared of the Lord,

did cease to work" (1 Nephi 18:12). As Nephi was the one manipulating the device, this statement is indeed true but not in the sense that it appeared broken or that it ceased to function entirely. This is demonstrated by the fact that it took Nephi's brothers four days before they realized that something was wrong: "And after we had been driven back upon the waters for the space of four days, my brethren *began* to see that the judgments of God were upon them" (1 Nephi 18:15, emphasis added). There is at least some sense that the Liahona ceased to function because the storm would have obscured the party's view of the sun and the stars, thus preventing Nephi's brothers from using the device to navigate. Shortly after Nephi is released from his bondage, he states: "Behold, I took the compass, and it did work whither *I desired it*" (1 Nephi 18:21, emphasis added). The usually deferential Nephi is careful to detail that he was the one working the compass after his release. The compass worked only for him, and it worked even before Nephi prayed to the Lord for the storm to cease. Nephi then states: "*I Nephi*, did guide the ship, that we sailed again towards the promised land" (1 Nephi 18:22, emphasis added). Nephi appears to have had a much more integral role in manipulating the compass than a casual reading of the text would suggest.

Conclusion

After arriving in the promised land, Lehi described Nephi's role in the journey thus: "[He] hath been an instrument in the hands of God, in bringing us forth into the land of promise; *for were it not for him, we must have perished with hunger in the wilderness*" (2 Nephi 1:24, emphasis added). It is difficult to shake the impression that in this verse Lehi is making a deliberate comparison between Nephi and the Liahona itself. Just as the Liahona was "an instrument" in the hands of Nephi to guide the party through the wilderness, so too was Nephi an "instrument in the hands of God," used as a tool to guide the party to the promised land. Nephi's integral role in the use of the Liahona clearly suggests similarities in use and function to astrolabes used by astronomers throughout the ancient Near East. This new understanding of the Liahona provides greater meaning to the words of Nephi, "and thus we see that by small means the Lord can bring about great things" (1 Nephi 16:29).

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Endnotes

1. Brigham Young, *Journal of Discourses* (Liverpool: Latter-Day Saints Book Depot, 1871), 13: 140, 306.
2. Hugh Nibley, "The Liahona's Cousins," *The Improvement Era* (February 1961): 88.
3. For examples of these attempts see George Q. Cannon, *The Life of Nephi The Son of Lehi* (Salt Lake City: Juvenile Instructor Office, 1883), 38; B.H. Roberts, *A New Witness for God* (Salt Lake City: George Q. Cannon & Sons, 1895), 550–5 2; Robert F. Smith, "Lodestone and the Liahona," in *Reexploring the Book of Mormon*, ed. John W. Welch (Salt Lake City, UT: Deseret Book, 1992), <http://publications.maxwellinstitute.byu.edu/fullscreen/?pub=1110&index=12>; Robert L. Bunker, "The Design of the Liahona and the Purpose of the Second Spindle," *Journal of Book of Mormon Studies* 3, vol. 2 (1994): 1–11; Alan C. Miner, *The Liahona: Miracles by Small Means* (Springville, UT: Cedar Fort Inc., 2013).
4. Smith, "Lodestone and the Liahona."
5. Ibid.

6. See Bob Burns and Mike Burns, *Wilderness Navigation: Finding Your Way Using Map, Compass, Altimeter & GPS* (Seattle: Mountaineers Books, 2015).
7. "And we did follow the directions of the ball ... " 1 Nephi 16:16.
8. "And it came to pass that the voice of the Lord came unto my father; and he was truly chastened." 1 Nephi 16:25–26. "And it came to pass that the Lord was with us, yea even the voice of the Lord came and did speak many words unto them, and did chasten them exceedingly" 1 Nephi 16:39. Consider also the directions Nephi receives from the Lord on building a ship found in 1 Nephi 17:7–10. Nephi frequently records experiences of direct communication with the Lord, but never claims to have received any sort of directional guidance from those interactions.
9. Consider that when Lehi prays for direction on where Nephi should go to find food, the Lord directs Lehi's attention back to the information provided by the ball, rather than providing the direction in the same revelatory experience. See 1 Nephi 16:26, 30.
10. Admittedly, this is a simplified description of an astrolabe's functionality. The mathematic calculations used in conjunction with astrolabes are highly complex and only tangentially provide navigation information by allowing the user to calculate current latitude and longitude based on the position of fixed celestial bodies. Using this positional information, one could then infer position relative to the latitude and longitude of known cities, oases, etc. Hence, an astrolabe's greatest navigational use is to calculate the positional information of specific locations and store that information for a later return. Without this, or comparable technology, consistent desert travel would be nearly impossible for caravans such as Nephi's as they would be unable to find small, isolated oases which lack discernable landmarks demarcating them from the surrounding desert. For a simple discussion of the astrolabe's basic functionality see Laura Poppick, "The Story of the Astrolabe, the Original Smartphone," *Smithsonian Magazine* (website), January 31, 2017, <https://www.smithsonianmag.com/innovation/astrolabe-original-smartphone-180961981/>.
11. Bruce Watson, "The Astrolabe: Astronomy's First Hot App," *Sky and Telescope* 131, no. 2 (2016): 24–27.

12. "Regular trade was carried on between the island of Crete and Egypt, a distance of approximately 300 miles (500 km), more than 25 centuries before the Christian era ... The details of how these voyagers found their way are not known, but the use of the Sun and stars as guides is mentioned in many sources, including the works of Homer and Herodotus, the Bible, and the Norse sagas." Encyclopaedia Britannica Online, s.v. "Navigation," accessed September 19, 2018, <http://www.britannica.com/EBchecked/topic/407011/navigation>.
13. Primitive star navigation is typically understood to have provided only rudimentary, or "spatial," navigation information. That is to say, primitive star navigation primarily yielded directional, not positional, information. As such the standardized calculations and methods surrounding astrolabe technology provided for the ancients, not only (but also)?? a larger wealth of available knowledge, but also a tool by which navigational information became positional and standardized.
14. Watson, "The Astrolabe," 24.
15. Robert T. Gunther, *The Astrolabes of the World*, vol. 1, The Eastern Astrolabes (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1932), 53.
16. Ibid.
17. "It is customary to refer to the Planispheric Astrolabe ... as the invention of the great Alexandrian savant, Hipparchus of Bithynia, born c. 180, died c. 125 B.C. It is said that he was the first man to apply a theory of stereographic projection to the drawing of the celestial sphere upon the plane of the equator. The planispheric astrolabe is impossible without this projection, so that if Hipparchus had really been the first exponent of this projection, there could have been no astrolabe before his day." Gunther, *The Astrolabes of the World*, 53.
18. Gunther, *The Astrolabes of the World*, 53–54.
19. Ibid.
20. E.S. Kennedy, P. Kunitzsch and R. P. Lorch, trans. and ed., *The Melon-Shaped Astrolabe in Arabic Astronomy* (Germany: Franz Steiner Verlag Stuttgart, 1999), 5.
21. See Michael Halpern, "Sidereal Compasses: A Case for Carolinian-Arab Links," *The Journal of the Polynesian Society* 95, no. 4

- (1986): 441–59; Ora Negbi, "Early Phoenician Presence in the Mediterranean Islands: A Reappraisal," *American Journal of Archaeology* 96, no. 4 (1992): 599–615; Christos Agouridis, "Sea Routes and Navigation in the Third Millennium Aegean," *Oxford Journal of Archaeology* 16, no. 1 (1997): 1–24; Douglas T. Peck, "Development of Celestial Navigation by the Ancient Maya," *The Journal of Navigation* 4, no.1 (January 2001): 145–49.
22. Kennedy, Kunitzsch and Lorch, *The Melon-Shaped Astrolabe*, 1–4.
 23. Refer to Figure 2 for a visual reference of a spherical astrolabe.
 24. Kennedy, Kunitzsch and Lorch, *The Melon-Shaped Astrolabe*, 1–4.
 25. Richard Talbert, ed., *Ancient Perspectives: Maps and Their Place in Mesopotamia, Egypt, Greece & Rome* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 2012), 37–39.
 26. " ... I, of myself, have dwelt at Jerusalem, wherefore I know concerning the regions round about;" 2 Nephi 25:6, (emphasis added). It seems that Nephi and Lehi were the principle guides in the wilderness for the first portion of the journey. Nephi's knowledge of the area seems to be enough to allow his family to travel away from Jerusalem, set up a camp at a suitable location, and then return to Jerusalem two times without issue. Curiously, accusations about Nephi guiding the party only occur after the company begins following the Liahona and notably after the death of Ishmael. It would seem that the group trusted Nephi and Lehi's guidance initially and became concerned only when the party struck out into unfamiliar territory using a device most of them did not know how to use.
 27. See 2 Nephi 1:5–6; 2 Ne. 28:6; Omni 1:16; Mosiah 1:1–5; Mosiah 2:11; Mosiah 28:15; Alma 2:28; Alma 37:4; Alma 45:19; see also Moses 1:4; Moses 7:32.
 28. Consider, for example, Nephi's tendency to attribute to the Lord events which he himself physically performed. Despite being the individual most responsible for the food and provisions of the company, Nephi says in 1 Nephi 16:11 that they "gather[ed] together whatsoever things [they] should carry into the wilderness, and all the remainder of [their] provisions which the Lord had given unto [them]" (emphasis added). The ever-deferential Nephi sees the "hand of God" in nearly every aspect of his life. Nephi attempts to display to the reader, who was not present at these events, that

the Lord was involved in a grand guiding way, not physically performing the acts.

29. Ezra Taft Benson, “The Book of Mormon—Keystone of Our Religion,” *Ensign* (November 1986), emphasis added.
30. Just prior to detailing the Liahona’s appearance, Nephi carefully informs the reader of the commandment the Lord gave to Lehi to reassume his journey the next day. Nephi seems to be attempting to display that the Liahona was provided to Nephi’s party at precisely the moment when Lehi needs the instrument to fulfill the commandment of the Lord. Nephi does not seem overly awed by its origin, composition, or even functionality. His primary interest in the device is that it appeared when his family needed it the most. To Nephi, the timing of the Liahona’s delivery is the miracle.
31. “Besides this custom of the bridegroom making gifts to the bride or paying a ransom to her father the Bible also makes frequent mention of property which the woman brought to her husband at marriage. Rebekah brought to her new home female slaves from her father’s household (Genesis xxiv. 59, 61). Laban made similar gifts to Leah and to Rachel (Genesis xxix. 24, 29). Othniel at marriage received from his father-in-law, Caleb, a field of springs (Judges i. 15). Solomon received from Pharaoh, his father-in-law, a city as the portion (‘shilluhim’) of the princess (I Kings ix. 16). Later, the practise of giving a dowry to a daughter, as it is now understood, entirely superseded the gift or ransom given by the groom; so that in Talmudic times it (‘nedunya’) is spoken of as a long-established custom.” Jewish Encyclopedia, s.v. “Dowry,” accessed September 19, 2018, <http://www.jewishencyclopedia.com/articles/5297-dowry>.
32. Ibid. See also: Phillip J. King, *Life in Biblical Israel* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 2001), 54.
33. See 1 Nephi 16.
34. Hugh Nibley, *Lehi in the Desert and the World of the Jaredites* (Salt Lake City: Deseret Books, 1988), 36, <https://publications.mi.byu.edu/fullscreen/?pub=1106&index=5>.
35. *Oxford Museum of the History of Science*, “Special Exhibition Label: ‘Al-Mizan: Sciences and Arts in the Islamic World’ (26/10/2010 - 20/03/2011)”, accessed September 19, 2018, <http://www.mhs.ox.ac>.

- uk/collections/imu-search-page/narratives/?irn=2113&index=2, emphasis added.
36. Anthony Turner, "Concerning a Pointer on the Astrolabe," *Journal for the History of Astronomy* 46, no. 4 (2015): 413–18.
 37. Kennedy, Kunitzsch and Lorch, *The Melon-Shaped Astrolabe*, 1. See also Richard Covington, "The Astrolabe: A User's Guide," *Aramco World* 58, no. 3 (2007): 22–23, <http://archive.aramcoworld.com/issue/200703/the.astrolabe.a.user.s.guide.htm>.
 38. For an introduction to the three predominant route reconstructions see: Jeffrey R. Chadwick, "An Archaeologist's View," *Journal of Book of Mormon Studies* 15, no. 2 (2006): 68–77, 122–24.
 39. "And I said unto my father: Whither shall I go to obtain food? And it came to pass that he did inquire of the Lord ... And it came to pass that the voice of the Lord said unto him: Look upon the ball, and behold the things which are written." 1 Nephi 16:23–24, 26.
 40. "And it came to pass that I, Nephi, did go forth up into the top of the mountain, according to the directions which were given upon the ball." 1 Nephi 16:30, emphasis added.
 41. "traveled for the space of many days ... pitch our tents for the space of a time," 1 Nephi 16:17.
 42. Kennedy, Kunitzsch and Lorch, *The Melon-Shaped Astrolabe*, 1–3.
 43. Poppick, "The Story of the Astrolabe."
 44. Emily Winterburn, "Using an Astrolabe," Foundation for Science Technology and Civilisation (2005), <http://muslimheritage.com/article/using-astrolabe>.
 45. Only the first two differences are discussed at length in this paper. However, it is interesting that none of the characters in the Book of Mormon directly involved with the instrument refer to it as the "Liahona." Instead, Nephi exclusively refers to the device as a "ball," "compass," or "director." It is possible that this indicates a familiarity with technology similar to the Liahona, as Nephi appears to have had three words he felt accurately described the functionality of the device. The word "Liahona," then, appears to be a name given by subsequent generations to describe the instrument as it functioned in the story of the Lehiite exodus. Scholars have suggested a variety of possible meanings of the word based on its probable Hebrew etymology. While there is not yet a scholarly

consensus on the etymological meaning of the word “Liahona,” the most probable interpretation appears to be “the direction (director) of the Lord.” See Jonathan Curci, “Liahona: ‘The Direction of the Lord’: An Etymological Explanation, *Journal of Book of Mormon Studies* 16, vol. 2 (2007): 60–67, 97–98. Alternatively, some scholars have proposed the meaning of the word Liahona corresponds to the Liahona’s function of helping Lehi’s company find their way from one encampment to another and should thus be rendered “encamping for Yahweh.” This meaning would correspond to the hypothetical Hebrew word *layahone*, “encamping for Yahweh,” derived from the participle form of the Hebrew verb *hānā*, “to pitch (tent), encamp, dwell.” This proposed etymology corresponds with a notion that the Lehtes may have viewed themselves as participating in an “exodus,” similar to that of the Hosts of Israel, as evidenced by what appear to be explicit Exodus motifs in the account. See George S. Tate, “The Typology of the Exodus Pattern in the Book of Mormon,” in N. E. Lambert, ed., *Literature of Belief: Sacred Scripture and Religious Experience* (Provo: BYU Religious Studies Center, 1981): 245–62, <https://rsc.byu.edu/archived/literature-belief-sacred-scripture-and-religious-experience/13-typology-exodus-pattern-book>; See also: S. Kent Brown, “The Exodus Pattern in the Book of Mormon,” *BYU Studies Quarterly* 30, no. 3 (Summer 1990): 111–26, <https://rsc.byu.edu/archived/jerusalem-zarahemla-literary-and-historical-studies-book-mormon/exodus-pattern-book-mormon>. In any case, the proposed etymologies suggest that the name given to the device may have functioned as a mnemonic device used by Lehi’s descendants to reinforce the moral and spiritual force of the account as they recounted the narrative to their children. Because it is highly likely that the majority of Lehi’s descendants would have primarily encountered these stories orally, providing a name for the device that described its function and/or reinforced its connection to the divine (the theophoric element of the word) could assist in helping hearers remember the details of their national origin story as well as properly ascribe the success of their journey to the Lord. This would stand in stark contrast to the Lamanite recollection of the Lehte exodus and subsequent ocean crossing, which appears to focus entirely on the role played by Lehi and Nephi rather than on any divine involvement. See Mosiah 10:12–13.

46. “And I beheld his sword, and I drew it forth from the sheath thereof; and the hilt thereof was of pure gold, and the workmanship thereof

was exceedingly fine, and I saw that the blade thereof was of the most precious steel." 1 Nephi 4:9.

47. Nephi is able to make metal plates, metal tools, and even replicates of the sword of Laban. Nephi does not, however, attempt to recreate the Liahona despite it being a metal object. For Nibley's assertion that Lehi and Nephi may have been metalsmiths see: Nibley, *Lehi in the Desert*, 85.
48. Alma 37:39, emphasis added. Alma's phrase could alternatively be interpreted as referring to the abilities of individuals of his day, not necessarily mankind as a whole.
49. 1 Nephi 16:28: "And it came to pass that I, Nephi, beheld the pointers which were in the ball, that they did work according to the faith and diligence and heed which we did give unto them" (emphasis added).
50. Joseph Smith, "Lecture Seventh of Faith," in *Lectures on Faith* (Springville, UT: Cedar Fort, 2010).
51. The two occur only six verses apart. See 1 Nephi 16:28 and 1 Nephi 16:34.
52. Emphasis added. See also Alma 37:41.
53. Chadwick, "An Archaeologists View," 74.
54. Encyclopedia.com, s.v. "Astrolabe," accessed October 17, 2012, <http://www.encyclopedia.com/doc/1G2-3437800039.html>.

THE GEOLOGY OF MORONI'S STONE BOX: EXAMINING THE SETTING AND RESOURCES OF PALMYRA

Benjamin R. Jordan and Warren P. Aston

Abstract: *The story of Joseph Smith retrieving gold plates from a stone box on a hillside in upstate New York and translating them into the foundational text of the Restoration is well known among Latter-day Saints. While countless retellings have examined these events in considerable detail, very few have explored the geological aspects involved in this story. In particular, none have discussed in detail the geological materials that would have been required by the Nephite prophet Moroni ca. AD 421 to construct a sealed container able to protect the gold plates from the elements and from premature discovery for some fourteen centuries. This paper reports the outcomes from a field investigation into what resources would have been available to Moroni in the Palmyra area. It was conducted by the authors in New York state in October 2017.*

The hill near Palmyra,¹ New York state, in which Moroni buried the plates and from which Joseph Smith retrieved them, has long been popularly known among Latter-day Saints as “Cumorah.” This unofficial practice derived from the assumption by many early Book of Mormon believers that this hill marks the location of the final battles between the Lamanite and Nephite armies. The practice remains common today among the general membership. As the Book of Mormon describes the land of Cumorah, its hill, and those wars in some detail, it is evident to

1. The hill under discussion is in Ontario County, rather than in Wayne County where the town of Palmyra lies. However, its proximity to the other locations where the Restoration began, such as the Sacred Grove and the Smith family home, means that the name “Palmyra” is much better known and is used to identify the hill here.

the careful reader that the real-world setting was not — indeed *could* not — have been situated in New York state.² Accordingly, for clarity throughout this paper, the New York hill where the plates were buried by Moroni is referred to as the “Palmyra hill.”



Image 1. *Joseph receives the plates from Moroni. Relief on the west side of the monument atop the Palmyra hill. W. Aston photography.*

2. There is a huge range of literature of greatly varying usefulness dealing with the subject of the New World setting of the Book of Mormon. A good overview that also suggests three scholarly sources for those wishing more detail is “Where Did the Book of Mormon Happen?” *Book of Mormon Central*, May 8, 2018, <https://knowhy.bookofmormoncentral.org/content/where-did-the-book-of-mormon-happen>.



***Image 2.** A general view, facing south, of the west side of the Palmyra hill, near the summit. This is the general area where Moroni buried the plates. Large flat-faced rocks, like those shown in the foreground, are common on the hill. W. Aston photography.*

From Mormon's Cumorah to Moroni's Hill

The final, decisive battle bringing about the end of Nephite society took place about AD 385 (recounted in Mormon 6:1–15) around the Hill Cumorah, the same location formerly known as the Hill Ramah, where the Jaredite nation had earlier ended in battle (Ether 15:11). As the leader of his people, Mormon had buried the collected records of his people in the Hill Cumorah, entrusting his abridgement of them to his son Moroni (Mormon 6:6). Mormon died in the ultimate battle, leaving Moroni to protect and even add to the Nephite record while still avoiding the victorious Lamanites as he wandered.

Three and a half decades later (about AD 421; see Moroni 10:1), Moroni ends his writing and prepares to bury the sacred items in a hill. The years of travel had brought him northward to the Palmyra area of upstate New York,

where the cooler climate would aid in the preservation of buried materials and where they would be accessible when required in the Restoration.

Realistically, for the three decades of wandering that brought him to the Palmyra area, Moroni could not have carried heavy items such as sizeable rocks in addition to the metal plates, breastplate, sword of Laban, Liahona, and the Urim and Thummim, as listed in the 1829 revelation to the Three Witnesses (Doctrine and Covenants 17:1). By his own account completely alone (Mormon 8:3, 5), we feel safe in concluding that when the time arrived to bury the plates, Moroni was restricted to local materials on hand in the Palmyra area.

A Geological Introduction to the Palmyra Setting

The Palmyra hill is a large glacial *drumlin*, formed during the last ice age. It belongs to a large region of drumlins that lie between Lake Ontario on the north and New York's Finger Lakes to the south.³ Understanding how the drumlins formed is important to understanding the findings that follow; it also offers insights into why *this* particular location would become the place for Moroni to secure his precious record.

During the ice age, a vast glacier of continental proportions, known to geologists as the Laurentide Ice Sheet, flowed southwards from Canada and across the Great Lakes region. As it moved across the landscape, the glacier eroded and carried along large amounts of mixed and very poorly sorted sediments that included clays, silts, sands, gravels and boulders in various combinations.⁴

These materials were deposited as hills elongated in the general direction of the glacier's flow, with the highest point of the hill being "uphill" of the glacier's flow direction and tapering down in the glacier's

3. A good general introduction is Michael J. Dorais, "The Geologic History of Hill Cumorah," *Journal of Book of Mormon Studies* 13, no. 1–2 (2004): 136–43, https://publications.mi.byu.edu/publications/jbms/13/1/S00014-5_0be6b50136ef-13Dorais.pdf. A fuller treatment of drumlin formation is D. P. Hess et al, "Geospatial analysis of controls on subglacial bedform morphometry in the New York Drumlin Field — implications for Laurentide Ice Sheet dynamics," *Earth Surface Processes and Landforms* 34 (2009): 1126–35, DOI: 10.1002/esp.1803.

4. See J. Menzies, "A review of the literature on the formation and location of drumlins," in *Earth-Science Reviews* 14, no. 4 (April 1979): 315–59, [https://doi.org/10.1016/0012-8252\(79\)90093-X](https://doi.org/10.1016/0012-8252(79)90093-X). A large-scale map showing the formation of drumlins and lakes can be viewed at *Surficial Geologic Map of New York: Finger Lakes Sheet*, 1986, New York State Geological Survey, http://www.nysm.nysed.gov/common/nysm/files/surf_fingerlakes.jpg.

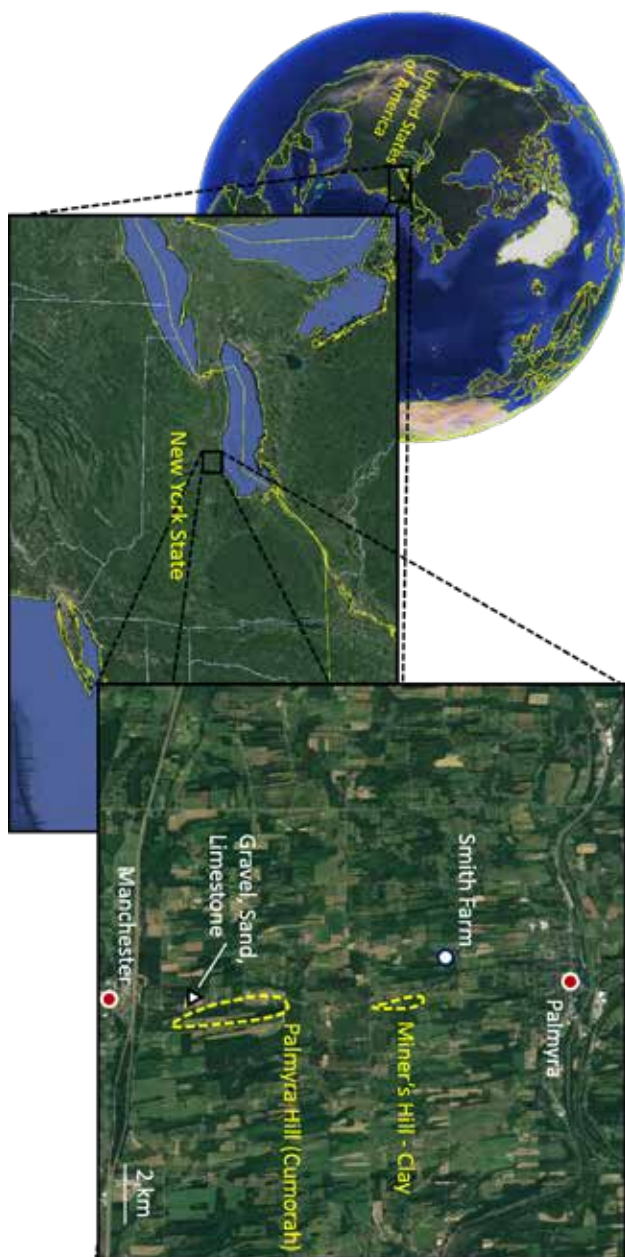


Image 3. Map of the location of the Palmyra hill in upstate New York State, USA, and its relationship to geologic resources that were necessary to build Moroni's stone box as described by Joseph Smith and Oliver Cowdery. Background image courtesy of Google Earth. Graphic courtesy B. Jordan.

flow direction.⁵ The highest point of the Palmyra hill lies, therefore, at its north end, with the long slope of the hill tapering away to the south.

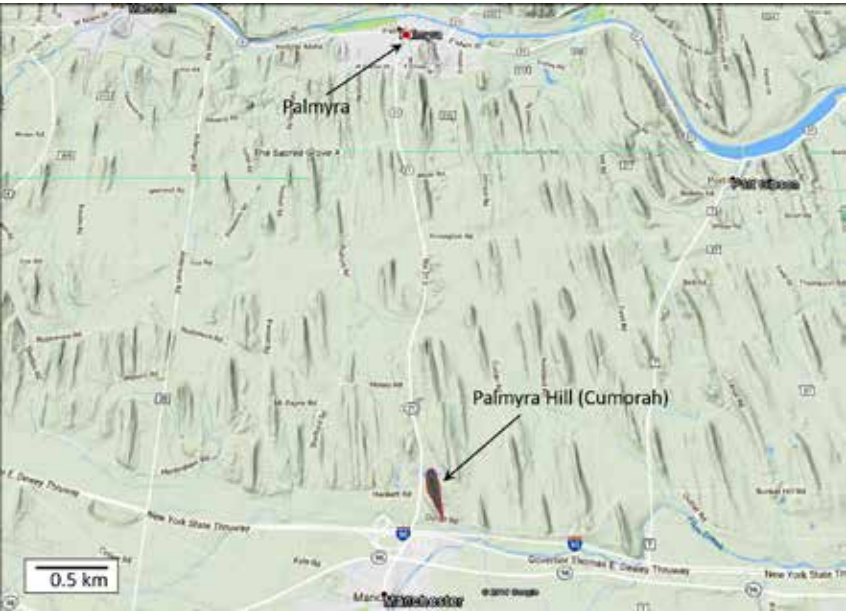


Image 4. The drumlin field in the area. Graphic courtesy B. Jordan.

In the Palmyra area, most of the drumlins consist of a mix of stratified or layered gravels and sands. However, near the Palmyra hill is one today named *Miners Hill*, which is an exception: it is predominately formed of clay — something that might well have played an important role in the making of Moroni’s stone box. This hill will be discussed shortly.

Also of possible relevance is the fact that the sides of drumlin hills tend to be steeply sloped compared with other sedimentary hills; this is very evident at the Palmyra hill. The high angle of the slope would place the box above the local water table by ensuring more efficient water

5. Although not all drumlins are formed of sedimentary deposits, the vast majority are (Menzies, *Earth-Science Reviews*, 14:319). The actual composition and structure of drumlins as well as their processes of formation is complex and still little understood. This paper makes no attempt to deal with those concepts. For in-depth discussion of the issues, also see C. R. Stokes et al., “The composition and internal structure of drumlins: Complexity, commonality, and implications for a unifying theory of their formation,” *Earth-Science Reviews* 107 (2011): 398–422, DOI:10.1016/j.earscirev.2011.05.001.

runoff and preventing the accumulation of water around the box. This may be why Moroni chose to place the box near the top of the hill.

On the other hand, faster water flow would likely have led to more rapid erosion in addition to the natural creep of soil downhill over time. Thus it is possible, if not likely, that the stone box was buried deep enough by Moroni to be completely covered by soil until erosion exposed its upper surface by Joseph's time.



Image 5. Panoramic photograph showing the profile of the Palmyra hill, facing east. B. Jordan photography.

A Description of Moroni's Stone Box

Joseph Smith described the box and its location: “On the west side of this hill, not far from the top,⁶ under a stone of considerable size, lay the plates, deposited in a stone box. This stone was thick and rounding in the middle on the upper side, and thinner towards the edges, so that the middle part of it was visible above the ground, but the edge all around was covered with earth. ... The box in which they lay was formed by laying stones together *in some kind of cement*. In the bottom of the box were laid two stones crossways of the box, and on these stones lay the plates and the other things with them.”⁷

Another description of the box was given by Oliver Cowdery, who said a hole was dug in the hill and, “[a]t the bottom of this was laid a stone of suitable size, *the upper surface being smooth*. At each edge was placed a *large quantity of cement*, and into this cement, at the four edges of this stone, were placed, erect, four others, their bottom edges resting in the cement at the outer edges of the first stone. The four last named, when placed erect, formed a box, the corners, or where the edges of the four came in contact, were also cemented so firmly that the moisture from

6. The possible reasons for burying the plates on the west side of the hill is the subject of a forthcoming paper by Warren Aston.

7. Joseph Smith — History 1:51–52 (emphasis added).

without was prevented from entering. It is to be observed, also, that *the inner surface of the four erect, or side stones was smooth.*⁸

Oliver goes on to describe the relative dimensions of the box, including the fact that it “was sufficiently large to admit a breast-plate, such as was used by the ancients to defend the chest, etc. from the arrows and weapons of their enemy. From the bottom of the box, or from the breast-plate, arose three small pillars composed of the same description of cement used on the edges; and upon these three pillars was placed the record of the children of Joseph.”⁹ For the purposes of this study, however, our focus will remain on the nature of the construction materials: stones and cement.

Rocks Available to Moroni in Making the Box

With these descriptions in mind, a comprehensive survey of the ground on all sides of the Palmyra hill and its surroundings was conducted by the authors, taking particular note of the description that the rocks that made up the box were smooth on at least one of their sides. The survey examined rocks in all possible settings, *in situ* on the hill slopes, walls of rocks cleared from fields, and rocks incorporated into landscape features and buildings.

Given the drumlin nature of the hill, the material of the hill consists of a wide variety of sedimentary material, large and small. Large cobbles (naturally rounded rocks up to about 25 cm/10 inches across) and larger boulders of the size necessary to form the box remain widely distributed across the surface of the hill and throughout the surrounding landscape. In particular, cobble to boulder-size rocks of laminated sandstone and rounded granite and gneiss are fairly common (see image 7A).

One question that arises is what Oliver meant by his use of the word “smooth” in order to determine which rock *type* is likely to have been used in the creation of the box. The sandstone cobbles consist of a fine-grained, slightly-reddish tan color, quartz-rich sandstone with a rounded outer surface. They easily split along lamination surfaces to form fairly smooth, flat surfaces that could fit Oliver’s description of the box (see image 7B). Another common rock found was eroded or rounded pieces of light gray-pink colored granite and gneiss, many of which had at least one side that was flat and smooth. Although their surfaces are not as flat, they are smoother than the sandstone (see images 7C and 7D).

8. Oliver Cowdery, “Letter VIII,” *LDS Messenger and Advocate* (Kirtland, OH), Oct. 1835, 2:196, <http://www.josephsmithpapers.org/paper-summary/his-story-1834-1836/95>, (emphasis added).

9. Ibid.



Image 6. *The survey examined local rocks from a variety of settings. Clockwise from top left: in situ on the Palmyra hill, rocks cleared from fields, rocks incorporated into landscaping, and rocks incorporated into buildings. W. Aston photography.*

It is worth noting, though, that as Oliver said the cement was prepared and placed in such a way that the rocks were “cemented so firmly that the moisture from without was prevented from entering,” the type of rock was likely important for another reason. One advantage in using granite over sandstone is that granite is generally much less porous than sandstone, thus sealing out moisture more effectively. This, coupled with the porous nature of the unconsolidated sediments that form the hill, would have allowed efficient water drainage from around the stone box. Any moisture that did not drain away would be kept from the box interior by the fine cement and the stone sides shaped, most likely, of granite.



Image 7. Rocks found in the vicinity of the Palmyra hill fitting the description of those used to make Moroni's stone box. Images A and B consist of rounded, but delaminated, sandstone. C and D are rounded cobbles of granite. B. Jordan photography.

Our investigation to determine if rocks, *as described by eye-witnesses*, were available in or near the place of burial to form the box demonstrates clearly that they were and, indeed, still are.

What Might Moroni Have Already Known about Cement?

A reasonable question at this point is: could Moroni have known how to make the cement that was vital to construction of the box? Or would he have required assistance, either divine instructions or a helper?

The answer to this question comes from the Book of Mormon itself, which describes that around 49–39 BC, hundreds of years before Moroni's time, the ancient Nephites:

became exceedingly expert in the working of cement; therefore they did build houses of cement, in the which they did dwell ... And thus they did enable the people in the land northward that they might build many cities, both of wood and of cement. (Helaman 3:7, 11)

Moroni thus grew up within a culture in which making cement using the abundant limestone of the region was already a common skill or technology. So it is entirely possible, even likely, that he learned the skill himself, needing no assistance when in Palmyra. We conclude that it is most unlikely, therefore, that Moroni would have needed recourse to either divine or human help in the matter. An examination of what is now known of the cement skills available in Moroni's day now sheds considerable further light on what he did while at Palmyra.

Archaeological Evidence for Ancient Cement in the Americas

The reference just cited in the Book of Helaman to houses and even cities built of wood and “cement” was universally derided in Joseph Smith's day; even well into the twentieth century awareness of the nature of structures in Mexico and Mesoamerica remained obscure among scholars and the public alike.

While the use of cement in the Book of Mormon period remains unknown in South America and in modern USA and Canada,¹⁰ today we know of hundreds of sites across Central America dating to that age — temples, pyramids, courtyards, palaces up to five stories high and other large buildings — constructed with, and sometimes largely composed of, high-quality concrete. These structures range up to 72 meters (236 feet) tall and can cover large areas. They have endured a humid climate, earthquakes, and hurricanes for up to three millennia and, despite the encroachment of jungle vines and roots since their abandonment around 1000 AD, have remained largely intact.

Archaeology has further established that while precursors appear among the Maya as early as the ninth century BC, cement and concrete skills first appear as a fully-developed technology in Mesoamerica

10. This fact, of course, is of crucial significance in determining where in the Americas the New World account of the Book of Mormon played out.

around the very period described in Helaman, the first century BC,¹¹ a most significant correlation with the Nephite text.

In 1973, Civil engineer David S. Hyman published the following summary of his research in terms that bear repeating:

I collected a comprehensive number of concrete, stucco, and mortar samples from many important sites throughout Mexico and Central America. ... These were subjected to load tests, chemical, petrographic, x-ray diffraction, and other analyses ... All cements proved to be pure or nearly pure calcium carbonate. Extreme hardness and durability of the finished concrete slab or stucco had been accomplished by purity of cement, incredible skill in proportioning and mixing with the aggregates and, in some cases, by the use of additives and surface hardeners [M]y earliest [dated] samples were of the highest quality.¹²

Ancient Maya cement, therefore, is essentially the same as modern *Portland* cement (the modern standard) and produces a strong matrix of concrete, comparable in every way to what is used in construction today.

The Ingredients of Durable Cement

Perhaps a greater challenge to Moroni than locating suitable rocks would have been finding materials suitable for producing high quality, hard-wearing cement in a large enough quantity to hold the stones together. While we do not know the exact nature and type of “cement” that was made by him, the materials in the immediate environment offer strong clues.

As the box had to protect its contents for some 1400 years, something we can be certain of is that Moroni’s cement must have been of an enduring type, most likely similar to modern cements. The essential chemical ingredient of cement is calcium (Ca), produced from what is commonly known as quicklime, burnt lime, or simply lime (Calcium oxide, CaO) from either limestone or dolostone. Limestone is the easier of the two to process and thus the most preferable rock type; as already noted, limestone would have been familiar to Moroni from his own Nephite culture.

11. See the summary provided in “When Did Cement Become Common in Ancient America?” Book of Mormon Central, August 26, 2016, <https://knowhy.bookofmormoncentral.org/content/when-did-cement-become-common-in-ancient-america>.

12. David S. Hyman, “Cements at Teotihuacan: A Criticism of Margain’s Appraisal,” *American Anthropologist* 75, no. 1 (February 1973): 314. <https://anthrosource.onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/epdf/10.1525/aa.1973.75.1.02a00290>, emphasis added.



Image 8. A large cobble of Limestone with the interior exposed. W. Aston photography.

Producing lime in the pre-industrial period was a process that involved cooking pieces of limestone on a wood fire. Once the wood burnt down to charcoal, temperatures of up to around 1,600° C (~2,900° F) were reached.¹³ This resulted in a chemical reaction producing globules

13. The heat values of various woods when burned can be found at “Combustion of Wood — Heat Values,” *The Engineering Toolbox* (web site), accessed December 1, 2017, https://www.engineeringtoolbox.com/wood-combustion-heat-d_372.html. Charcoal can be produced at lower temperatures; see, for example, <http://www.fao.org/docrep/X5328E/x5328e05.htm>. Lime can also be produced without producing charcoal, but using just wood. The temperatures needed to produce lime in earlier times are discussed at <https://www.sciencelearn.org.nz/resources/474-lime-a-time-tested-chemical>. Regardless of whether charcoal or wood was used, Moroni could have easily produced lime from the limestone found near Palmyra and Manchester.

(“clinkers”) of calcium silicate (Ca_2SiO_4); after cooling, water added to the material made it expand to a powder of around 5 or 6 times the volume of the limestone. This was the cement which, added to an aggregate and water, formed concrete.

Within the local drumlin, gravels and the limestone cobbles mentioned earlier and pictured above are found; they are of an excellent quality for producing lime. Post fieldwork analysis established that these limestone rocks are high in the critical compound of Calcium Oxide, CaO .

Compound	Formula	Weight Percent (%)
Silicon dioxide	SiO_2	13.59
Aluminum oxide	Al_2O_3	0.89
Titanium dioxide	TiO_2	0.01
Iron oxide	Fe_2O_3	0.75
Calcium oxide	CaO	77.99
Magnesium oxide	MgO	1.94
Potassium oxide	K_2O	0.08
Sodium oxide	Na_2O	0.05
Sulfur trioxide	SO_3	0.64
Phosphorus pentoxide	P_2O_5	0.16
Strontium oxide	SrO	0.22
Barium oxide	BaO	0.00
Manganese oxide	MnO	0.03
Undetermined		3.64

Image 9. Limestone analysis results. Courtesy of B. Jordan.

Of course, Moroni needed to burn wood to reduce the limestone to powder. Where this was done remains unclear, but the geography of the Palmyra hill may provide a clue. At the hill’s southwestern end is a small valley, or vale, situated between the hill and a low rise on the west that prevents anyone passing along the western side of the hill from seeing into the vale. Such a place could have provided him with the seclusion necessary to assemble the stone box and manufacture the cement while remaining undetected. With decades of experience avoiding detection in his long travels, probably making regular fires for cooking, we believe Moroni would have utilized such natural features as he worked to not draw attention to the actual burial location itself.

Modern cements primarily consist of a mixture of lime, sand, and clay. Our investigation found that all three of these materials exist in close proximity to the Palmyra hill, and in sufficient quantities to make the cement necessary to form a stone box of the size described by Joseph and Oliver.

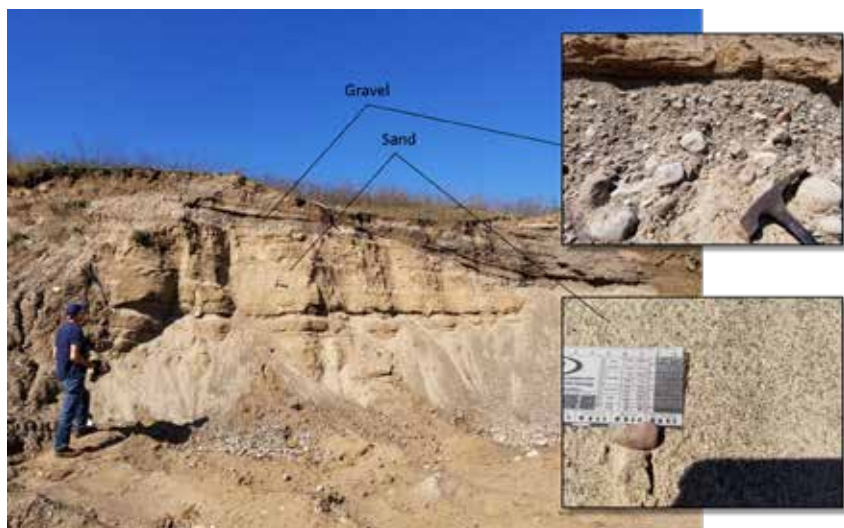


Image 10. The drumlin geology of the Palmyra area is revealed in the layers of sand, gravel, and limestone inclusions at this quarry just southwest of the hill. Within the gravel was limestone of a grade sufficient to produce lime. B. Jordan photography.

Lime and Sand

Just to the west of the southern point of Palmyra Hill, at a distance of 1.7 km (1.09 miles), is an excavation of drumlin sediments that consists of alternating layers of medium to coarse-grained, cross-bedded sand and graded gravel, which is typical of drumlins.¹⁴

The majority of the drumlin material consists of sand; it is the *gravel* deposits that commonly contain cobble- and pebble-sized pieces of limestone. Additionally, there are sizeable bedrock outcrops of limestone in the area, as evidenced by a working limestone quarry (the Dolomite Products Company) ~7 km (~5 miles) southeast of the Palmyra hill. Limestone and dolostone quarries are New York's second most common type of mine.¹⁵

Clay

As clay is almost unknown in the Palmyra area, the clay that Moroni needed was the most challenging ingredient for us to locate.¹⁶ As noted

14. Menzies, "A review of the literature on the formation and location of drumlins"; Stokes, "The composition and internal structure of drumlins."

15. See New York State Department of Environmental Conservation, *2015 Fact Sheets Products of New York State Mines*, https://www.dec.ny.gov/docs/materials_minerals_pdf/minfactsht.pdf.

16. Ibid. Clay is not mentioned in the report for the entire state.



Image 11. *Testing limestone with diluted hydrochloric acid. W. Aston photography.*

earlier, however, some 3 km (~2 miles) due north of the Palmyra hill is a smaller drumlin called Miner's Hill. Perhaps uniquely in the area, this hill consists almost entirely of fine clay. According to the current land owner, who allowed the New York Highway Department to mine it, it is the only location in the area that serves as a source of clay.

Miner's Hill lies between Joseph Smith's family home and the Palmyra hill, a proximity that may be significant in the story of the plates. It also has a deep tunnel, recently re-excavated, offering a glimpse into the interior of the hill. The tunnel dates back to the Smith family's time and is therefore of possible historic interest.¹⁷

What Happened to the Stone Box?

Understandably, in Joseph Smith's day it was the *contents* of the box — the plates — that held the greatest interest to believers and unbelievers alike. Still, there were those in both camps who also sought to see the stone box on the hill for themselves. There are no reliable first-hand accounts of what happened to the stone box. However, the most credible reports agree that the stone box, its capstone having been opened several

17. A fascinating effort is underway to establish the nature of the "cave" or tunnel inside Miner's Hill, see KC Kern, "Discovering Joseph Smith's Cave in Miner's Hill, Manchester, New York," *Archival.link* (website), September 22, 2015, <http://archival.link/mormoncave/story>.



Image 12. Miner's Hill in Palmyra is a rare drumlin consisting of fine clay. W. Aston photography.

times by Joseph Smith in his meetings with the resurrected Moroni over the years, and seemingly left open after he removed its contents, was now exposed to the elements and eventually washed in pieces down the hill.

Two surviving accounts are our sources for this likely outcome. The first was General Authority (First Council of the Seventy) Edward Stevenson (d. 1897) who published an account in 1893 about interviewing an “old man” living near the hill:

Questioning him closely he stated that he had seen some good-sized flat stones that had rolled down and lay near the bottom of the hill. This had occurred after the contents of the box had been removed and these stones were doubtless the ones that formerly composed the box. I felt a strong desire to see these ancient relics and told him I would be much pleased to have him inform me where they were to be found. He stated that they had long since been taken away.¹⁸

The other is a report in which David Whitmer, one of the Three Witnesses to the Book of Mormon, had stated:

18. Edward Stevenson, *Reminiscences of Joseph the Prophet, And the Coming Forth of the Book of Mormon* (Salt Lake City, 1893), 13, <https://www.gutenberg.org/files/54337/54337-h/54337-h.htm>.

Three times [David Whitmer] has been at the Hill Cumorah and seen the casket that contained the tablets and seerstone. Eventually the casket has been washed down to the foot of the hill, but it was to be seen when he last visited the historic place.¹⁹

What seems certain, at least, is that Moroni's stone box is no longer in its original position on the hill nor, despite some claims to the contrary, does any indication of the hole remain where it was once buried.

The Unique Convergence of Geological Factors in the Palmyra Area

The glacial processes of the Palmyra region brought together all the necessary materials to form the stone box, to manufacture the cement holding the stone components together, and fashion the three small cement pillars inside it. Moroni would have been able to access the rocks and sediments necessary without extensive travel or effort.

Considered individually, sandstone, granite, and limestone are all, of course, very common rocks on the surface of the Earth, as are sediments such as clays and sand. This is also true of the formation of flat-sided sandstones and granite as they weather. However, finding all these rocks and sediments together in close proximity is more *unusual*. While such a grouping may not be accurately described as rare on Earth, given the needs of Moroni it was highly advantageous to his purposes to have all these occur in the vicinity of the hill in which he buried the plates.

Joseph Smith noted in his History that the hill where he obtained the plates was a prominent landmark²⁰ in an area where the terrain is quite flat and most hills appear nearly identical. This uniformity of size is common in drumlin fields and would have been especially true in Joseph Smith's time, as much of the area had been deforested by settlers to make farmland. This prominence, coupled with the fact that the stone materials and all the cement ingredients are readily available in the vicinity, made the Palmyra hill uniquely situated for the purposes of Moroni.

Conclusion

This research answers two closely related questions:

19. David Whitmer, interview with Chicago Times (August 1875), quoted in Ebbie L. V. Richardson, "David Whitmer: A Witness to the Divine Authenticity of the Book of Mormon," (master's thesis, Brigham Young University, 1952), 158, <https://scholarsarchive.byu.edu/etd/5072/>. As reported in the same paper (p. 166), David Whitmer also alluded to seeing the stone box himself in another interview.

20. Joseph Smith — History 1:51.



Image 13. *The view facing west from the north end of the Palmyra hill. W. Aston photography.*

1. Were the geological materials necessary to make a stone box, consisting of sizable stones and the ingredients for cement, present in close enough proximity to the Palmyra hill to have been available for Moroni to build such a box?
2. Are there rocks or stones locally available that match the description given by eyewitnesses or near-secondary sources?

The answer to both questions is clearly a firm yes. While this information does not really say anything about the claim that the Book of Mormon itself is an authentic ancient record, from a geological perspective it firmly supports the idea that all the materials necessary to build the stone box that contained the plates, as described by witnesses, can indeed be found in the local area.

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a reviewer for multiple academic journals. His favorite work experiences have been co-leading fieldtrips in Oman and Hawaii and participating in research excursions in sixteen countries, including in the South Pacific and seventeen states, mapping and sampling underwater volcanoes. Currently Ben is an associate professor at Brigham Young University-Hawaii and an active member of the American Geophysical Union, the Geological Society of America, the Tsunami Society and the International Association of Volcanology and Chemistry of the Earth's Interior.

Warren Aston *is an independent researcher based in Brisbane, Australia. Since 1984 his exploratory efforts throughout the Near East and Mesoamerica have identified the candidates for “Nahom” and the Old World “Bountiful” now accepted by most LDS scholars. In 2013 he co-founded the Khor Kharfot Foundation, leading several international teams undertaking fieldwork at the site. He is the author of In the Footsteps of Lehi (1994); Lehi and Sariah in Arabia: The Old World Setting of the Book of Mormon (2015) and numerous papers and articles. Warren’s findings have been reported in Church Education System manuals, BYU Studies Quarterly, Encyclopedia of Mormonism and the Journal of Book of Mormon Studies. They have also been presented at non-LDS forums such as the annual Seminar for Arabian Studies in the UK and in publications such as the Journal of Arabian Studies. His work continues in both Arabia and Mesoamerica, including a major Book of Mormon Central exploratory project focused on the hill Ramah-Cumorah.*

ORSON SCOTT CARD'S “ARTIFACT OR ARTIFICE”: WHERE IT STANDS AFTER TWENTY-FIVE YEARS

Jeff Lindsay

Abstract: *When Orson Scott Card wrote “The Book of Mormon: Artifact or Artifice?” in 1993, he applied keen skills as an author of fiction to help readers understand how to detect the many hidden assumptions an author brings into a text. Subtle details such as the choice of what to explain or what not to explain to readers can quickly reveal the era and environment of the author. The value of Card’s analysis is reconsidered in light of extensive Book of Mormon studies since 1993 and has been found, for the most part, to have withstood the test of time well, like the Book of Mormon itself.*

Twenty-five years ago — long before the founding of The Interpreter Foundation and even predating the founding of FARMS by half a decade — a famous name among fiction writers, Orson Scott Card, gave a speech at BYU that provided a novel way of evaluating Book of Mormon claims. In “The Book of Mormon: Artifact or Artifice?” at the 1993 BYU Symposium on Life, the Universe, and Everything,¹ Card applied his literary skills to examine the artifacts of fiction we should find if the Book of Mormon had been fabricated and not merely translated by Joseph Smith.

Upon reading Card’s article today, one familiar with Book of Mormon studies may be impressed with how well Card’s analysis and conclusions have stood the test of time. Many of the points he made have become more relevant or strengthened by subsequent explorations into the text of the Book of Mormon, the details of its translation and publication,

1. Orson Scott Card, “The Book of Mormon — Artifact or Artifice?,” *Nauvoo Times*, February 1993, <http://www.nauvoo.com/library/card-bookofmormon.html>.

the scholarship into the lives of the witnesses, and many new studies relevant to evidence for the plausibility of the Book of Mormon and the meaning of the text.

When Card spoke in early 1993, he did not have the benefit of the recent discoveries related to Lehi's Trail from the work of Warren Aston, who has highlighted the plausibility of numerous details such as the existence and location of an ancient place with a name like Nahom and the existence of a fully plausible site for Bountiful exactly where it should be.² He would not have seen the 1999 notice from S. Kent Brown about the discovery of ancient altars in Yemen providing hard archaeological evidence for the rare place name Nahom in the right place and time to be relevant to Lehi's Trail.³ He did not have the benefit of the field work of George Potter examining the prospects for what was once said to be impossible, the River Laman in the Valley of Lemuel three days south of the beginning of the

2. Warren P. Aston and Michaela K. Aston, *In the Footsteps of Lehi* (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 1994); followed by the much more detailed work, Warren P. Aston, *Lehi and Sariah in Arabia: The Old World Setting of the Book of Mormon* (Bloomington, IN: Xlibris Publishing, 2015). See also Warren Aston, "Across Arabia with Lehi and Sariah: 'Truth Shall Spring out of the Earth,'" *Journal of Book of Mormon Studies* 15, no. 2 (2006): 8–25, 110–13; Warren P. Aston, "The Origins of the Nihm Tribe of Yemen: A Window into Arabia's Past," *Journal of Arabian Studies: Arabia, the Gulf, and the Red Sea* 4, no. 1 (June 2014): 134–48, https://www.academia.edu/13256024/The_Origins_of_the_Nihm_Tribe_of_Yemen_A_Window_into_Arabias_Past. Also see Warren P. Aston, "A History of NaHoM," *BYU Studies Quarterly* 51, no. 2 (2012), <https://scholarsarchive.byu.edu/byusq/vol51/iss2/6> and Warren P. Aston, "The Arabian Bountiful Discovered? Evidence for Nephi's Bountiful," *Journal of Book of Mormon Studies* 7, no. 1 (1998): 4–11, <https://publications.mi.byu.edu/fullscreen/?pub=1397&index=2>. Regarding the discovery of Nahom, while it was 1988 when German archaeologists uncovered the three altars bearing the ancient NHM tribal name, it would not be until well after Card's article that these finds would generate a stir in the Latter-day Saint community.

3. S. Kent Brown, "'The Place Which Was Called Nahom': New Light from Ancient Yemen," *Journal of Book of Mormon Studies* 8, no. 1 (1999): 66–68, <https://publications.mi.byu.edu/publications/jbms/8/1/S00012-50cb97a1641b311New%20Light.pdf>. While the German archaeological team excavated the altars in 1988, Brown's brief 1999 note is believed to be the first publication making a possible connection between the altars and the Book of Mormon place name Nahom. Much further analysis on the altars was later published by Warren Aston in "Newly Found Altars from Nahom," *Journal of Book of Mormon Studies*, 10, no. 2 (2001): 56–61, 71, <https://publications.mi.byu.edu/publications/jbms/10/2/S00008-50e5e94d04c218Aston.pdf>. See also Aston, *Lehi and Sariah in Arabia* and Aston, "A History of NaHoM."

Red Sea, where Lehi preached to his sons.⁴ He didn't have the massive body of evidence from John Sorenson's *Mormon's Codex*⁵ or the insights about the Mesoamerican perspectives in the Book of Mormon uncovered by Brant Gardner.⁶ He lacked the revolutionary insights from the study of the earliest Book of Mormon texts by Royal Skousen or the analysis of the language of the Book of Mormon by Stanford Carmack.

Card's speech was also before Latter-day Saint scholars became familiar with the work of Scottish researcher Margaret Barker and before she became familiar with the Book of Mormon. Barker has sought to reconstruct the early Jewish religion before the reforms of Josiah and before the major changes of the Second Temple period.⁷ Barker was impressed with what she found in the Book of Mormon, for it seemed to reflect an ancient environment and ancient worldviews consistent with her research, and, again, quite foreign to the knowledge available to scholars in Joseph Smith's day.⁸

4. George Potter and Richard Wellington, *Lehi in the Wilderness: 81 New, Documented Evidences that the Book of Mormon is a True History* (Springville, UT: Cedar Fort, Inc., 2003). See also Richard Wellington and George Potter, "Lehi's Trail: From the Valley of Lemuel to Nephi's Harbor," *Journal of Book of Mormon Studies* 15, no. 2 (2006): 26–43, <https://publications.mi.byu.edu/publications/jbms/15/2/S00007-50bf64ad1b8fe4WellingtonPotter.pdf>.

5. John L. Sorenson, *Mormon's Codex: An Ancient American Book* (Provo, UT: Neal A. Maxwell Institute, 2013).

6. Brant Gardner, *Traditions of the Fathers: The Book of Mormon as History* (Salt Lake City: Greg Kofford Books, 2015).

7. Margaret Barker, "What Did King Josiah Reform?" in John W. Welch, David Rolph Seely and Ann H. Seely, eds., *Glimpses of Lehi's Jerusalem* (Provo, UT: FARMS, 2004), 521–42, <https://publications.mi.byu.edu/fullscreen/?pub=1081&index=16>; Margaret Barker, "Joseph Smith and Preexilic Israelite Religion," in *The Worlds of Joseph Smith*, ed. John W. Welch (Provo, UT: Brigham Young University Press, 2005), 69–82, <https://byustudies.byu.edu/content/joseph-smith-and-preexilic-israelite-religion>. Also see Margaret Barker, *Temple Mysticism: An Introduction* (London: Society for Promoting Christian Knowledge, 2011).

8. Neal Rappleye, "The Deuteronomist Reforms and Lehi's Family Dynamics: A Social Context for the Rebellions of Laman and Lemuel," *Interpreter: A Journal of Mormon Scripture* 16 (2015): 87–99, <https://www.mormoninterpreter.com/the-deuteronomist-reforms-and-lehis-family-dynamics-a-social-context-for-the-rebellions-of-laman-and-lemuel/>; Kevin Christensen, "Book Review: Temple Mysticism: An Introduction, by Margaret Barker," *Interpreter: A Journal of Mormon Scripture* 5 (2013): 191–99, <https://www.mormoninterpreter.com/book-review-temple-mysticism-an-introduction-by-margaret-barker/>; Kevin Christensen, "The Temple, the Monarchy, and Wisdom: Lehi's World and the Scholarship of Margaret

Much has changed since Card tugged at the text from the perspective of a master of science fiction, but for the most part the added knowledge 25 years later only increases the value of Card's approach. Card looked for telltale threads of modern fiction, revealing instead that the text was of quite a different weave. Card sees it as the tapestry of multiple authors from an era far removed from modern fiction, a work impossible for even a skilled writer of fiction in our day or Joseph's. Using the lens of a science fiction writer, Card reveals patterns woven into the text that defy explanation based on Joseph Smith as author. Here we review some of the patterns and artifacts of authenticity that Card spots, and discuss updated information relevant to several of Card's points for an added perspective.

Voices and Viewpoints of Authors, Ancient and Modern

Card points out that authors write with a vast network of assumptions from their environment coloring the way they perceive and describe events. The environment the author has inherited provides numerous views on life and society that are easily taken for granted without realizing that it may not be this way at other times or in other societies. The environment that influenced the author can often be revealed by examining that which the author recognizes as unusual and in need of explanation in the text versus what the author sees as normal and requiring no explanation.

One of the first points Card mentions to illustrate such subtleties is the contrast between the attitude toward valuable documents showed by Book of Mormon characters and Joseph himself. He mentions Amaleki's statement in Omni 1:25 wherein he justifies his decision to turn over the records he has inherited to King Benjamin:

Which, by the way, is something that would certainly not be a cultural idea available to Joseph Smith. You don't turn ancient records over to kings in the world of the 1820s in America. Kings would have nothing to do with ancient records. You would turn ancient records over to a scholar. We know that that was Joseph Smith's personal attitude because when he wanted to find support for his translation in order to encourage Martin Harris's continuing support, he sent Harris, *not* to a king or a president or a political leader, but to a scholar.⁹

Barker," in Welch, Seely, and Seely, *Glimpses of Lehi's Jerusalem*, 449–522, <https://publications.mi.byu.edu/fullscreen/?pub=1081&index=15>.

9. Card, "The Book of Mormon — Artifact or Artifice?."

This is one of many indications of implicit cultural views consistent with the ancient world of the Book of Mormon and highly divergent from Joseph Smith's environment, and a valuable observation by Card. Indeed, the issue of the handling, preservation, and transmission of sacred records in the Book of Mormon has been a fruitful area for additional research since 1993. Consider, for example, John Tvedtnes's book published in 2000, *The Book of Mormon and Other Hidden Books: Out of Darkness unto Light*.¹⁰ Tvedtnes examines the authentic ancient aspects of relevant features in the Book of Mormon such as the use of treasuries to store records, the practice of hiding or sealing ancient records for a future time, the use of stone boxes to preserve records, traditions about records entrusted to the care of angels, mountain repositories, and ancient traditions about glowing stones used for revelation, all showing evidence that the world of the Book of Mormon is highly consistent with ancient Near Eastern practices and traditions.

More recently, a professional archivist, Anita Wells, has noted that the meticulous way in which the Book of Mormon describes its own provenance and that of the various records used in creating the text reveals intricate and realistic details about document handling that cannot be explained as a product of the early 19th century.¹¹ Wells explains that our modern concepts of record handling and establishing provenance was developed by archivists in Europe long after Joseph Smith's day, and would not become well established in the US until early in the 20th century. This perspective has important implications:

[T]he archival profession as we understand it now did not exist in Joseph Smith's time. The concept of provenance (a record of ownership to guide claims of authenticity) and chain of custody (documenting that record of ownership) was not identified. The Bible, Joseph's main resource for an example of ancient writing at the time he translated the Book of Mormon, gave very little indication of who wrote it and how its records were copied and transmitted throughout the ages. These ideas were not something anyone in the mid-19th century

10. John A. Tvedtnes, *The Book of Mormon and Other Hidden Books: Out of Darkness unto Light* (Provo, UT: FARMS, 2000), <https://publications.mi.byu.edu/book/the-book-of-mormon-and-other-hidden-books-out-of-darkness-unto-light/>.

11. Anita Wells, "Bare Record: The Nephite Archivist, The Record of Records, and the Book of Mormon Provenance," *Interpreter: A Journal of Mormon Scripture* 24 (2017): 99–122, <https://www.mormoninterpreter.com/bare-record-the-nephite-archivist-the-record-of-records-and-the-book-of-mormon-provenance/>.

could have known, a working conceptual knowledge of which would allow their incorporation into the Book of Mormon. Provenance is a modern convention used today and developed in the past century to validate claims (notably in art auctions); Mormon made the chain of custody and provenance of his record abundantly clear from millennia prior.¹²

While the Bible provides little guidance on provenance, a variety of ancient scribal practices included giving details on documents and their origins, and the practices we find in the Book of Mormon ring true as products of an ancient culture that cared deeply about records and writing. They ring true today in light of our familiarity with modern archival practices. But they don't reflect Joseph Smith's environment. Intriguingly, Wells cites Card's "Artifact or Artifice" on this point:

Science fiction author Orson Scott Card explained that written hoaxes are a product of their time, easily unmasked by later scientific understanding. If the Book of Mormon was purely a Joseph Smith creation, how he did or did not include lineage and custodial authorship information should conform to 19th-century manners and ring false to modern readers. Yet the more we learn about archival provenance and chain of custody, the more remarkable it is to discover the precise documentation of such practices in the Book of Mormon.¹³

Turning to Mesoamerica, John L. Sorenson also shows that Book of Mormon practices regarding record keeping are consistent with ancient Mesoamerican traditions,¹⁴ as is also true for the nature of records and writing systems, including the keeping of dates, recording of prophecies, genealogies, keeping of lineage histories, etc.¹⁵ For example, the Quiché Maya had an office of record keeper that was passed from father to son, similar to the Nephites' practice. The records also played an important role as symbols of political and religious authority.¹⁶

Authorial Interests

Card's keen eye as an author helps us recognize the diverse interests and voices of various authors. Nephi, for example, glosses over details

12. Ibid., 110.

13. Ibid., 113.

14. Sorenson, *Mormon's Codex*, 104–8.

15. Ibid., 184–232.

16. Ibid., 106.

of battles, whereas Mormon tends to give intricate information "but only when telling the story of a heroic captain who is a spiritual as well as a military example."¹⁷ Nephi and Jacob are writing for a different purpose than Mormon and Moroni were, and they naturally focus on different issues. This is natural, that is, for an authentic document with multiple authors. Properly reflecting the complex array of different rhetorical purposes for the various voices of the Book of Mormon would have been a remarkable achievement if Joseph Smith were its author. Further, Mormon's interests, which include an intense focus on military strategy and battle details, are clearly not the interests of Joseph Smith, whose extensive writings over his life show no such interest in the details of military campaigns. It is Card's experience that authors tend to return to the topics that fascinate them, as Mormon does to military matters. It is unlikely that the voice of Mormon is young Joseph drawing upon his non-military environment in the 1820s. Indeed, the numerous aspects of warfare in the Book of Mormon represent an area where the book is on remarkably solid ground as an authentic ancient work, with intricate, realistic details far beyond Joseph's environment, as documented, for example, in *Warfare in the Book of Mormon*.¹⁸

Card's observations on authorial voices and interests anticipate, in part, a significant later contribution to Book of Mormon studies in Grant Hardy's *Understanding the Book of Mormon: A Reader's Guide*.¹⁹ By considering the Book of Mormon as literature from real humans, regardless of whether it is fiction or history, Hardy highlights the viewpoints and interests of the multiple men who worked to prepare and edit Book of Mormon records. Hardy did not intend to write an apologetic work, but rather to enhance appreciation of the literary quality of the Book of Mormon through exploring the voices and agendas of Mormon, Moroni, and Nephi, three major editors who shaped the final complex document compiled from numerous sources. However, the result of his work and his ear for different voices in a literary work show that the three editors he examines are best understood as different individuals with

17. Card, "The Book of Mormon — Artifact or Artifice?."

18. Stephen D. Ricks and William J. Hamblin, eds., *Warfare in the Book of Mormon* (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 1990), <https://publications.mi.byu.edu/book/warfare-in-the-book-of-mormon/>.

19. Grant Hardy, *Understanding the Book of Mormon: A Reader's Guide* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010).

unique voices and agendas, making Hardy's analysis an unintentionally powerful apologetic work, as Daniel Peterson has noted.²⁰ Hardy states,

Under close scrutiny, [the Book of Mormon] appears to be a carefully crafted, integrated work, with multiple narrative levels, an intricate organization, and extensive intratextual phrasal allusions and borrowings. None of this is foreign to fiction, but the circumstances of the book's production are awkward: the more complicated and interconnected the text, the less likely it is that Joseph Smith made it up spontaneously as he dictated the words to his scribes, one time through.²¹

Hardy's observation requires understanding the growing body of evidence about the translation process itself. Royal Skousen's meticulous examination of the original manuscript of the Book of Mormon would provide detailed confirmation that the translation process was based on oral dictation to scribes, and from the accounts of multiple witnesses it is clear that it was done without manuscripts as Joseph dictated. Skousen summarizes:

All of this evidence (from the witnesses' statements, the original manuscript, the printer's manuscript, and from the text itself) is thus consistent with the hypothesis that Joseph Smith could actually see (whether in the interpreters themselves or in his mind's eye) the translated English text — word for word and letter for letter — and that he read off this revealed text to his scribe. Despite Joseph's reading off of the text, one should not assume that this process was automatic or easily done. Joseph had to prepare himself spiritually for this work. Yet the evidence suggests that Joseph was not the author of the Book of Mormon, not even its English language translation, although it was revealed spiritually through him and in his own language.²²

We now know there were numerous witnesses and remarkably consistent testimony showing that Joseph dictated not only at a rapid

20. Daniel C. Peterson, "Understanding the Book of Mormon: A Reader's Guide," *Deseret News*, June 24, 2010, <https://www.deseretnews.com/article/705384849/Daniel-C-Peterson-Understanding-the-Book-of-Mormon-A-Readers-Guide.html>.

21. Hardy, introduction to *Understanding the Book of Mormon*.

22. Royal Skousen, "How Joseph Smith Translated the Book of Mormon: Evidence from the Original Manuscript," *Journal of Book of Mormon Studies* 7, no. 1 (1998): 31, <https://publications.mi.byu.edu/publications/jbms/7/1/S00005-50be28d378b0e4Skousen.pdf>.

pace but without notes, without manuscripts, and apparently without a Bible even when quoting Isaiah or other parts of the Bible.²³ (Indeed, it appears that Joseph did not even have a Bible of his own until after completion of the Book of Mormon translation, when he sent Oliver Cowdery in late 1829 to purchase a Bible so he could begin the work of the inspired translation of the Bible.²⁴) It was a miraculous process on the face of it, but the wonders are only magnified when we look at the text in intricate detail. The many witnesses,²⁵ including at least one non-Latter-day Saint witness,²⁶ who at various times saw the translation as it took place as well as the witnesses of the plates, also including at least one non-Latter-day Saint witness,²⁷ create a consistent record in support of what Joseph said about his translation work.

23. See, for example, Michael Hubbard MacKay and Gerrit J. Dirkmaat, *From Darkness Unto Light: Joseph Smith's Translation and Publication of the Book of Mormon* (Provo, UT: Religious Studies Center, Brigham Young University, and Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 2015), 119–30, and Michael Hubbard MacKay and Gerrit J. Dirkmaat, "Firsthand Witness Accounts of the Translation Process," in *The Coming Forth of the Book of Mormon: A Marvelous Work and a Wonder*, ed. Dennis L. Largey, Andrew H. Hedges, John Hilton III, and Jerry Hull, (Provo, UT: Religious Studies Center, Brigham Young University, 2015), 61–79. Also see Jeff Lindsay, "Did Joseph Use a Bible?," *Mormanity Blog*, Oct. 30, 2015, <https://mormanity.blogspot.com/2015/10/did-joseph-use-bible.html>.

24. Kent P. Jackson, "Joseph Smith's Cooperstown Bible: The Historical Context of the Bible Used in the Joseph Smith Translation," *BYU Studies Quarterly* 40, no. 1 (2001): 41–70, <https://byustudies.byu.edu/content/joseph-smiths-cooperstown-bible-historical-context-bible-used-joseph-smith-translation>.

25. In addition to well-known account of the Three Witnesses and the Eight Witnesses, see also Amy Easton-Flake and Rachel Cope, "A Multiplicity of Witnesses: Women and the Translation Process," in Dennis L. Largey, *et al.*, eds., *The Coming Forth of the Book of Mormon: A Marvelous Work and a Wonder* (Provo, UT: Religious Studies Center, Brigham Young University, 2015), 133–53.

26. One non-Latter-day Saint witness was Michael Morse, Emma's brother-in-law, who gave an interview in 1879, recalling that "when Joseph was translating the Book of Mormon, he, (Morse), had occasion more than once to go into his immediate presence, and saw him engaged at his work of translation. The mode of procedure consisted in Joseph's placing the Seer Stone in the crown of a hat, then putting his face into the hat, so as to entirely cover his face, resting his elbows upon his knees, and then dictating word after word, while the scribe - Emma, John Whitmer, O. Cowdery, or some other, wrote it down." W.W. Blair, letter to the editors, *Saints Herald* 26, no. 12 (June 15, 1879): 191, quoted in Royal Skousen, ed., *The Earliest Text* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2009), xiii.

27. The first unintentional witness of the plates was Josiah Stowell, who apparently took the plates out of Joseph's hands as he brought them home. He hefted them and later even stated that he saw a portion of the exposed plates. See Anthony Sweat,

Exposition

Card points out that modern science fiction writers have learned to adjust their writing to subtly reveal large differences between the setting of their fiction and the modern world. Thus, instead of stopping to explain that a door on another world operated in a much different way than doors on Earth, Robert Heinlein famously simply wrote, “The door dilated.” That simple statement takes the unusual technology for granted, as one would in that alien environment, and leaves it to the reader to figure out what was happening. Regular fiction, on the other hand, still tends to interrupt the story to explain what is different in a setting for the benefit of contemporary readers. While Heinlein’s now widely adopted approach was a step forward in making science fiction more natural, introducing novelty without constantly interrupting the story to explain it, it is still an unnatural artifact, for someone in a world where doors dilated instead of swinging on hinges or rolling on rollers would not bother to say the door dilated as a person left but would simply say “he left.” If the door needed to be mentioned at all, one might say “the door opened.” If dilating doors are the norm, there would be no reason to mention dilation, just as we don’t say “she pivoted the door shut on its dual hinges until the outer latch engaged a locking mechanism” instead of “she closed the door.” Card keenly observes that stop-action explanations for the benefit of a modern audience are generally absent in the Book of Mormon, except for the case of explaining the monetary system in Alma 11. In this case, Card observes that the monetary system around 100 BC surely would have changed by Mormon’s day, and would be a cultural difference to him that would need explanation to make sense of the story of Zeezrom’s tempting Alma with money. Further, the details of how Mormon handles the explanation, Card argues, are exactly what one would expect from Mormon as a writer and not what one would write from the perspective of Joseph’s environment. This is an interesting example in which a knowledge of modern science fiction exposition helps us appreciate what happens and doesn’t happen in the text of the Book of Mormon. The subtleties of exposition tell us much about who the author was and what they perceive as normal or unusual, and this alone does much to rule out Joseph Smith as a modern author of this ancient text.

“Hefted and Handled: Tangible Interactions with Book of Mormon Objects,” in Dennis L. Largey, et al., *The Coming Forth of the Book of Mormon: A Marvelous Work and a Wonder*, 48–49, <https://rsc.byu.edu/es/archived/coming-forth-book-mormon/hefted-and-handled-tangible-interactions-book-mormon-objects>.

Since Card's speech in 1993, many further insights have strengthened the evidence that the authors of the Book of Mormon took much for granted that would be foreign to Joseph Smith. A few of the many dozens of potential examples include:

- Numerous strange (to us) elements in the story of Ammon and King Lamoni, including the ability of flock-scattering gangsters to wander freely into the court of the king, the offering of a daughter in marriage to the Nephite visitor, the presentation of arms as a testimony to the king, and so forth. Brant Gardner has carefully elucidated the Mesoamerican cultural artifacts reflected in this story in *Traditions of the Fathers*.²⁸
- The concept of a hill serving as a place of arms (plausible when one recognizes the importance of obsidian outcroppings as a key source of weaponry in Mesoamerica, as discussed by John L. Sorenson²⁹).
- Alma praying *after* he eats at Amulek's home in Alma 8:22, a practice not likely characteristic of Joseph Smith's environment.³⁰
- The ability of blood to stain swords, something not part of Joseph's environment but part of a civilization using obsidian embedded in wooden clubs as a sword and weapon of choice.³¹
- The plausible description (from the perspective of immigrants living in the New World) in Alma 7:10 of Christ's birthplace being in Jerusalem (the "land" of Jerusalem) rather than the city of Bethlehem, a statement

28. Gardner, *Traditions of the Fathers*, 285–89.

29. Sorenson, *Mormon's Codex*, 416–17.

30. Angela M. Crowell and John A. Tvedtnes, "Notes and Communications: The Nephite and Jewish Practice of Blessing God after Eating One's Fill," *Journal of Book of Mormon Studies* 6, no. 2 (1997): 251–54, <https://publications.mi.byu.edu/publications/jbms/6/2/S00014-50cb7728bbca514TvedtnesCrowell.pdf>. See also "Why Did Alma Bless and Thank God After Eating?," *Book of Mormon Central*, June 6, 2016, <https://knowhy.bookofmormoncentral.org/content/why-did-alma-bless-and-thank-god-after-eating>.

31. William J. Hamblin and A. Brent Merrill, "Swords in the Book of Mormon," in Stephen D. Ricks and William J. Hamblin, eds., *Warfare in the Book of Mormon*, (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book and FARMS, 1990), 342, <https://publications.mi.byu.edu/fullscreen/?pub=1108&index=15>.

given without explanation to overcome the strident objections it has generated ever since. It is inconceivable that someone even mildly familiar with the Bible would make this “blunder” and even more inconceivable that such a blunder would later be supported by newly found evidence showing ancient Jews did in fact view Bethlehem as part of the “land of Jerusalem,” a concept not extractable from the Bible.³²

Neighborhoods, Networks, Economies, Politics, and the Voice of the People

Card makes several salient points about the culture implicit in the Book of Mormon and shows that in several significant though sometimes subtle ways that culture is clearly foreign to what Joseph Smith knew. Indeed, in considering the hints about Nephite and Lamanite society, Card accurately describes the culture inherent to the Book of Mormon as entirely alien to Joseph Smith’s world and correctly points out that apparent similarities are superficial and largely due to our imposing modern assumptions and paradigms without carefully reading the text.

Interesting issues of this sort raised by Card include the difference in social and neighborhood relationships, where kinship and lineage were dominant social factors in Mesoamerica and the Book of Mormon, in contrast to American society. Card also considers the nature of employment, where the Book of Mormon suggests that agriculture and other economic activities were highly communal or under direction of elites in contrast to the way people pursued employment in Joseph’s day. Further, Card was impressed with the “instant cities” that Captain Moroni created. Alma 50 describes Moroni’s frenetic city-building activities, including the way he “began a foundation of a city” named

32. “If Jesus was born in Bethlehem, why does Alma say he would be born at Jerusalem?” *Book of Mormon Central*, February 1, 2018, <https://www.bookofmormoncentral.org/qa/if-jesus-was-born-in-bethlehem-why-does-alma-say-he-would-be-born-at-jerusalem>. See also Neal Rappleye, “Bethlehem Bulla,” *Nephite History in Context* 2 (December 2017): 14–17 and “Letters of ‘Abdu-Ḥeba of Jerusalem (EA 285–290),” *Nephite History in Context* 2 (December 2017): 6–13; and “Apocryphon of Jeremiah (4Q385a),” *Nephite History in Context* 2 (December 2017): 1–5, all at <https://anditcametopassblog.files.wordpress.com/2017/12/nephitehistoryincontext2.pdf>. See also Jeff Lindsay, “Bethlehem vs. the Land of Jerusalem: Is Alma 7:10 a Blunder?,” *JeffLindsay.com* (blog), Oct. 27, 2010, https://www.jefflindsay.com/BM_Jerusalem.shtml.

Moroni (Alma 50:13) and also "began the foundation for a city" named Nephihah (Alma 50:14) among other cities that he built in a short period. This seems bizarre if read from the perspective of Joseph's environment but is plausible from a Mesoamerican perspective, as Card argues and as we discuss further below in light of more recent research.

Since 1993 there has been further investigation in the field of Mesoamerican neighborhoods and the relationship between rural households and urban centers. A relevant book from 2012 is *Neighborhood as a Social and Spatial Unit in Mesoamerican Cities*,³³ which begins with a detailed review article by Michael E. Smith and Juliana Novic, "Neighborhoods and Districts in Ancient Mesoamerica,"³⁴ discussed below. Also of interest in the same volume is the chapter of Gary M. Feinman and Linda M. Nicholas, "Compact Versus Dispersed Settlement in Pre-Hispanic Mesoamerica: The Role of Neighborhood Organization and Collective Action,"³⁵ which examines ancient Mesoamerican societies in terms of social structures, looking at the dispersed, agrarian communities and more compact communities, and examining the impact of population density on political structures. Neighborhood ties and structures became especially important in forms of rule more corporate or collective with shared power and "broadened voice," for neighborhoods would be the focal point for such collaborative action. The work of Feinman and Nicholas may be helpful in contemplating what the Book of Mormon may mean when it speaks of the role of "the voice of the people" in decision making and politics.

Smith and Novic in the introductory chapter of the volume discuss the diverse nature of neighborhoods and district organizations in ancient

33. M. Charlotte Arnauld, Linda R. Manzanilla and Michael E. Smith, eds., *Neighborhood as a Social and Spatial Unit in Mesoamerican Cities* (Tucson, AZ: University of Arizona Press, 2012).

34. Michael E. Smith and Juliana Novic, "Neighborhoods and Districts in Ancient Mesoamerica" in Arnauld, Manzanilla, and Smith, *Neighborhood as a Social and Spatial Unit in Mesoamerican Cities*, 1–26, <http://www.public.asu.edu/~mesmith9/1-CompleteSet/MES-JN-12-MesoN-BookIntro.pdf>.

35. Gary M. Feinman and Linda M. Nicholas, "Compact Versus Dispersed Settlement in Pre-Hispanic Mesoamerica: The Role of Neighborhood Organization and Collective Action," in Arnauld, Manzanilla, and Smith, *Neighborhood as a Social and Spatial Unit in Mesoamerican Cities*, 132–55, https://www.researchgate.net/publication/232715788_Compact_Versus_Dispersed_Settlement_in_Pre-Hispanic_Mesoamerica_The_Role_of_Neighborhood_Organization_and_Collective_Action_Gary_M_Feinman_and_Linda_M_Nicholas.

Mesoamerica, where urban centers were much more sparsely populated than large cities in the Old World:

Since the publication of Bullard's paper, several archaeologists have discussed Lowland Maya settlement clusters, but without considering their possible role as urban neighborhoods (e.g., Ashmore 1981; Pyburn et al. 1998). The first to associate [Lowland Maya settlement] clusters with neighborhoods was Cynthia Robin (2003: 330–331), who notes that “neighborhood-focused research is perhaps the least investigated direction of Maya household archaeology” (p. 331). Perhaps Mayanists tended to avoid the topic of neighborhoods because that concept was associated with the crowded cities of ancient Mesopotamia or the Islamic world. Yet, the low density tropical cities of the Maya manifest a very different kind of urbanism (Arnauld and Michelet 2004), one that Roland Fletcher (2009) called “low density agrarian based urbanism.”³⁶

The systems described seem to be compatible with Book of Mormon structures, where nobles and elites still wielded influence at various levels of society, with kings under kings among the Lamanites or lesser judges under higher judges in Nephite society. Nobles and elites wielded influence while also representing somehow and sometimes “the voice of the people.”

The low density of urban population resulted in unclear transitions from hamlet or neighborhood to city, allowing for the kind of “instant cities” that impressed Orson Scott Card as another way in which the Book of Mormon revealed a type of society foreign to Joseph Smith. The ability of military commanders to create entire new fortified cities in critical areas is a foreign concept to American society but makes sense in a society accustomed to forming cities from sparsely populated areas based on the model of “low-density agrarian-based urbanism.” The low-density areas in a particular region could be unified under control of a military leader or other elite leader to create an instant low-density agrarian-based urban center (“instant city”) that might only need some of Moroni's earthen banks for fortification to provide military advantage.

In *Mormon's Codex*, Sorenson has pointed out that the term for “city” in Mesoamerica “was applied on a conceptual, not just a functional basis”³⁷ and that they “seem to have been planned and designated as such

36. Smith and Novic, “Neighborhoods and Districts in Ancient Mesoamerica,” 11–12.

37. Sorenson, *Mormon's Codex*, 298.

from their founding.”³⁸ Sorenson notes the parallel to Alma’s “city” of Helam that was designated as such with a population of only about 450 people.³⁹ Small agrarian gatherings in strategic areas likewise could easily have been turned into “instant cities” by Captain Moroni to support military goals, consistent with Card’s observation on a Book of Mormon phenomenon inconsistent with Joseph Smith’s environment.

Incidentally, the units of town and village are both mentioned in the Book of Mormon but only twice in Mormon 4 and 5, while the unit of city has about 400 mentions. Joseph’s life was spent in villages and towns. In his own history, he writes that he was born in the *town* of Sharon in Vermont (Joseph Smith—History 1:3) and then later moved to Manchester, which he calls a village (Joseph Smith—History 1:51). We also read that Martin Harris was “a resident of Palmyra township” (Joseph Smith—History 1:61). Palmyra had around 600 people when Joseph’s family moved there,⁴⁰ but thanks in part to the opportunities created by the Erie Canal, its population had grown to about 4,600 by 1825.⁴¹ This township was much larger than Alma’s city of Helam and perhaps much larger than the “instant cities” Captain Moroni founded or organized. The Book of Mormon terminology as well as the curious ability to found cities almost instantly is outside of Joseph Smith’s environment and culture but consistent with a Mesoamerican city. Further, the concept of “cities” among Native Americans and especially large, advanced cities like Zarahemla can be considered outside of Joseph’s environment and outside of the common knowledge of his day, though earlier works from European writers such as Alexander von Humboldt made some aspects of Mesoamerican antiquities known in better educated circles.⁴²

As for the apparent similarities to Joseph’s culture, Card addresses one of the most common issues pointed to by critics, the selection of judges. Some read “voice of the people” and think of ballot boxes and a highly egalitarian society with separation of powers according to the US Constitution, but this suspiciously modern feature turns out to be based

38. Ibid., 297–98.

39. Ibid., 295.

40. Donald L. Enders, “A Snug Log House: A Historical Look at the Joseph Smith Sr., Family Home in Palmyra, New York,” *Ensign* (Aug. 1985), <https://www.lds.org/ensign/1985/08/a-snug-log-house?lang=eng>.

41. Bob Lowe, “A Brief History Of Palmyra,” *PalmyraNY.com*, 1998, <http://www.palmyrany.com/about/1800.htm>.

42. Jeff Lindsay, “Alexander von Humboldt and the Book of Mormon: What Could Joseph Smith Have Gleaned?,” *JeffLindsay.com* (blog), last updated Dec. 7, 2017, <https://www.jefflindsay.com/bme18.shtml>.

on imported assumptions. A more careful reading of the text indicates that something much different than American elections and American democracy took place in Nephite society. Card urges us to look again:

But in the Book of Mormon, the judge not only judges people but also enforces the law and directs the gathering of taxes and supplies and sending them in support of the armies. Not your normal, traditional role. He enforces traditional law, but when new laws are needed, the judge makes them! Where in American life of his time would Joseph Smith have seen this?

How are these judges selected? We hear of almost no contested elections. On the contrary, judges seem to nominate their successors. With few exceptions, the judge serves until death, and is usually succeeded by a son or brother, or by a member of a family that has previously held the judgeship. Now, except for the Adamsses, there were no dynasties in Joseph Smith's America.

The judges actually function as elected kings. The old pattern of government still endured, they just had a different method of choosing the guy in charge. Mormon pointed out the difference, which meant he stressed the election of the judges by the voice of the people, never questioning that authority should stay in only a few aristocratic families and that judges should have monarchical powers. Far from being a mistake in the Book of Mormon, this is one of the places where the Book of Mormon makes it clear that it does not come from 1820s American culture. Even the best of hoaxers would have made the judges far more American.⁴³

Brant Gardner's later treatment of the "voice of the people" and the role of judges in the Book of Mormon would show much greater affinity for Mesoamerican concepts than for the democracy of the young United States.⁴⁴

A recent observation related to the reign of judges and the "voice of the people" in the Book of Mormon comes from new evidence that ancient Mesoamerica cultures sometimes had less autocratic and more collective or "democratic" rule. This recent discovery seems to greatly amplify the role of collective rule mentioned above by Feinman and Nicholas.³³ Science writer Lizzie Wade reports:

43. Card, "The Book of Mormon — Artifact or Artifice?."

44. Brant Gardner, *Traditions of the Fathers: The Book of Mormon as History* (Salt Lake City: Greg Kofford Books, 2015), 245–53.

Now, thanks in part to work led by ... Richard Blanton, an anthropologist at Purdue University in West Lafayette, Indiana, Tlaxcallan is one of several premodern societies around the world that archaeologists believe were organized collectively, where rulers shared power and commoners had a say in the government that presided over their lives.

These societies were not necessarily full democracies in which citizens cast votes, but they were radically different from the autocratic, inherited rule found — or assumed — in most early societies. Building on Blanton's originally theoretical ideas, archaeologists now say these "collective societies" left telltale traces in their material culture, such as repetitive architecture, an emphasis on public space over palaces, reliance on local production over exotic trade goods, and a narrowing of wealth gaps between elites and commoners.

"Blanton and his colleagues opened up a new way of examining our data," says Rita Wright, an archaeologist at New York University in New York City who studies the 5000-year-old Indus civilization in today's India and Pakistan, which also shows signs of collective rule. "A whole new set of scholarship has emerged about complex societies."

"I think it's a breakthrough," agrees Michael E. Smith, an archaeologist at Arizona State University (ASU) in Tempe. "I've called it the most important work in the archaeology of political organization in the last 20 years." He and others are working to extend Blanton's ideas into a testable method, hoping to identify collective states solely through the objects they left behind.⁴⁵

Blanton's paper has this intriguing abstract:

During the central Mexican late Postclassic period, the Aztec Triple Alliance became the largest and most powerful empire in Mesoamerica. Yet ancient Tlaxcallan (now Tlaxcala, Mexico) resisted incorporation into the empire despite being entirely surrounded by it and despite numerous Aztec military campaigns aimed at the defeat of the Tlaxcaltecas. How did it happen that a relatively small (1,400 km²) polity was able to

45. Lizzie Wade, "It wasn't just Greece: Archaeologists find early democratic societies in the Americas," *Science* (website), March 15, 2017, <http://www.sciencemag.org/news/2017/03/it-wasnt-just-greece-archaeologists-find-early-democratic-societies-americas>.

resist a more powerful foe while its neighbors succumbed? We propose a resolution to this historical enigma that, we suggest, has implications for the broader study of social and cultural change, particularly in relation to theories of state formation and collective action. We find it particularly interesting that the Tlaxcaltecas abandoned a key tenet of traditional Nahua political structure in which kingship was vested in members of the nobility, substituting for it government by a council whose members could be recruited from the ranks of commoners. To achieve such a significant deviation from typical Nahua authority structure, the Tlaxcaltecas drew selectively from those aspects of Nahua mythic history and religion that were consistent with a comparatively egalitarian and collective political regime.⁴⁶

We look forward to further research into the intriguing possibilities of collective government in portions of the ancient Americas, including systems that may be closer to Book of Mormon times. Meanwhile, what was once thought to be a dead-giveaway of the Book of Mormon's modern origins, the reign of judges with their reliance on "the voice of the people," upon closer scrutiny is not only radically different than what Joseph knew but now appears to be an authentic ancient artifact (albeit an exceptional one) of Mesoamerica, not a fruit of Joseph's artifice. For future scholars to better understand Book of Mormon "democracy," they would be wise to use a lens focused on ancient Mesoamerica and emerging research on ancient political systems there.

Overlooked Subtleties: A Key to Appraising the Book of Mormon

Based on Card's insights, we can suggest that many subtle details in the Book of Mormon text are easily overlooked precisely because they were overlooked and not explained by its authors.

For example, in Helaman 7 where Nephi prays on a tower in his garden near the road leading to the chief market, there are some intriguing details that have merited scholarly exploration but didn't seem in need of elaboration by Mormon. Here the analysis from Brant Gardner in

46. Lane F. Fargher, Richard E. Blanton, and Verenice Y. Heredia Espinoza, "Egalitarian Ideology and Political Power in Prehispanic Central Mexico: The Case of Tlaxcallan," *Latin American Antiquity*, 21, no. 3 (September 2010): 227–51, <https://www.cambridge.org/core/journals/latin-american-antiquity/article/egalitarian-ideology-and-political-power-in-prehispanic-central-mexico-the-case-of-tlaxcallan/3B1BD8566FF687B30E22F338A30B98E7>.

*Traditions of the Fathers*⁴⁷ and earlier analysis from John Sorenson⁴⁸ are particularly useful. Mormon doesn't bother to explain that in Nephite culture, there were large cities with multiple markets but that Zarahemla (and perhaps others) had a chief market. He doesn't bother to explain that the Nephites built roads. He doesn't bother to explain that in his role, Nephi needed to be near the heart of the city and thus had a home near a major road, and that this home had a walled enclosure, a garden, and tower perhaps like the characteristic pyramid-shaped towers that private residences sometimes had in Mesoamerica, or that towers played an important role in their society.⁴⁹ He doesn't explain that towers existed that were attached to or near private residences⁵⁰ and were much lower than the large towers used for public rituals, low enough to make it easy for Nephi to converse with a crowd along the neighboring road. All the interesting background explanation that would be helpful to a modern reader and might naturally be included by a modern writer describing such a scene is left out because it wasn't unusual to Mormon. Even if Joseph somehow had access to precise information about the use of towers in private residences and the existence of chief markets and major roads in large Mesoamerican cities, a modern writer taking advantage of that information would naturally have felt a need to explain the setting directly or through many more details. A fraudulent author developing the story based on specialized knowledge might even emphasize the clever details in his account in preparation for later claiming it as dramatic evidence of authenticity once such information become more generally available to the public. We have none of this in Mormon's brief matter-of-fact account and in Joseph's obliviousness to the relevance of the story to Mesoamerican finds.

47. Gardner, *Traditions of the Fathers: The Book of Mormon as History* (Salt Lake City: Greg Kofford Books, 2015), 279–80.

48. John L. Sorenson, "Nephi's Garden and Chief Market," in John Welch, ed., *Reexploring the Book of Mormon* (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 1992), 236–37, <https://publications.mi.byu.edu/fullscreen/?pub=1110&index=68>.

49. On the correlations between towers in the Book of Mormon and their prominent role in Mesoamerican society and architecture, see Sorenson, *Mormon's Codex*, 323–27, 491–92. Also see David F. Potter, "Prehispanic Architecture and Sculpture in Central Yucatan," *American Antiquity* 41, no. 4 (Oct. 1976): 430–48, <https://www.jstor.org/stable/279010>; which mentions that the Mayan lowlands city of Rio Bec had "ornamental towers simulating temple pyramids," though some other lowland cities considered did not.

50. Sorenson, *Mormon's Codex*, 491–92.

Mormon's casual mention of Nephi's tower can be compared to other uses of towers in the Book of Mormon. The tower built by King Benjamin, of course, should be well known to Book of Mormon readers. King Benjamin's tower was near the temple (Mosiah 2:7–8). The people of Zeniff in the city of Nephi also had a tower near the temple where Gideon almost slew wicked King Noah (Mosiah 19:5–6). Other references may be easy to miss, such as in Alma 51:20, where the Kingmen, subdued by Captain Moroni, “were compelled to hoist the title of liberty upon their towers, and in their cities, and to take up arms in defence of their country,” just as Mosiah had earlier ordered that the title of liberty “be hoisted upon every tower” in the land (Alma 46:36). Here towers implicitly play an important role or at least a highly visible role in their society. Lamanite society also employed towers, for Amalickiah “appointed men to speak unto the Lamanites from their towers, against the Nephites” (Alma 48:1). Other towers were built by Moroni as part of his defensive works (Alma 50:4) and likely were of a different nature than the towers mentioned above. There is also an unexplained reference to the tower of Sherrizah from which men, women, and children were captured and taken captive by the Lamanites (Moroni 9:7).

The men and women of Sherrizah may have fled to a tower as a place of last defense, just as King Noah fled to the tower by the temple when being pursued by Gideon. If these towers were part of a pyramid or a temple on a pyramid, the practice of fleeing there for safety may fit a Mesoamerican context well, as John E. Clark has observed, yet fleeing to a tower for safety when being pursued might not be a common concept in Joseph Smith's environment.⁵¹

Non-military towers such as those used for covenant making, religious purposes, and publicity do not seem to have been part of Joseph Smith's frontier environment yet are subtly woven into the Book of Mormon in a way consistent with Mesoamerican culture as well

51. See John E. Clark, “Archaeology, Relics, and Book of Mormon Belief,” *Journal of Book of Mormon Studies* 14, no. 2 (2005): 38–49, 71–74, <https://publications.mi.byu.edu/fullscreen/?pub=1383&index=6>. Clark cites Fray Diego Durán, *The Aztecs: The History of the Indies of New Spain*, trans. Doris Heyden and Fernando Horcasitas (New York: Orion Press, 1964), 68: “The Tecpanecs, retreating toward their city, intended to use their temple as a last stronghold, but Tlacaelel [an Aztec leader] reached the temple before them and, taking possession of its entrance, ordered one of his men to set it on fire, having made prisoner all those who were within.” He also cites Durán, 89: “When we reach Totoltzinco the king of Texcoco will set fire to the temple and the battle will come to an end.”

as with some aspects of ancient Near Eastern culture.⁵² For example, regarding the relationship between the tower of King Benjamin and related rituals in pre-exilic Judaism, Stephen D. Ricks observes that as one of many aspects of the covenant-making and festival-related aspects of King Benjamin's speech, that:

In confirming the Old Testament documentation of the use of the dais, the Mishnah also supports the evidence found in the Book of Mormon. Together these illustrate that platforms are (1) located in the temple precinct, (2) associated with the coronation of new kings, (3) used by the king or another leader to read the law to the people, (4) used to offer dedicatory prayers for the temple, and (5) associated with the Festival of Booths. In view of these considerations, one can conclude that Benjamin's tower was more than just a way to communicate to the people — it was part of an Israelite coronation tradition in which the king stands on a platform or pillar at the temple before the people and before God.⁵³

The Old Testament evidence supporting these conclusions is not readily extractable from the KJV due to translation difficulties nor clearly available elsewhere in Joseph Smith's environment.

By the way, some critics of Mesoamerica as the New World setting of the Book of Mormon have ridiculed the concept of King Benjamin's building a Mesoamerican-style stone tower in just a day, but the text in

52. For Old World parallels to the tower built by King Benjamin for his famous speech, which may be described as a covenant-making and coronation ritual, See Terrence L. Szink and John W. Welch, "King Benjamin's Speech in the Context of Ancient Israelite Festivals," in John Welch and Stephen Ricks, eds., *King Benjamin's Speech* (Provo, UT: FARMS, 1998), <https://publications.mi.byu.edu/fullscreen/?pub=1087&index=8>; which cites T. Raymond Hobbs, *2 Kings* (Waco, TX: Word Books, 1985), 142, who suggests that the object stood on, by, or near the king during a Feast of Tabernacles ceremony was "some kind of column, podium, or platform." (n148) Szink and Welch also refers to ceremonies of enthronement in which the king was lifted on to a platform or pillar to receive homage from the congregation. See also Hugh Nibley, "Assembly and Atonement," Welch and Ricks, *King Benjamin's Speech*, <https://publications.mi.byu.edu/fullscreen/?pub=1087&index=7>; which refers to the use of platforms in ancient Babylon for coronation ceremonies. Further see Stephen D. Ricks, "Kingship, Coronation, and Covenant in Mosiah 1–6," Welch and Ricks, *King Benjamin's Speech*, 233–75, <https://publications.mi.byu.edu/fullscreen/?pub=1087&index=10>, especially the discussion of the royal dais used in covenant making in Old Testament times.

53. Ricks, "Kingship, Coronation, and Covenant in Mosiah 1–6."

Mosiah 2:7 does not actually say King Benjamin built the tower in a day, nor does it even say or require that he began its construction *after* the crowd showed up. In stating that “he caused a tower to be erected,” it could just as well have been built in anticipation of the coming crowd to prepare a ritual platform for the coronation ceremony and perhaps other ceremonies. The association of towers and temples is known in Mesoamerica, and the role of tall towers was prominent there. The Book of Mormon’s implications about the various roles of towers, taken for granted by Mormon, fits well within Mesoamerica and not as well within Joseph’s environment.

It’s hard to account for the numerous precise parallels to Mesoamerica as merely lucky guesses, but it is equally implausible to posit that a modern writer with an advanced source of knowledge about such things would have described such a foreign setting without at least pointing out the cultural differences to aid modern readers. This problem is related to the problem we have previously pointed out regarding alleged sources (rare European maps of Arabia, for example) that Joseph or his advisors with sufficient resources theoretically might have used to guide the purported fabrication of the story of Lehi’s Trail.⁵⁴ If one had built-in details about the trail and even a rare place name like Nahom/Nehhem based on detailed maps and other research in order to add evidence of authenticity, why not use more widely known details like the place name Mecca to give local color and plausibility? For the homerun/bulls-eye of Nahom⁵⁵ as an ancient name in the right place, why use a potentially verifiable tidbit and then leave it as an easily missed detail mentioned only once and *never discussed again after publication of the Book of Mormon*? If evidence of authenticity was built into the text on purpose, why did it take over a century for the first member of the Church to notice the potential link between Nahom and the ancient site in Yemen that is now a remarkable candidate for Nahom?

The same question applies to almost every form of the growing evidence for plausibility that has been found in the Book of Mormon.

54. Jeff Lindsay, “Joseph and the Amazing Technicolor Dream Map: Part 1 of 2,” *Interpreter: A Journal of Mormon Scripture*, 19 (2016): 153–239, <https://www.mormoninterpreter.com/joseph-and-the-amazing-technicolor-dream-map-part-1-of-2/>; and “Joseph and the Amazing Technicolor Dream Map: Part 2 of 2,” *Interpreter: A Journal of Mormon Scripture*, 19 (2016): 247–326, <https://www.mormoninterpreter.com/joseph-and-the-amazing-technicolor-dream-map-part-2-of-2/>.

55. Neal Rappleye and Stephen O. Smoot, “Book of Mormon Minimalists and the NHM Inscriptions: A Response to Dan Vogel,” *Interpreter: A Journal of Mormon Scripture*, 8 (2014), 157–85, <https://www.mormoninterpreter.com/book-of-mormon-minimalists-and-the-nhm-inscriptions-a-response-to-dan-vogel/>.

If Joseph were deliberately mimicking chiasmus, ancient covenant patterns, psalms of lament, inclusio, and other forms of parallelism, if he were deliberately adding realistic details from his research to make the Book of Mormon accounts seem more realistic, why not call attention to these easily missed elements both with more emphasis in the text and then in subsequent publicity?

Joseph did celebrate the validation of ancient American civilization that came with the 1841 publication of *Incidents of Travel in Central America, Chiapas and Yucatan* by John Lloyd Stephens,⁵⁶ with illustrations by Frederick Catherwood. This work introduced many readers to the extensive civilization of the ancient Americas. Clearly Joseph was interested in external evidences for Book of Mormon issues.⁵⁷ Had he been aware of impressive evidence from Arabia, it surely would have been mentioned. Were he a fraud, he surely would have arranged for one of his peers to later “discover” the evidence and make the most of it. Built-in evidence makes no sense if the evidence is never noticed or pointed to. This would make the Book of Mormon a most unusual fraud. As a fraud, it would be of a most unusual nature for still other reasons that Card helps us recognize.

56. John Lloyd Stephens, *Incidents of Travel in Central America, Chiapas and Yucatan* (London: John Murray, 1841 and New York: Harper and Brothers, 1841), <https://books.google.com/books?id=rmEaAAAAYAAJ>. For more on the Latter-day Saint reaction, see John L. Sorenson “The Book of Mormon as a Mesoamerican Record,” in *Book of Mormon Authorship Revisited*, ed. Noel B. Reynolds (Provo, UT: FARMS, 1997), 395, <https://publications.maxwellinstitute.byu.edu/fullscreen/?pub=1099&index=19>.

57. Neal Rappleye, “War of Words and Tumult of Opinions: The Battle for Joseph Smith’s Words in Book of Mormon Geography,” *Interpreter: A Journal of Mormon Scripture* 11 (2014): 37–95, <https://www.mormoninterpreter.com/war-of-words-and-tumult-of-opinions-the-battle-for-joseph-smiths-words-in-book-of-mormon-geography/>; Matthew Roper, “Joseph Smith, Central American Ruins, and the Book of Mormon,” in *Approaching Antiquity: Joseph Smith and the Ancient World*, eds. Lincoln H. Blumell, Matthew J. Grey, and Andrew H. Hedges (Provo, UT: Religious Studies Center, Brigham Young University, 2015), 141–62; Matthew Roper, “John Bernhisel’s Gift to a Prophet: Incidents of Travel in Central America and the Book of Mormon,” *Interpreter: A Journal of Mormon Scripture* 16 (2015): 207–53, <https://www.mormoninterpreter.com/john-bernhisels-gift-to-a-prophet-incidents-of-travel-in-central-america-and-the-book-of-mormon/>; David C. Handy, “Joseph Smith, John Lloyd Stephens, and the Times and Seasons,” *Book of Mormon Archaeological Forum*, 2010, http://www.bmaf.org/articles/smith_stephens_times_seasons__handy; and Jeff Lindsay, “What Could Joseph Have Known About Mesoamerica?,” *JeffLindsay.com* (blog), 2011, <https://www.jefflindsay.com/bme11.shtml>.

A Rarely Attempted Feat, Or, Mormon vs. Ossian

Critics frequently try to defuse respect for the Book of Mormon by suggesting that the purported fraud of Joseph Smith is routinely done with even more impressive results. J.R.R. Tolkien's works such as *The Lord of the Rings* trilogy are commonly cited, showing that it is possible for a writer to concoct a beautiful, complex, and generally consistent "history" involving many places, numerous new names, great battles, political intrigues, and so forth. (But see the recent work of Brad Wilcox, Wendy Baker-Smemoe, Bruce L. Brown, and Sharon Black on the "phonoprint" of names created by Tolkien compared to those found in the Book of Mormon, yielding evidence that Tolkien's names for people from different language groups were created by a single author while those of the Book of Mormon were not.⁵⁸) The fact that Tolkien had advanced education and put in a lifetime of work to produce his polished masterpiece, points often made by Latter-day Saint apologists in response to critics citing Tolkien, is a minor point in light of Card's insight.

Card's experience as a science fiction writer enables him to make a salient observation about the alleged fraud of the Book of Mormon. If it is a fraud, what Joseph did is *rarely attempted* and almost certainly results in obvious failure. What he did, if the Book of Mormon is a fraud, was not simply write a work of fiction set in a different culture and remote time. Many writers stand with Tolkien in being able to write such fiction well, with a product that is clearly fiction written by a single modern author for a modern audience. The Book of Mormon, on the other hand, claims to be written by multiple ancient authors over a long expanse of time within a distant and changing culture. Such a fraud, to have any hope of long-term success, would need to be written from the cultural perspective of the authors in a different culture, not one that explains or indicates what is foreign relative to our modern culture. Such a work must reflect different authorial interests of the various writers and reflect the changes in culture or perspective that occur over time. It is a breathtakingly complex project. Such a work *almost never* attempts to pass itself off as a genuine document from a remote culture and time.

Card then cites an important example where a fraudulent work purportedly from antiquity was passed off as genuine by a modern

58. Brad Wilcox, *et al.*, "Comparing Book of Mormon Names with Those Found in J.R.R. Tolkien's Works: An Exploratory Study," *Interpreter: A Journal of Mormon Scripture* 30 (2018): 105–24, <https://www.mormoninterpreter.com/comparing-book-of-mormon-names-with-those-found-in-j-r-r-tolkiens-works-an-exploratory-study/>.

author. The work was a collection of Gaelic poems said to be written by an ancient poet named Ossian. The poems had been "translated" into English by a Scottish politician and writer, James Macpherson. Macpherson's publication was a hit and added to his fame and fortune. He died wealthy enough to buy a spot at Westminster Abbey for his tomb. But he did not die without being denounced as a fraud by Samuel Johnson, who also was buried at Westminster Abbey (but as a token of respect, not as a result of his wealth).

The poetry of Ossian inspired many influential people including Napoleon, Goethe, Thomas Jefferson, and others. Selma, Alabama, was named after Selma, the home of the Scottish warrior Fingal from the poems of Ossian. The work has had a significant influence in many circles, in spite of concerns about fraud.

The text is available at *Sacred-Texts.com*, where J.B. Hare, the website's founder, summarizes the controversy:

James Macpherson claimed that Ossian was based on an ancient Gaelic manuscript. There was just one problem. The existence of this manuscript was never established. In fact, unlike Ireland and Wales, there are no dark-age manuscripts of epic poems, tales, and chronicles and so on from Scotland. It isn't that such ancient Scottish poetry and lore didn't exist, it was just purely oral in nature. Not much of it was committed to writing until it was on the verge of extinction. There are Scottish manuscripts and books in existence today which date as far back as the 12th century (some with scraps of poetry in them), but they are principally on subjects such as religion, genealogy, and land grants.

For this and several other reasons which are dealt with in the Preliminary Discourse *et seq.*, authenticity of the work was widely contested, particularly by Samuel Johnson. A huge (and probably excessive) backlash ensued, and conventional wisdom today brands Ossian as one of the great forgeries of history.

In fairness, themes, characters and passages of Ossian are based on established Celtic and Scottish folklore. Much of the fourth volume of J.F. Campbell's massive *Popular Tales of the West Highlands* is devoted to tracking down Ossianic fragments in circulation prior to Macpherson or elicited from illiterate Highland peasants who had never heard of *Ossian*.

Macpherson is today considered the author of this work. The language of composition was probably English: As Campbell determined, Macpherson wasn't even particularly fluent in Gaelic.⁵⁹

What some view as a definitive work on the fraud of Ossian came out after Card's article with the 2009 publication of Thomas M. Curley's *Samuel Johnson, the Ossian Fraud, and the Celtic Revival in Great Britain and Ireland*.⁶⁰ In summarizing his survey of the Ossian fraud, Curley praises Samuel Johnson for recognizing the nature of the fraud, a conclusion that has withstood the test of time and Curley's own extensive detective work:

Johnson's sense of the falsity of the *Ossian* works was correct, despite professions to the contrary by some modern scholars. Twenty-eight out of Macpherson's thirty-nine titles — seventy-two percent of all the individual works comprising *Ossian* — have no apparent grounding in genuine Gaelic literature and are therefore entirely his own handiwork. The remaining twenty-eight percent of the titles have but generally loose ties to approximately sixteen Gaelic ballads. Contrary to his assertions, Macpherson was no editor or translator of ancient poetry. He was the author of new, largely invented literature in violation of true history, legitimate Gaelic studies, and valid national identity in Scotland. As Johnson had charged, Macpherson committed literary fabrication.⁶¹

Macpherson claimed to have original Gaelic manuscripts that he translated. Samuel Johnson, recognizing the many indications of fraud in the translation, demanded that Macpherson present the originals for review. One can easily draw a parallel to Joseph Smith who was also asked to show his golden plates to the world, if such existed. But unlike Joseph Smith and the golden plates, Macpherson provided no extract of copied characters from the manuscripts, sought out no independent scholarly examination of a portion of his translation, had no witnesses to support the existence of the original manuscripts, and had no witnesses of the translation process. Further, with no angel requiring that the original

59. J.B. Blare, "The Poems of Ossian by James Macpherson [1773]," introductory comments, *Sacred-Texts* (website), last accessed September 26, 2018, <http://www.sacred-texts.com/neu/ossian/>.

60. Thomas M. Curley, *Samuel Johnson, the Ossian Fraud, and the Celtic Revival in Great Britain and Ireland* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009).

61. Thomas M. Curley, "The Great Samuel Johnson and His Opposition to Literary Liars," *Bridgewater Review* 28, vol. 2 (Dec. 2009): 8, https://vc.bridgew.edu/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=1253&context=br_rev.

document be returned for divine safekeeping, Macpherson lacked any excuse for the failure to let others see the documents he had translated.

Macpherson's fraud is not without evidence of authenticity, for many of the names he uses were ancient Gaelic names that can be found in documents going back several hundred years. But as Curley and others have explained, these are names that could have been picked up from current lore that Macpherson extracted from his wanderings in the British Isles. Curley also explains that there are also 16 authentic Gaelic sources that are used in some way by Macpherson, giving it several small kernels of apparent authenticity. Some have argued that Macpherson was simply taking liberties with the existing poems and still acted largely as a loose translator, but Curley argues that such defenses are unjustified and that the fans of Ossian poetry must confront the fact that the vast majority of it is simply fabricated.

Curley argues that the evidence of fraud is clear-cut and easily exposed, and most scholars today may agree. On the other hand, some scholars have sought to revive Macpherson's Ossian, claiming that it is much more authentic than Samuel Johnson recognized. For example, Pail Moulton writes,

A recent resurgence of research has done much to exonerate Macpherson from accusations of fraud. Research by Howard Gaskill, Fiona Stafford, Derick Thomson, and others have shown that Macpherson's poems were largely authentic, as many of the poems have since been corroborated with other Gaelic sources.... Many of his poems that have been corroborated show that he was often rather liberal in his translations, which was typical for the time. **Most modern scholars in the subject now agree that the majority of his poems are based on genuine, ancient Gaelic poetry,** but that Macpherson's claim he had found a lost epic was overly ambitious.⁶²

Moulton's statement about the views of "most modern scholars" needs to be considered cautiously. It might be better said that most scholars recognize there is a touch of genuine Gaelic poetry that Macpherson drew upon, but saying that "the poems are based on genuine, ancient Gaelic poetry" may be misleading. Ultimately, what Macpherson offered his enthusiastic audiences was his invention. Defenders suggest that

62. Paul F. Moulton, "A Controversy Discarded and 'Ossian' Revealed: An Argument for a Renewed Consideration of 'The Poems of Ossian,'" *College Music Symposium*, vol. 49/50 (2009/2010), 393, <https://www.jstor.org/stable/41225266>, (emphasis added).

Macpherson was drawing upon authentic material but applying a great deal of his own creativity to translate in his own style, but this overlooks what Macpherson insisted upon from the beginning: that his translation was “extremely literal” and that the unusual word order in the English was often adjusted to reflect that of the original.⁶³ But this was artifice, not an artifact of authentic translation. Yola Schmitz describes Macpherson’s artifice as *translatese* — the deliberate creation of nonstandard syntax to create the sense of a highly literal translation from a foreign language.⁶⁴

Compared to the Book of Mormon, what Macpherson attempted was not a complex history spanning vast stretches of time and epic migrations from the Old World to the New, but mere poems, and not from a wholly unfamiliar culture but from his own island and from his own country and ancestors though removed by 1500 years. Macpherson had the benefit of being well educated, of being raised in a society familiar with Gaelic tales, with access to abundant sources of relevant information for his project. What Macpherson attempted is quite unlike the feat of, say, having a poorly educated New York farm boy with scant resources write about travel across the Arabian Peninsula or create ancient poetry rooted in ancient Hebrew or describe battles, cities, natural disasters, and other events in an unfamiliar New World setting. What Macpherson attempted was kid stuff compared to the Book of Mormon, and yet his Ossian project failed in spite of some hopeful supporters seeking to overlook its flaws. It was successful enough to add to his wealth, but he had already been vocally denounced as a fraud by Samuel Johnson and remains widely recognized as a fraud who got very much wrong. It has certainly not withstood the test of time. From the beginning, basic questions about the existence of the original documents could not be answered nor could witnesses be provided.

The Book of Mormon was a surprise bolt from the blue from a poorly educated, impoverished farm boy not known to be a bookworm or a writer, unexpectedly announcing he had received an ancient record, then daring to show the plates to numerous people, and then translating it by dictation

63. James Macpherson, *Fragments of Ancient Poetry, Collected in the Highlands of Scotland and Translated from the Galic or Erse Language* (Edinburgh: G. Hamilton and J. Balfour, 1760), vi, https://books.google.com.hk/books?id=DgheA AAACAAJ&printsec=frontcover&hl=zh-TW&source=gb_s_ge_summary_r&cad=0#v=onepage&q&f=false.

64. Yola Schmitz, “Faked Translations: James Macpherson’s Ossianic Poetry,” in Daniel Becker, Annalisa Fischer, and Yola Schmitz, eds., *Faking, Forging, Counterfeiting: Discredited Practices at the Margins of Mimesis* (Bielefeld, Germany: Transcript Verlag, 2018), 167–80, <https://www.jstor.org/stable/j.ctv1wxr9t.13>.

at a prodigious rate apparently without the use of any manuscripts. Consider the contrast we find in Macpherson's preparation for his work, as described by Yola Schmitz in her 2017 chapter on the Ossian fraud:

Macpherson's upbringing put him in the perfect position.

He was born in Ruthven, in the Scottish Highlands where he was brought up in a Gaelic-speaking community and accustomed to the oral tradition of the bards of the clans. Yet, he also experienced first-hand the serious effects of British oppression. In 1745, the nine-year-old Macpherson witnessed the Jacobite Rising with all its devastating consequences for the collective identity and the heritage of the Scottish clans. In its wake, many customs and traditions, such as the tartan plaid and playing the bag pipes, were prohibited.

However, one of the worst consequences must have been the subsequent ban on using the Scottish Gaelic language. Therefore, Macpherson's forgery can also be considered an attempt to recuperate what was left of the literary tradition of the Highlands and to rehabilitate a people, thought to be uncultured and uncivilised.

These circumstances provided Macpherson with all he needed to produce a successful forgery. **He was an insider of Scottish traditions and, at the same time, he had profited from an academic education. He had not only learned how classic works of poetry were studied but also how they were supposed to be presented.** When the scholars in Aberdeen showed interest in this kind of poetry and offered to sponsor an excursion to the Highlands, Macpherson seized the moment and delivered.⁶⁵ [*emphasis added*]

Card's comparison with Macpherson's fraud makes valid points that have only become stronger in light of further research both into the Ossian fraud and into the origins of the Book of Mormon, including the translation process, for which there were multiple credible witnesses.

Macpherson's fraud could also be considered in light of a few other attempted forgeries, including Thomas Chatterton's Rowley papers, purporting to be poems from a 15th-century monk named Rowley. The poems were initially accepted due to a general lack of attention at the time of publication to the details of the English language and its changes over the centuries. Chatterton used antique paper for his poems but was

65. Yola Schmitz, "Faked Translations," 169.

unable to properly reflect the language of the time he sought to mimic, ensuring that the fraud would be detected.⁶⁶

Failure to appreciate linguistic change over time was a key weakness in the Ossian fraud. Macpherson claimed that the Erse language (ancient Gaelic) of 300 AD had remained pure and unchanged over the centuries, allowing him to read and understand ancient Erse and translate Ossian's poetry into English. In spite of Macpherson's outstanding education, this was a monumental blunder, one easily picked up by critics in his day. Some observed that Gaelic in Scotland showed obvious variability just from one valley to the next. With such obvious change across short distances, how could the language remain unchanged over more than a thousand years?

On the other hand, the challenges of linguistic change over time is an area where the Book of Mormon shines and far surpasses what Macpherson and, presumably, Joseph knew. Linguistic change is implicit as a fact of life in the Book of Mormon narrative. Nephi's scribal work may already be blurring the lines between Egyptian and Hebrew (1 Nephi 1:1–3).⁶⁷ We see the Mulekites, immigrants without written records to help maintain their language, have lost much of their language (it had become "corrupted") and need to be taught to understand the Nephite's language after just a few hundred years of separation (Omni 1:17–18), with their rapid linguistic drift presumably accelerated by contact with local peoples in the New World. We see Nephites treasuring their written records as a means of helping them maintain their scriptural language system (Mosiah 1:2–6). We see the Lamanites losing their written language and later needing to be taught the Nephite writing system (Mosiah 24:1–7). And in spite of their written records, centuries later Mormon acknowledges that their Hebrew had been altered (Mormon 9:33) and that their script for recording scriptures, now called "reformed Egyptian," had been altered over time and was unknown except to them (Mormon 9:32, 34). These are realistic views on linguistic change, in contrast to the much less reasonable claims from the highly educated Macpherson.

66. "Thomas Chatterton and the Rowley Forgeries," University of Delaware Library (website), Special Collection Department, last modified Dec. 21, 2010, <http://www.lib.udel.edu/ud/spec/exhibits/forgery/rowley.htm>. See also "Thomas Chatterton," *Wikipedia*, last edited October 24, 2018, https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Thomas_Chatterton.

67. Neal Rappleye, "Nephi the Good: A Commentary on 1 Nephi 1:1–3," *The Interpreter Foundation* (blog), January 3, 2014, <https://interpreterfoundation.org/nephi-the-good-a-commentary-on-1-nephi-11-3/>.

Mulek: Zarahemla's Deception?

I was impressed with Card's ability as an author and critic to look past the text itself and see the potential for human interpolations in one of the stories recounted in the Book of Mormon, the origins of the Mulekites. Card recognizes the potential for tension between the Nephites and the people of Zarahemla when they met. They have common origins and surely must become allies, but who shall rule? Card, open about his speculation, imagines King Zarahemla feeling at a disadvantage in the "negotiations" with the Nephites, who come with obvious signs of authority and God's favor. In addition to relics such as the sword of Laban, they bear sacred brass plates and other Nephite plates that help preserve their sacred history and their language, while the Mulekites have allowed their language to erode, probably through interaction with other locals over the years. To buttress his claim to the throne, Card proposes that King Zarahemla may have fabricated his claim to authority by stating that he was a descendant of King Zedekiah via a mysterious son, Mulek, unknown to the writers of the Bible.

Interestingly, the Mulekites do not immediately introduce themselves as Mulekites nor does Zarahemla immediately introduce himself as a descendant of Mulek in the description of first contact in Omni. The Mulekites describe themselves as "the people of Zarahemla" (Omni 1:14), and we learn that they came out from Jerusalem at the time that King Zedekiah was carried captive into Babylon. It is only after King Mosiah causes the people to be instructed in the Nephite language (presumably a brief refresher course for a language still rich in cognates) that King Zarahemla claims to have royal heritage himself.

Card's proposal is original and worthy of consideration. It may be accurate, but there is an interesting recent discovery since Card penned his speculation on Zarahemla that needs to be weighed. Recently Jeffrey Chadwick presented evidence of a tantalizing new archaeological find in Jerusalem, a small stamp seal with the inscription "belonging to Malkiyahu, son of the king." There is a plausible case that this belonged to Mulek, son of Zedekiah, and could be a seal for a Book of Mormon personality.⁶⁸ Further investigation is needed, but Chadwick's carefully considered approach raises a fascinating possibility.

68. Jeffrey R. Chadwick, "Has the Seal of Mulek Been Found?" *Journal of Book of Mormon Studies* 12, no. 2 (2003): 72–83, 117–18, <https://publications.mi.byu.edu/publications/jbms/12/2/S00008-50be69aad59c87Chadwick.pdf>.

Language: A Powerful Cluster of Clues

Card discusses the language of the Book of Mormon, following what has been a widely accepted scholarly paradigm for Joseph's translation that holds that Joseph received mental impressions he then expressed in his own language. This is a very natural approach, especially when one considers the abundant bad grammar of the original manuscript as dictated by Joseph Smith. Members of the Church looking at the original manuscript may be shocked to see what looks like "hick grammar" with phrases like "he went a preaching" and "in them days." Many of these awkward and perhaps even embarrassing grammatical gaffes were quickly corrected during the editorial process.

Card's commentary can be reconsidered in light of one of the most extensive works of scholarship related to the Book of Mormon, the lifetime of research conducted by Royal Skousen, resulting in the many recently published volumes of Book of Mormon textual scholarship for the Critical Text Project.⁶⁹ This is arguably the most important body of Book of Mormon scholarship to date in which "every page, every sentence, every word, letter, and mark are accounted for" and explored in the landmark project.⁷⁰ His work would also lead to publication of *The Book of Mormon: The Earliest Text*,⁷¹ a critical text giving the reader the Book of Mormon text as close as currently possible to what was dictated by Joseph Smith, coupled with notes showing numerous significant changes made in various printings. The details of these works are rich with surprises and insights about the miracle of the Book of Mormon translation process, details that make obvious that the text was dictated orally.⁷²

One year after Card's article was published, Skousen published an important article pointing to the complex and seemingly non-standard grammar in the originally dictated text of the Book of Mormon.⁷³ Skousen noted that the dictated English did not fit Joseph's dialect. Some

69. For an overview of The Critical Text Project and a list of related books and publications, see "About the Critical Text Project," *The Book of Mormon Critical Text Project*, last accessed September 28, 2018, <http://bookofmormoncriticaltext.byustudies.byu.edu/about>.

70. Royal Skousen, "Online Access to the Book of Mormon Critical Text Project," *The Book of Mormon Critical Text Project*, <http://criticaltext.byustudies.byu.edu/>.

71. Skousen, *The Book of Mormon: The Earliest Text*.

72. Skousen, "How Joseph Smith Translated the Book of Mormon: Evidence from the Original Manuscript," 22–31.

73. Royal Skousen, "The Original Language of the Book of Mormon: Upstate New York Dialect, King James English, or Hebrew?" *Journal of Book of Mormon*

of the awkward grammar as dictated could be viewed as Hebraisms, and the rest did not seem to fit any single version of English from any one time and place, raising many questions but also making it clear that calling upon Joseph's dialect was an inadequate explanation for the data.

Several years later, Skousen's ongoing explorations would lead him to a startling new conclusion which he announced in a 2005 issue of the Maxwell Institute's *Insights*. After reviewing three previously reported unexpected conclusions that had been compelled by his investigation in the Critical Text Project, he explained that in the past two years his work had led to a fourth unexpected finding: "The original vocabulary of the Book of Mormon appears to derive from the 1500s and 1600s, not from the 1800s."⁷⁴ The era of English Skousen referred to is known as *Early Modern English*, a phase in the evolution of English corresponding roughly to 1500 to 1700 AD, though some scholars use a range of 1470 to 1670 AD. This period includes the time in which the King James Bible was produced (published in 1611), but the KJV Bible is not representative of the entire era. Skousen's article discussed a variety of examples from the text which point to an influence in the translation from English not found in the KJV and more archaic than dialects in the United States. It was a controversial announcement, but one grounded in data and meticulous research.

One of the first discoveries leading Skousen to begin considering the issue of Early Modern English involved consideration of the phrase "pleasing bar of God" in Jacob 6:13 and Moroni 10:34. In context, this represents an unpleasant encounter for the wicked being judged, so why would it be called *pleasing*? In 2004, Skousen published his analysis in light of the nature of the mistakes Oliver Cowdery tended to make upon hearing unfamiliar words during dictation, and speculated that the term Joseph dictated was actually "pleading bar of God."⁷⁵ But the "pleading bar" as a legal term in English is archaic and was not in use in Joseph's day. Rather, the "pleading bar" seems to come from English in the early 1600s. Skousen concluded that "the actual translator of the Book of Mormon — either the Lord himself or his translation committee — seems to have been familiar with the term!"⁷⁶

Studies 3, no. 1 (1994): 28–38, <https://publications.mi.byu.edu/publications/jbms/3/1/S00003-50c7617fa96a53Skousen.pdf>.

74. Royal Skousen, "The Archaic Vocabulary of the Book of Mormon," *Insights: A Window on the Ancient World* 25, no. 5 (2005): 2–6, <https://publications.mi.byu.edu/publications/insights/25/5/S00001-25-5.pdf>.

75. Royal Skousen, "The Pleading Bar of God," *Insights* 24, no. 4 (2004): 2–3, <https://publications.mi.byu.edu/publications/insights/24/4/S00001-24-4.pdf>.

76. *Ibid.*

In light of his ongoing investigation, Skousen would later state that:

Joseph Smith was literally reading off an already composed English-language text. Taken as a whole, the evidence in the manuscripts and in the language of the earliest text supports the hypothesis that the Book of Mormon was a precise text. I do not consider this conclusion apologetic but instead as one demanded by the evidence.

The opposing viewpoint, that Joseph Smith got ideas and translated them into his own English, cannot be supported by the manuscript and textual evidence. The only substantive argument for this alternative view has been the nonstandard nature of the original text, with its implication that God would never speak ungrammatical English, so the nonstandard usage must be the result of Joseph Smith's putting the ideas he received into his own language. Yet with the recent finding that the original vocabulary of the text appears to date from the 1500s and 1600s (not the 1800s), we now need to consider the possibility that the ungrammaticality of the original text may also date from that earlier period of time, not necessarily from Joseph's own time and place. The evidence basically argues that Joseph Smith was not the author of the Book of Mormon, nor was he actually the translator. Instead, he was the revelator: through him the Lord revealed the English-language text (by means of the interpreters, later called the Urim and Thummim, and the seer stone). Such a view is consistent, I believe, with Joseph's use elsewhere of the verb *translate* to mean 'transmit' and the noun *translation* to mean 'transmission' (as in the eighth Article of Faith).⁷⁷

Skousen had thrown out a challenge to others "to consider the possibility that the ungrammaticality of the original text may also date from that earlier period of time, not necessarily from Joseph's own time and place." It was a challenge that would be taken up by a linguist, Stanford Carmack, in a series of publications, primarily in *Interpreter: A Journal of Mormon Scripture*. These include the following six publications:

77. Royal Skousen, "My Testimony of the Book of Mormon, Scholarly and Personal," *Mormon Scholars Testify*, Dec. 2009, <https://www.fairmormon.org/testimonies/scholars/royal-skousen>.

1. "A Look at Some 'Nonstandard' Book of Mormon Grammar"⁷⁸

Carmack's wide array of examples allows him to make this statement:

Much of the earliest Book of Mormon language which has been regarded as nonstandard through the years is not. Furthermore, when 150 years' worth of emendations are stripped away, the grammar presents extensive evidence of its Early Modern English character, independent in many cases from the King James Bible.⁷⁹

This article lays the foundation for Carmack's extensive work exploring Early Modern English (EModE) elements in the Book of Mormon. Carmack shows that some of the syntax in the Book of Mormon actually shows clearly pre-KJV elements.

Carmack considers numerous issues and examples. For instance, awkward usages of the word "much," such as *much* + *afflictions*, *fruits*, *threatenings*, *horses*, *contentions*, or *provisions* do not appear to be from the KJV Bible nor from Joseph's dialect but are found in Early Modern English. Also considered are the relative use of *has* versus *hath*; third-person plural subjects used with archaic third-person singular inflection, as in *Nephi's brethren rebelleth*, *they dieth*, and *hearts delighteth*; unusual uses of "there was" or "there were"; variation in grammatical mood in the same sentence; the past participle *arriven* used five times in the 1829 Book of Mormon; dative impersonal constructions like *it supposeth me*, *it sorroweth me*, and *it whispereth me*; the phrase *faith on the Lord*; and many other apparently non-standard or blatantly erroneous constructions such as *in them days* in Helaman 7:8 and 13:37 ("hick grammar" today but known in acceptable EModE) or *I had smote* in 1 Nephi 4:19, for which we presently require (and now have in the Book of Mormon) *smitten* as the past participle, although *smote* was frequently used as a past participle beginning in the 16th century.

Carmack's article came as a surprise to many readers, greatly amplifying the initial suggestions of Skousen yet also creating significant controversy, as one can gather from the comments posted in response to Carmack's article. But this was just the beginning of the detailed analysis to come.

78. Stanford Carmack, "A Look at Some 'Nonstandard' Book of Mormon Grammar." *Interpreter: A Journal of Mormon Scripture* 11 (2014): 209–62, <https://www.mormoninterpreter.com/a-look-at-some-nonstandard-book-of-mormon-grammar/>.

79. *Ibid.*, 209.

2. “*The Implications of Past-Tense Syntax in the Book of Mormon*”⁸⁰

Carmack here considers the Book of Mormon’s unusually high rate of using “did” to convey past tense, as in “Moroni *did arrive* with his army to the land of Bountiful” (Alma 52:18). “The 1829 Book of Mormon contains nearly 2,000 instances of this particular syntax, using it 27% of the time in past-tense contexts. The 1611 King James Bible ... employs this syntax less than 2% of the time. While the Book of Mormon’s rate is significantly higher than the Bible’s, it is close to what is found in other English-language texts written mainly in the mid- to late-1500s. That usage died out in the 1700s.”⁷³

Carmack also notes how other modern writers mimicking KJV language fail to match the KJV or the Book of Mormon in terms of past tense syntax. Carmack argues that the Book of Mormon’s usage makes it unique for its time. In light of the detailed statistics of Book of Mormon past tense syntax, it seems that its syntax is not readily explainable as a product of Joseph Smith’s diction nor of Joseph’s mimicry of either the Bible or other texts available to him.

3. “*Why the Oxford English Dictionary (and not Webster’s 1828)*”⁸¹

Carmack’s next paper argues that the archaic language of the Book of Mormon cannot be understood by referring to the 1828 dictionary of Noah Webster but rather requires a much more archaic dictionary.

He adds to his growing body of linguistic data by exploring several additional patterns. One example is “it supposeth me,” a rare inverted syntax pattern that occurs four times in the Book of Mormon, each consistent with Early Modern English usage much earlier than the KJV in ways that make it unlikely for Joseph to have picked this up on his own.

Could Joseph Smith have known about this inverted syntax? I suppose he could have seen it, had he spent time reading Middle English poetry. Was it accessible to him? No. This grammatical structure is exceedingly rare, the embodiment of obsolete usage. Had he ever seen it, he hardly would have recognized it

80. Stanford Carmack, “The Implications of Past-Tense Syntax in the Book of Mormon,” *Interpreter: A Journal of Mormon Scripture* 14 (2015): 119–86, <https://www.mormoninterpreter.com/the-implications-of-past-tense-syntax-in-the-book-of-mormon/>.

81. Stanford Carmack, “Why the Oxford English Dictionary (and not Webster’s 1828),” *Interpreter: A Journal of Mormon Scripture* 15 (2015): 65–77, <https://www.mormoninterpreter.com/why-the-oxford-english-dictionary-and-not-websters-1828/>.

and been able to transform it.... Yet the text employs inverted syntax with *suppose* appropriately and consistently four times⁸²

Along the way, Carmack points out just how complex and interesting the Book of Mormon text is:

Let me also say at this point that it is wrongheaded to propose Moroni as translator in order to account for "errors" in the text. He may have been involved in the divine translation effort, but to employ him as an explanatory device in order to account for putative errors is misguided. The English-language text is too complex, diverse, and even well-formed to ascribe it to a non-native translation effort. Again, as I have stated in an earlier paper, the BofM is not full of grammatical errors. Rather, it is full of EModE — some of it is typical and pedestrian, some of it is elegant and sophisticated, and some of it is, to our limited or uninformed way of thinking, objectionable and ungrammatical. The BofM also contains touches of modern English and late Middle English. It is not a monolithic text, and we are just beginning to learn about its English language.... I have certainly come to realize that it is not the text of the BofM that is full of errors, but rather our judgments in relation to its grammar.⁸³

For those wanting certainty, that's disturbing language. But this smells like an adventure that will lead somewhere. Critics and fans alike should find this challenge worth digging into. Will new insights about the Book of Mormon cause it to go down in flames? Critics may hope so. Carmack, on the other hand, argues that whatever the details are that led to Early Modern English in the Book of Mormon, the heavy strain of complex Early Modern English syntax of the Book of Mormon, once thought to be merely Joseph's bad grammar or a clumsy attempt at imitating the KJV, implies that the Lord "revealed a concrete form of expression (words) to Joseph Smith" and that the text itself is of divine origin. As surprising as this statement is, at the moment it seems to be a fair one in light of a great deal of objective data.

I think the devil is not in these details, but something is, and further work is needed.

82. Ibid., 76.

83. Ibid., 67–68.

4. “What Command Syntax Tells Us About Book of Mormon Authorship”⁸⁴

One of the particularly interesting details showing apparent Early Modern English influence in the Book of Mormon is the consistently unusual syntax used in expressing commands. These abundant archaic command forms include wordy constructions such as “he *commanded his people that they should maintain* those cities” in Alma 52:4 or “the Father *hath commanded me that I should give unto you this land* for your inheritance” in 3 Nephi 20:14. Carmack makes this argument:

The variety of command syntax found in the Book of Mormon is very different from what is seen in the King James Bible. Yet it is sophisticated and principled, evincing Early Modern English linguistic competence. Interestingly, the syntactic match between the 1829 text and a prominent text from the late 15th century is surprisingly good. All the evidence indicates that Joseph Smith would not have produced the structures found in the text using the King James Bible as a model, nor from his own language.⁸⁵

Carmack concludes that “[a] linguistically unsophisticated author could not have produced the array of syntactic structures found in the [Book of Mormon]. Deep, native-speaker knowledge of [Early Modern English] was required to achieve the regulated patterns of use found in the [Book of Mormon].”⁸⁶

5. “The More Part of the Book of Mormon Is Early Modern English”⁸⁷

Carmack explores the use of an obsolete construction using “more” to indicate the greater part of something. Carmack shows that awkward usages in the original Book of Mormon text cannot be plausibly explained as mimicry of the KJV Bible and are unlikely to be due to Joseph’s own dialect.

84. Stanford Carmack, “What Command Syntax Tells Us About Book of Mormon Authorship,” *Interpreter: A Journal of Mormon Scripture* 13 (2015): 175–217, <https://www.mormoninterpreter.com/what-command-syntax-tells-us-about-book-of-mormon-authorship/>.

85. *Ibid.*, 175.

86. *Ibid.*, 215.

87. Stanford Carmack, “The More Part of the Book of Mormon Is Early Modern English,” *Interpreter: A Journal of Mormon Scripture* 18 (2016): 33–40, <https://www.mormoninterpreter.com/the-more-part-of-the-book-of-mormon-is-early-modern-english/>.

6. "Joseph Smith Read the Words"⁸⁸

In this interesting paper, Carmack responds to Orson Scott Card and Brant Gardner regarding the theory that Joseph's translation of the Book of Mormon involved expressing revealed ideas in his own language. They are in good company, Carmack observes, as similar views have been espoused by B. H. Roberts, John A. Widtsoe, Sidney B. Sperry, Daniel H. Ludlow, and Robert L. Millett. However, newly available data about the original text dictated by Joseph show that had he been doing the translation himself, expressing revealed concepts in his own words, then the language and syntax of the Book of Mormon would be much different than it is.

Carmack argues that many words and phrases said to reveal a 19th-century influence, like "mighty change," "song of redeeming love," or "infinite atonement," are actually much older and can be found in the Early Modern period of English.⁸⁹

Carmack emphasizes the Book of Mormon's accurate archaic uses of over 30 words not found in the Bible, nearly all of which are not expected to have been found in Joseph's dialect. Such words are unlikely to have come from Joseph's own vocabulary, making their usage an indication (one of many) that Joseph's "translation" involved receiving specific words, as if he were reading them somehow to his scribe as he dictated. This is a significant argument for "tight control" in the translation process. But there are other strong arguments as well:

Different types of systematic usage — for example, 16th-century past-tense syntax with *did*; heavy *that*-complementation with verbs like *command*, *cause*, *suffer*, and *desire*; the completely consistent use of the short adverbial form *exceeding* with adjectives; and morphosyntactic patterns and variation involving the {-th} plural (and even the {-s} plural) — only

88. Stanford Carmack, "Joseph Smith Read the Words," *Interpreter: A Journal of Mormon Scripture* 18 (2016): 41–64, <https://www.mormoninterpreter.com/joseph-smith-read-the-words/>.

89. On the issue of modern origins for "infinite atonement," see Jeff Lindsay, "Plagiarism in the Book of Mormon? Is It Derived from Modern Writings?," *JeffLindsay.com* (blog), last updated Sept. 22, 2017, https://www.jefflindsay.com/LDSFAQ/FQ_BMProb3.shtml; and "Mercy, Justice, and the Atonement in the Book of Mormon: Modern or Ancient Concepts?," Dec. 26, 2016, <https://www.jefflindsay.com/LDSFAQ/mercy.shtml>.

match the systematic usage of the Early Modern period and are found throughout the text.⁹⁰

Several other papers drive these points home in various ways, including the unusual usage of *was*,⁹¹ the surprising but characteristically Early Modern English usage of {th} for plural forms,⁹² evidence from Joseph's 1832 history regarding his own vocabulary and syntax,⁹³ and evidence from other writers who sought to imitate the Bible.⁹⁴

Collectively, Skousen and Carmack present a case for strong Early Modern English influence in the Book of Mormon that is not driven by apologetics or any preconceived notions about the Book of Mormon, but driven by extensive objective data. The data present a complex story, for while there are Early Modern English elements from shortly before the KJV era or other parts of the Early Modern English era,⁹⁵ there are more modern elements in the Book of Mormon such as its high usage of the very practical English innovation "its." The word is in the KJV, but occurs only once in Leviticus 25:5 and was not present at all in the original 1611 version. The word is found in Shakespeare but did not become frequently used until well after the KJV era. Thus, the strong thread of Early Modern English, not all from one single time frame, is also blended with some modern elements as well as some apparent artifacts from Hebrew or

90. Carmack, "Joseph Smith Read the Words," 47.

91. Stanford Carmack, "The Case of Plural Was in the Earliest Text," *Interpreter: A Journal of Mormon Scripture* 18 (2016): 109–37, <https://www.mormoninterpreter.com/the-case-of-plural%E2%80%89was-in-the-earliest-text/>.

92. Stanford Carmack, "The Case of the {th} Plural in the Earliest Text," *Interpreter: A Journal of Mormon Scripture* 18 (2016): 79–108, <https://www.mormoninterpreter.com/the-case-of-the-th-plural-in-the-earliest-text/>.

93. Stanford Carmack, "How Joseph Smith's Grammar Differed from Book of Mormon Grammar: Evidence from the 1832 History," *Interpreter: A Journal of Mormon Scripture* 25 (2017): 239–59, <https://www.mormoninterpreter.com/how-joseph-smiths-grammar-differed-from-book-of-mormon-grammar-evidence-from-the-1832-history/>.

94. Stanford Carmack, "Is the Book of Mormon a Pseudo-Archaic Text?," *Interpreter: A Journal of Mormon Scripture* 28 (2018): 177–232, <https://www.mormoninterpreter.com/is-the-book-of-mormon-a-pseudo-archaic-text/>.

95. One further example is the use of the non-standard form of "a" before a gerund, as in "a preaching," one of the first awkward grammatical forms I noticed in looking at the Original Manuscript. I would learn that this is also an archaic form with Early Modern English roots. See Jeff Lindsay, "The Debate Over Book of Mormon Translation: Loose or Tight?," *Nauvoo Times*, September 5, 2014, http://www.nauvootimes.com/cgi-bin/nauvoo_column.pl?number=102343&author=jeff-lindsay#.W0ijs359jUo.

Egyptian in the translation, suggesting a complex translation, but a translation with a distinctive Early Modern English influence. In spite of its complexity, the translation is remarkably consistent and points to origins outside of Joseph Smith's environment, however and why ever Early Modern English was selected for much of the syntax of the book.

Further Language Issues

Other research on language involves the issue of the language of the Book of Mormon on the golden plates. One of the most puzzling statements in the Book of Mormon — something that makes no sense in light of common knowledge in Joseph's day — is Nephi's statement in the opening verses to alert the reader that he wrote using "the learning of the Jews and the language of the Egyptians" (1 Nephi 1:2). This was perplexing to readers in Joseph's day and ours. Numerous theories have been proposed regarding what this might mean.⁶⁵ While there is still room for debate regarding what Nephi meant, it is clear there is something that seemed obvious in Nephi's day that is not obvious to us and has not been explained adequately for our intellectual curiosity. It's the kind of issue that often occurs in legitimate texts from a foreign culture and not as an artifact of modern fiction for modern readers. Further, the concept of Hebrew scribes using Egyptian in any way — often cited as a ridiculous weakness in the Book of Mormon — has become much more plausible in light of archaeological evidence long after the Book of Mormon was published. Neal Rappleye, for example, is able to make a strong case that Nephi was using Egyptian and that this is consistent with an ancient scribal tradition that would not have been known in Joseph's day. Remarkably consistent with Card's approach, Rappleye points out why Nephi may have felt a need to explain what he was doing — an explanation that is quite logical when viewed from the perspective of an ancient author yet puzzling to us today:

It is reasonable to suggest that Nephi's language is part of a centuries-old and widespread scribal tradition in Judah of writing in hieratic Egyptian. Nephi calls it "the language of my father" (1 Nephi 1:2), and evidence suggests that rather than being perpetuated by the state for bureaucratic interests, this tradition was passed on within the family. By Nephi's day, the hieratic script was often intermixed with Hebrew script, incorporating Hebrew word orders and scribal habits, thus differing from Egyptian as it was written in Egypt. Calabro calls it a "Judahite variety of Egyptian script"; Wimmer calls

it “*Palästinisches Hieratisch*” (“Palestinian Hieratic”). Both of these seem functionally equivalent to Nephi’s “learning of the Jews and the language of the Egyptians.”...

Within this context, it is not likely that Nephi’s writing was Hebrew language in an Egyptian script. The awkwardness of such an arrangement was long ago pointed out by Hugh Nibley. Now, we know this is not how hieratic was being used in Nephi’s day. Since Calabro specifically notices what could be called Hebraisms (Hebrew word orders) in the hieratic writing, the presence of Hebraisms not typically found in Egyptian — as the *Egyptians* write — is insufficient evidence to assert that the underlying language is Hebrew as opposed to Nephi’s statement that it is Egyptian. Indeed, the most natural interpretation of Nephi’s statement is that he was writing Egyptian the way the Jews had learned to write it, that is, according to their own, independent, scribal tradition, which had some natural syncretism with Hebrew but was nonetheless Egyptian...

That Nephi specifies his writing is according to “the learning of the Jews” indicates that he has some awareness that there are differences in how the Egyptians themselves write and use their language. He may be referring to the differences in script, in word order, in the incorporation of some Hebrew linguistic elements, or most likely all of the above. The awareness of these differences could come only from having some contact with “pure” Egyptian scribal practices, as Wimmer’s findings suggest. This awareness of Egyptian according to the “learning of the Egyptians,” to adapt Nephi’s phrase, could explain why Nephi makes a statement about his language at all: familiar with both traditions of Egyptian writing, Nephi may have felt a need to specify that his was the Judahite variety. Readers of the Egyptian variety would probably still be able to read the Palestinian hieratic but may have struggled. Perhaps Nephi was hoping to help such potential readers avoid confusion from the Hebraized elements of his Egyptian writing by telling them up front that this was the Judahite variety of hieratic.

The context created from late preexilic scribal practice in Judah allows for a sensible interpretation of 1 Nephi 1:2 that resolves its ambiguity. The data allow us to see just what the

"language of the Egyptians," according to "the learning of the Jews," actually consisted of and interpret Nephi's statement accordingly. No such explanatory context can reasonably be fashioned out of Joseph Smith's world, where the reaction of contemporaries indicates that the phrase was as perplexing to readers then as it is now.⁹⁶

If Rappleye is correct, this view raises questions about some of the many apparent Hebrew wordplays in the Book of Mormon that may need to be reconsidered, although there is still the possibility of such Hebraic elements having been incorporated into the text in spite of it (or parts of it) being primarily in Egyptian.

In any case, the issue of Hebrew scribes working with Egyptian language has long been mocked by Book of Mormon critics but now seems to be another case where the implausible Book of Mormon is turning the tide on its critics as we learn more about the ancient world and break past easy but errant assumptions about what the book is telling us. It is also another case where detailed examination of foreign cultural phenomena such as scribal practices in ancient Palestine and Egypt help us reconstruct the assumptions built into Nephi's brief explanation and fill in gaps for a modern audience.

A fraudulent work of fiction is not likely to present puzzles that yield such rewards upon further investigation, nor would a modern work give an explanation that only make things worse for the modern reader by raising serious puzzles that would only become clear through detailed research. Consideration of what Nephi felt a need to explain again reveals that we are dealing with something far outside of Joseph's environment. We are dealing with an ancient voice from the dust, an authentic and complex record worthy of respect and thoughtful analysis on every page.

A Surge in Semitic Wordplays, Especially Related to Names

While the debate continues on the nature of the underlying language(s) and script(s) that were on the golden plates, there are noteworthy hints of a significant influence of Hebrew due to numerous apparent instances of artful and intentional Hebraic wordplays, especially in the names presented in the Book of Mormon. A great body of analysis on this issue has come to light only in the past decade, particularly through the extensive work of

96. Neal Rappleye, "Learning Nephi's Language: Creating a Context for 1 Nephi 1:2," *Interpreter: A Journal of Mormon Scripture* 16 (2015): 151-59, <https://www.mormoninterpreter.com/learning-nephis-language-creating-a-context-for-1-nephi-12/>.

Matthew Bowen as compiled in his 2018 book, *Name as Key-Word: Collected Essays on Onomastic Wordplay and the Temple in Mormon Scripture*.⁹⁷ Bowen's detailed work shows that when a variety of Book of Mormon names are considered in light of their plausible Hebrew form, clever and pervasive wordplays appear in the way these names are used.

The name Alma, for example, now known to be an authentic ancient Jewish man's name (after so many decades of mockery from critics for Joseph's "blunder" of not recognizing Alma as a common Latin female name),⁹⁸ is introduced with an apparent wordplay on the Hebrew name: given that the name Alma can mean "young man" in Hebrew, the statement that Alma "was a young man" suggests a knowing wordplay in Mosiah 17:2. A wordplay with the Hebrew root **'lm*, "to hide," to be "hidden" or "concealed," may also occur in the story of Alma being "hidden" and "concealed" while writing the words of Abinadi and "privately" teaching those who would listen. The abundance of wordplays involving his name in Mosiah 17–18 "accentuates his importance as a prophetic figure and founder of the later Nephite church."⁹⁹

Finding wordplays, like other Hebraic elements including Hebrew poetical elements, in an English translation faces the obvious problem of lacking the text in the original language from which one might more fully evaluate the nature of the literary device. However, with names in particular,

97. Matthew Bowen, *Name as Key-Word: Collected Essays on Onomastic Wordplay and the Temple in Mormon Scripture* (Orem, UT: Interpreter Foundation and Salt Lake City: Ehorn Books, 2018). These essays draw upon information previously published by Bowen in *Interpreter: A Journal of Mormon Scripture* (<https://www.mormoninterpreter.com>).

98. Paul Hoskisson, "What's in a Name? Alma as a Hebrew Name," *Journal of Book of Mormon Studies* 7, no. 1 (1998): 72–73, <https://publications.mi.byu.edu/pdf-control.php/publications/jbms/7/1/S00011-50be297b720ea9Hoskisson.pdf>. See also John Tvedtnes, "Hebrew Names in the Book of Mormon" (Presentation, Thirteenth World Congress of Jewish Studies in Jerusalem, Jerusalem, Israel, August 2001), <https://www.fairmormon.org/wp-content/uploads/2011/12/tvedtnes-HebrewNames.pdf>; and Terrence L. Szink, "The Personal Name 'Alma' at Ebla," *Religious Educator* 1, no. 1 (2000): 53–56, <https://rsc.byu.edu/es/archived/volume-1-number-1-2000/personal-name-alma-ebila>.

99. Bowen, *Name as Key-Word*, lii–liii and 91–100. See also Matthew L. Bowen, "Alma — Young Man, Hidden Prophet," *Interpreter: A Journal of Mormon Scripture* 19 (2016): 343–53, <https://www.mormoninterpreter.com/alma-young-man-hidden-prophet/>; and Matthew L. Bowen, "He Did Go About Secretly: Additional Thoughts on the Literary Use of Alma's Name," *Interpreter: A Journal of Mormon Scripture* 27 (2017): 197–212, <https://www.mormoninterpreter.com/he-did-go-about-secretly-additional-thoughts-on-the-literary-use-of-almas-name/>.

there is a reasonable chance that evidence of a wordplay can survive translation if the name is transliterated well and if the associated text has been translated well. An example is the name Jesus in Matthew 1:21: "thou shalt call his name Jesus, for he shall save his people from their sins." In spite of the Hebrew having been written in Greek and then translated in English, and in spite of not having the original Aramaic or Hebrew words that were actually spoken in Matthew 1, we can still see a connection between the name of Jesus and the Hebrew word *yosia* meaning "to save."

Still, even when working with the original language, an apparent wordplay may be unintended and arise from chance. However, when the wordplay relates well to the text or has explanatory power, and when the wordplay is applied more than once or in creative, artful ways, the probability of intent is higher. Bowen makes the case for most of his finds that multiple factors point to intentional and clever wordplays rather than mere chance. Wordplays involving Book of Mormon names in Bowen's book (which also considers some newly proposed Biblical wordplays) include the following:

- Nephi's name. Proposed to be from Egyptian *nfr* meaning good or goodly, Nephi appears to have multiple meaningful connections to the word "good" in the text, beginning with Nephi's declaration at the very beginning of our text that "I, Nephi, having been born of goodly parents..." Bowen suggests this relationship is at play in both the opening and closing chapters of Nephi's writings, forming an "inclusio" that appropriately brackets his two-book work,?? and underscores his mission of helping readers know the goodness of God and helping them to choose do good and follow Christ.¹⁰⁰
- The name Mary, related to the Egyptian root *mr(i)*, "love," "desire," or "wish." It is only after seeing Mary in vision that Nephi recognizes the significance of the tree he saw in his vision: "it is the **love of God** which sheddeth itself abroad in the hearts of the children of men; wherefore, it is the **most desirable** above all things" (1 Nephi 11:22). Other possible wordplays with other occurrences of the name Mary are also discussed.¹⁰¹

100. Bowen, *Name as Key-Word*, 1–15.

101. *Ibid.*, 17–47.

- Mormon's name and the related place name, the Waters of Mormon, for which Mormon appears to show awareness of a relationship to the same root as Mary for the first syllable, apparently resulting in creative links with the words "desire" and "love."¹⁰²
- The name Joseph, which involves evidence of particularly extensive and creative wordplays related to a Hebrew root meaning "gather," "assemble," etc., and a root meaning "to add" or "increase." These wordplays are primarily made using an ancient Hebrew literary technique known as *Gezera Shawa*, in which two scriptural passages are brought together based on a shared word in both passages, thereby adding to or reinterpreting the meaning in a creative way. After Bowen's book went into print, he published another study investigating a further set of wordplays related to the name Joseph.¹⁰³ There Bowen makes the case that Nephi's heavy application of the Isaianic use of *yāsap* ("to add, to proceed") in 2 Nephi 25–30 is "a direct and thematic allusion" to a latter-day Joseph who would have a role in in bringing forth additional scripture. "This additional scripture would enable the meek to 'increase,' just as Isaiah and Nephi had prophesied."⁷³
- The name Benjamin, which is also used artfully with *Gezera Shawa* by Benjamin himself. In the covenant-making context of King Benjamin's speech, he seeks to make his people become sons and daughters of God (Mosiah 5:17), with language drawing upon language in 2 Samuel 7:14 which employs the Hebrew *leben* ("for a son"), and also Psalm 2:7 and Deuteronomy 14:1–2, employing the Hebrew word *ben* ("son") or *banim* ("children"). Those who accept the Lord will be at the "right hand" (Hebrew *yamin*) of God (Mosiah 5:9)¹⁰⁴, possibly invoking Psalm 110:1. The verses that Benjamin brings together shows further usage

102. Ibid., 24–47.

103. Matthew L. Bowen, "And the Meek Also Shall Increase': The Verb YĀSAP in Isaiah 29 and Nephi's Prophetic Allusions to the Name Joseph in 2 Nephi 25–30," *Interpreter: A Journal of Mormon Scripture* 30 (2018): 5–42, <https://www.mormoninterpreter.com/and-the-meek-also-shall-increase-the-verb-yasap-in-isaiah-29-and-nephis-prophetic-allusions-to-the-name-joseph-in-2-nephi-25-30/>.

104. Bowen, *Name as Key-Word*, 49–68.

of Gezera Shawa resulting in a clever wordplay on his own name that emphasizes that through making and keeping the covenant with God, Benjamin's people can become sons and daughters of God and be enthroned at his right hand, each becoming "a Benjamin."

- The name Judah and the Jews, with Judah being related to Hebrew roots which can mean "to offer praise out of a feeling of gratitude" or to "praise," "thank," or "acknowledge." In his chapter, "What Thank They the Jews?," Bowen shows how Nephi applies these meanings as he urges the future Gentiles to be grateful to the Jews for the scriptures they have preserved for the world and to resist the temptation to despise and persecute the Jews (2 Nephi 29:3–6). "What thank they the Jews?" in 2 Nephi 29:4, the Lord's condemning question of future anti-Semitic Gentiles, appears to provide a direct wordplay between the words for "Jews" and "thank." To say that the Jews have helped bring forth "salvation" to the Gentiles (also 2 Nephi 29:4) may also be a wordplay on the name of Jesus. Bowen also observes that Nephi's closing words which call upon us to "respect the words of the Jews" (2 Nephi 33:14) further underscores the revealed message shared in 2 Nephi 29.¹⁰⁵ Bowen also notes that the Book of Mormon offers the strongest condemnation of anti-Semitism found anywhere in the scriptures.¹⁰⁶ How appropriate that it would be done with Hebraic wordplays.
- The names Enos and Jacob, as used by Enos to relate his experiences to those of his ancestor Jacob in Genesis 32–33. Enos appears to employ a Hebraic wordplay between the name Jacob and "wrestle" in addition to a wordplay on his own name.¹⁰⁷
- Abish, a woman servant among the Lamanites whose name is given, strangely, while most Book of Mormon women go unnamed. In this case, however, her name fits the story with a straightforward wordplay, and also fits an important theological agenda. "Abish" can mean "Father is a man," an apt name for a woman who, in the same verse that names her, is said to have been secretly

105. *Ibid.*, 69–81.

106. *Ibid.*, liii.

107. *Ibid.*, 83–90.

converted due to a “remarkable vision of her father.” But since names beginning with “Ab-” in the Old Testament often make a reference to God, “Father is a man” has a very appropriate reference to the nature of God, particularly Christ. Ammon was seeking to teach the Lamanites who the Great Spirit was and how Christ would come to earth as a mortal to redeem all mankind. The name Abish is meaningful in more than one way in this account, and we can be grateful that it was included.¹⁰⁸

- The place names Zarahemla and Jershon. Jershon was one of the first potential wordplays noted in the Book of Mormon, with an easily discernible relationship to the Hebrew word “inheritance,” the perfect name for the land that was given as a land of “inheritance” to the newly converted and exiled Anti-Nephi-Lehites fleeing their Lamanite homelands and again later to the newly converted Zoramites. But Bowen reveals more in the literary devices involving Jershon, including multiple instances in which the Book of Mormon reveals an awareness of the Hebrew meaning of Jershon, coupled with the artful intertwining of Jershon wordplays with wordplays on the name Zarahemla, proposed as taken from “seed of compassion” or “seed of pity” in Hebrew. Bowen shows that both names provide us with valuable test cases for the Book of Mormon, reflecting repeated and apparently deliberate wordplays that are consistent with ancient Hebrew literary methods and highly unlikely to have been the result of blind luck in a farm boy’s random ramblings.¹⁰⁹
- The names Zoram and Rameumpton. Both names share a common syllable that in Hebrew can describe something that is “high” or “lifted up.” These names may be involved in wordplays in descriptions of the Zoramites and their peculiar, prideful religious practices involving standing on an elevated tower or stand called the “Rameumpton” from which they boasted of their elite status. Similar wordplays may have been used in Alma’s counsel to his son Shiblon and in Mormon’s description of the corrupt chief judges Cezoram and Seezoram, both with Zoram-derived names,

108. Ibid., 101–18.

109. Ibid., 119–40.

to emphasize that the proud and wicked Nephites had become lifted up like the Zoramites.¹¹⁰

- The name Aminadab, which Bowen sees as a Semitic/Hebrew name meaning "my kinsman is willing" or "my people are willing." Aminadab is the Nephite dissenter among the Lamanites who helps them recognize what is occurring during a miraculous event in Helaman 5 in which the Nephite brothers and prophets Lehi and Nephi are spared in a Lamanite prison. Aminadab, remembering his religious roots, tells the terrified Lamanites that "You must repent, and cry unto the voice, even until ye shall have faith in Christ" (Helaman 5:41). They are converted and their witness leads to many more converts. Mormon, in concluding this story, notes that it was the "willingness" of the Lamanite people that led to their conversion (Helaman 6:36).

There are many more wordplays that have been proposed for various passages in the Book of Mormon, but Bowen's focus on the significance of names appears to be especially fruitful and generally plausible, and frequently brings out added meaning or answers meaningful questions about the text. In most of these cases, it would be difficult to ascribe the wordplays identified to just chance and clever argumentation, though false positives in general cannot be completely ruled out. As Bowen observes, whether the text was written in Hebrew or Egyptian, the underlying meanings of names and relevant wordplays drawing upon Hebrew roots could have been recognized by readers familiar with the brass plates and the Nephites' (evolving) spoken language with its Hebrew origins, reducing the impact of uncertainty on the written language on the relevance of wordplays based on names with recognized meaning in Hebrew or Egyptian. In spite of such uncertainties, Bowen's work leaves us with a much richer appreciation of the genuinely ancient literary nature of the Book of Mormon, filled with gems that are being noticed only now, nearly two centuries after the Book of Mormon was dictated by a young man who had not yet studied Hebrew and could not have studied Egyptian. The literary strength of the Book of Mormon as an ancient text has become even more impressive since Orson Scott Card discussed its strengths.

110. Ibid., 141–75. See also Matthew L. Bowen, "See That Ye Are Not Lifted Up: The Name Zoram and Its Paronomastic Pejoration," *Interpreter: A Journal of Mormon Scripture* 19 (2016): 109–43, <https://www.mormoninterpreter.com/see-that-ye-are-not-lifted-up-the-name-zoram-and-its-paronomastic-pejoration/>.

Summary

With the presentation and publication of “Artifact or Artifice” a quarter century ago, Card gave us valuable tools for detecting hidden assumptions that reveal the era in which fiction was created. His approach can help us look past the text itself and the assumptions we may have been importing into a text or story to consider other possibilities. Such tugging at the text of the Book of Mormon brought fruitful insights in 1993. Twenty-five years later, most of his initial findings still appear valid or even strengthened. His own assumptions about Joseph Smith’s language, commonly made by many readers, have been strongly challenged by emerging work on the nature of the translation and the dictated text, but even if Card’s views on this one point end up being overturned, the result only further confirms Card’s overall thesis, that the Book of Mormon is an artifact of an environment foreign to Joseph Smith’s setting and mind.

“Artifact or Artifice?” has withstood the test of time well, like the Book of Mormon, although some details discussed by Card require updated understanding in light of intriguing new data. The question “artifact or artifice?” remains a vital and increasingly fascinating one that readers should pose as they read the Book of Mormon deeply, dropping superficial assumptions, to more fully encounter the numerous surprises and even wonders in the text.

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LET THERE BE A FAMINE IN THE LAND

Jim Hawker

Abstract: *The drought recorded in Helaman 11 is probably the only dated, climate-related event in the entire Book of Mormon that could have left a “signature” detectable over 2,000 years after it occurred. Typical methods to detect this kind of event using dendrochronology (the study of tree rings) or sediment cores from lake beds either do not go back far enough in time or are not of high enough resolution to detect the event described in Helaman 11. However, over the last 15 to 20 years, various researchers have turned to analyzing stalagmites collected from caves to reproduce the precipitation history of a given area. These analysis methods are now producing results approaching the 1-year resolution of dendrochronology, with 2 sigma (95%) dating accuracies on the order of a decade. There is an ongoing debate with regard to where the events in the Book of Mormon took place. One of the proposed areas is Mesoamerica, specifically in southern Mexico and Guatemala. This paper will test the hypothesis that the drought described in the Book of Helaman took place in Mesoamerica using the results of precipitation histories derived from the analysis of three stalagmites compared to determine if there is evidence that a drought took place in the expected time frame and with the expected duration.*

The Book of Mormon records that the prophet Nephi, son of Helaman, asked God to cause a famine in the land with the hope that it would end the destruction and wickedness caused by a war with the Gaddianton robbers¹ (Helaman 11:2, 10). This event is unique in the Book of Mormon because it may be the only recorded event that can be dated within an accuracy of a few years and that might have left an

1. This is the spelling of the name of the robbers in Royal Skousen, *The Book of Mormon — The Earliest Text* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2009), 544.

imprint or signature that could be detected today, over 2,000 years after it took place. This famine had the following characteristics:

- Three- to 3.5-year duration. It began during the 73rd year of the reign of the judges (Helaman 11:2–5), 19 “Book of Mormon years” before the birth of Christ (3 Nephi 1:4–13). It ended during the 76th year of the reign of the judges (Helaman 11:17), 16 “Book of Mormon years” before the birth of Christ.
- Involved a relatively large geographic area that extended outside of Nephite lands (Helaman 11:6).
- Caused primarily by a lack of rain, not some other reason like war, plant diseases, or locusts, for example (Helaman 11:6, 13, 17).
- Severe enough that it stopped the war, and “they did perish by the thousands in the more wicked parts of the land” (Helaman 11:6).

Dating this event in terms of Book of Mormon chronology depends on what year Christ was born. There are differing opinions on this subject, but the proposed dates are generally within a range of about 4–5 years. A few of the proposed dates are described below:

- Doctrine and Covenants 20:1 indicates a date of 6 April 1 BC for the birth of Christ. (There is no year 0, so if he were born on 6 April 1 BC, he would have been 1 year old on 6 April 1 AD, and his birth could also be specified as being 0 AD.)
- Spackman argues, based on historical evidence, that Lehi must have left Jerusalem sometime between the spring of 588 and the spring of 587 BC.² He also accepts scriptural and historical sources that indicate Jesus Christ was born in the spring of 5 BC., but his claim is that the only way to fit 600 years from time Lehi left Jerusalem to this birth of Christ is to assume the Nephites used a 12-moon lunar calendar so their years were shorter than present-day solar years.
- Pratt compares the evidence for several dates that have

2. Randall P. Spackman, “The Jewish/Nephite Lunar Calendar,” *Journal of Book of Mormon Studies* 7/1 (1998). <http://publications.maxwellinstitute.byu.edu/fullscreen/?pub=1397&index=8>.

been proposed for Christ's birth.³ He argues, based on some of the same historical evidence as Spackman concerning events before and after the Biblical account of the birth of Christ, that Christ was born around the time of the Passover, about 6–9 April, 1 BC.

- Humphries compares the Biblical account and Persian customs/traditions with historic astronomical and other evidence⁴ to propose that the star of Bethlehem was a comet documented in Chinese records and that the date of the birth of Christ was sometime during the period 13–27 April 5 BC, which also coincides with Passover of that year.
- Dunn indicates, "Jesus himself is generally reckoned to have been born some time before the death of Herod the Great in 4 BCE. A date between 6 BCE and 4 BCE would accord with such historical information as Matthew's birth narrative assumes (Matthew 2.16) and with the tradition of Luke 3.23 that Jesus was 'about thirty years age' in the fifteenth year of Tiberius Caesar (Luke 3.1), reckoned as 27 or 28 CE."⁵

Many other sources, both Latter-day Saint and non-Latter-day Saint, could be cited, but all sources the author is aware of fall within the range of years defined by the sources cited above. This range produces a corresponding range for the years when the drought described in Helaman would have occurred. All that is necessary is to determine whether or not this range of years for the drought event overlaps the range of years of drought events in geographic areas of interest defined from other sources.

These proposed dates for the birth of Christ generate a range of years when the beginning of the drought could have taken place. If the spring of 6 BC is used as the date Christ was born and solar years are assumed, the beginning of the drought could have been as early as the spring of 25 BC. If the spring of 1 BC is used as the date of the birth of Christ and lunar years are assumed, the beginning of the drought (converted to the modern calendar) could have been as late as the fall of 20 BC (using 12×19

3. John P. Pratt, "Yet Another Eclipse for Herod," *Planetarian* 19/4 (December 1990), 8–14. https://www.ips-planetarium.org/page/a_pratt1990.

4. Colin J. Humphries, "The Star of Bethlehem, A Comet in 5 BC and the Date of Christ's Birth," *Tyndale Bulletin* 43.1 (1992) 31–56. https://legacy.tyndalehouse.com/tynbul/Library/TynBull_1992_43_1_02_Humphreys_StarBethlehem.pdf

5. James D. G. Dunn, "Christianity in the Making, Volume 1, Jesus Remembered," (Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co, 2003), 312.

lunar cycles and a lunar cycle = 29.53 days²). This drought can therefore be described as starting any time from 25 BC through 20 BC inclusive, having a duration of 3 to 3.5 years and being severe enough that most crops could not grow because of the lack of precipitation.

To resolve the confusion of the calendar schemes (i.e., BCE/CE, BC/AD), the remainder of this paper will use the convention of +/- AD to indicate years, since this designation is familiar to most people and avoids the issue of the missing year 0 in the BC/AD convention, especially when doing associated math. So, the drought can be described as starting as early as the spring of -24 AD and as late as the fall of -19 AD.

Detecting a drought as short as 3 to 3.5 years over 2,000 years ago presents difficult challenges. The method used to reconstruct the precipitation history needs a resolution on the order of half of the duration of the event being sampled. This means the time between samples of the precipitation history must be about 1.75 years or less. Any approach having a width between samples that is much larger than this value might not detect the event, or even if it does, it would only provide an extremely coarse measure of its duration. Of course, the approach for constructing the precipitation history of some geographic area would also require a way of determining the date or year associated with any given sample and to estimate the accuracy of that association.

Many people are familiar with dendrochronology — the study of tree rings to reconstruct the precipitation history of a given area. The width of the rings can be used to estimate the amount of precipitation by correlating the widths of the rings with known precipitation records in modern times. The earliest portions of the ring width “patterns” from modern trees are then correlated with the most recent patterns of older trees whose life overlapped the modern trees. As long as trees can be identified in a given area whose lives continuously overlapped backward in time, this method can provide a continuous estimate of the precipitation history that extends back before precipitation records were kept. The date associated with each “sample” or tree ring of this precipitation is determined by simply counting the number of tree rings to the desired year in the past. This method of constructing a precipitation history satisfies the requirements for detecting the event in the Book of Helaman since it has a resolution that is ~1 year per sample and can be dated to an accuracy of ~1 year.

One proposed location for the events of the Book of Mormon is the Mesoamerican area, described in great detail by Sorenson.⁶ But with regard to the drought described in Helaman and a proposed setting of Mesoamerica, dendochronology is of no use because the oldest tree-ring chronologies of the Mesoamerican region do not cover the period of interest, -24 to -19 AD. The oldest dated tree ring in this region comes from central Mexico and begins in AD 771.⁷ However, over the last 15–20 years, researchers have been developing methods that have resolutions high enough and dating accurate enough to begin to identify drought events with the characteristics specified in the account recorded in Helaman.⁸ In addition, these methods have been used to generate precipitation histories for the Mesoamerican region.⁹ This paper will test the hypothesis that the drought described in the Book of Helaman took place in the geographic area known as Mesoamerica using the results of precipitation histories derived from these new sources and methods.

6. John L. Sorenson, *Mormon's Codex: An Ancient American Book*, (Salt Lake City and Provo, UT: Deseret Book Company and Neal A. Maxwell Institute for Religious Scholarship, 2013).

7. D.W. Stahle, *et al.*, "Major Mesoamerican droughts of the past millennium," *Geophysical Research Letters*, Vol. 38 (2011), L05703, doi:10.1029/2010GL046472. <https://www.ncdc.noaa.gov/paleo-search/study/11175>. The NOAA National Climatic Data Center (NCDC) provides access to the International Tree-Ring Data Bank (ITRDB), which is the world's largest public archive of tree ring data. No older tree-ring data for the Mesoamerican area is contained in this database.

8. See Ian J. Fairchild, *et al.*, "Modification and preservation of environmental signals in speleothems," *Earth Science Reviews* (March 2006), hereafter referenced as *Fairchild*; J. W. Webster, *et al.*, "Stalagmite evidence from Belize indicating significant droughts at the time of Preclassic Abandonment, the Maya Hiatus, and the Classic Maya collapse," *Palaeogeography, Palaeoclimatology, Palaeoecology* 250 (June 2007), 1–17, hereafter referenced as *Webster*; P. D. Akers, *et al.*, "An extended and higher-resolution record of climate and land use from stalagmite MC01 from Macal Chasm, Belize, revealing connections between major dry events, overall climate variability, and Maya sociopolitical changes," *Palaeogeography, Palaeoclimatology, Palaeoecology*, 459 (2016), 268–88, hereafter referenced as *Akers*; Matthew S. Lachniet, *et al.*, "A 2400 yr Mesoamerican rainfall reconstruction links climate and cultural change," *Geology* 40/3 (March 2012), 259–62, hereafter referenced as *Lachniet*; and Douglas J. Kennett, *et al.*, "Development and Disintegration of Maya Political Systems in Response to Climate Change," *Science* 338 (9 November 2012) 788–91, hereafter referenced as *Kennett*.

9. See *Webster, Akers, Lachniet, and Kennett*.

High Resolution Methods of Estimating Precipitation

One of the postulated theories for the demise of the Mayan and other Mesoamerican civilizations has been that it was caused by prolonged droughts on the order of many decades.¹⁰ This has motivated researchers to develop methods for reconstructing the precipitation history of Mesoamerica.¹¹ Another motivation has been the study of historical climate patterns for the Mesoamerican region as they relate to present climate change and the effect of prolonged conditions like El Niño on weather patterns.¹²

To achieve both high resolution and accurate dating, many researchers have turned to the use of speleothems (cave deposits), such as stalagmites growing in caves in the region of interest.¹³ The resolution of the precipitation history obtained from stalagmites is dependent on several factors. One important factor is the rate of growth of the stalagmite.¹⁴ A comparatively short stalagmite that grew over a particular time would have a poorer resolution than a much longer stalagmite that grew over the same period. Another factor affecting resolution is the method used to sample the growth patterns of the stalagmite along its length.¹⁵ For example, current methods require the stalagmite to be split along its axis. Holes are drilled along the central axis of the stalagmite to provide material for various chemical measurements. The resolution of these methods depends on the width of the drill bit and the spacing between drilled holes. The material removed from a majority of the holes is used to reconstruct the precipitation history, while the material from a smaller subset of holes provides dates (with an associated date accuracy) at the corresponding points along the stalagmite's axis.¹⁶ These "date" measurements are used to create a "date model" to estimate the date at any arbitrary point in the precipitation history.¹⁷

These invasive methods and a non-invasive method using light for reconstructing a high-resolution precipitation history from stalagmites

10. Ibid.

11. Ibid.

12. David Hodell, *et. al.*, "The Lake Petén Itzá Scientific Drilling Project," *Scientific Drilling* 3 (September 2006), 25–29.

13. See Fairchild, Webster, Akers, Lachniet, and Kennett.

14. See also Kennett, Lachniet, Webster, and Akers. See also Lachniet, *et. al.*, "A 2400-year Mesoamerican rainfall reconstruction links climate and cultural change," GSA Data Repository 2012065 (March 2012), <https://www.geosociety.org/datarepository/2012/2012065.pdf>. This is related to and very similar to Lachniet, but is more technical in nature.

15. See Webster, Akers, Lachniet, and Kennett.

16. See Fairchild, Webster, Akers, Lachniet, and Kennett.

17. Ibid.

are briefly described below. At this point, the reader may want to skip forward to the “Is Mesoamerica ‘the land?’ Published Research Results” section if the following details are not of interest — they are rather technical. However, they are provided to help understand the published results. For in-depth investigation on the subject of using speleothems to reconstruct precipitation history, the textbook *Speleothem Science: From Process to Past Environments* is available.¹⁸

Proxy Measurements for Precipitation

Luminescence

The luminescence method¹⁹ uses ultraviolet light to illuminate a narrow (~2 millimeter) region on the central axis of one of the split halves of the stalagmite while recording the luminescence (color) pattern with a camera scanned along its entire length. These patterns are produced by organic acids shown to be dependent on the amount of vegetation produced by the soil in the vicinity of the cave where the stalagmite was formed. Since the amount of vegetation correlates with the amount of precipitation, this luminescence pattern can be used as a proxy for rainfall. Low luminescence (less organic acids) corresponds to periods of lower precipitation, while higher luminescence (more organic acids) corresponds to times with higher precipitation. Since this method is non-invasive (it does not involve drilling), its resolution is dependent only on the rate of growth of the stalagmite. Drilling is still required to produce material for estimating dates/ages along the axis of the stalagmite, but these “age” drill holes are typically spaced much further apart than those drilled for other methods.

18. Ian J. Fairchild and Andy Baker, *Speleothem Science: From Process to Past Environments* (Oxford: Wiley-Blackwell, 2012).

19. See Fairchild and Baker, *Speleothem Science*; Y. Y. Shopov, D. C. Ford, and H. P. Schwarcz, “Luminescent microbanding in speleothems: High-resolution chronology and paleoclimate,” *Geology* 22/5 (May 1994), 407–10, <https://pubs.geoscienceworld.org/gsa/geology/article-abstract/22/5/407/206056/luminescent-microbanding-in-speleothems-high?redirectedFrom=PDF>; and Siobhan F. McGarry and Andy Baker, “Organic acid fluorescence: Applications to speleothem palaeoenvironmental reconstruction,” *Quaternary Science Reviews* 19/11 (July 2000), 1087–1101, <https://www.sciencedirect.com/science/article/pii/S0277379199000876>. See also Webster and Akers.

Oxygen Isotope Concentration Ratio

The oxygen isotope concentration ratio method²⁰ measures the concentration of two stable isotopes of oxygen in powders produced from drilling holes at periodic points along the central axis of a split half of the stalagmite. The measured concentration ratio, $^{18}\text{O}/^{16}\text{O}$, is used to determine $\delta^{18}\text{O}$ (read *delta-O-18*, which is a direct proxy for precipitation) by comparing it with the oxygen concentration ratio of a standard, such as Vienna Standard Mean Ocean Water (VSMOW) or Pee Dee Belamnite (PDB), or Vienna Pee Dee Belamnite (VPDB). $\delta^{18}\text{O}$ is normally expressed in parts per thousand ($^{\circ}/_{\text{00}}$ VSMOW, or PDB or VPDB depending on which standard is used). To ensure the $\delta^{18}\text{O}$ values derived from measurements are a valid proxy for rainfall, several measurements at the growth end of the stalagmite are compared with modern, recorded rainfall records in the region where the cave/stalagmite was located.

$\delta^{18}\text{O}$ is a proxy for rainfall in the stalagmites studied in Mesoamerica primarily due to preferential evaporation rates of the lighter ^{16}O in the nearby ocean. Rain falling on land areas close to the ocean therefore has a higher concentration of ^{16}O . During drier conditions with less rainfall over the area of the cave, fewer molecules containing ^{16}O are present, causing the concentration ratio of minerals in the stalagmite that contain oxygen, hence $\delta^{18}\text{O}$, to rise. During wetter conditions with more rainfall, more molecules containing ^{16}O become incorporated into the minerals in the stalagmite, causing the concentration ratio and $\delta^{18}\text{O}$ to decrease.

Carbon Isotope Concentration Ratio

The carbon isotope concentration ratio method²¹ measures the concentration of two stable isotopes of carbon in powders produced from drilling holes at periodic points along the central axis of one of the halves of the stalagmite. The measured concentration ratio, $^{13}\text{C}/^{12}\text{C}$, is used to determine $\delta^{13}\text{C}$ (read *delta-C-13*, which is an indirect proxy

20. See Lachniet, *et. al.*, “A 2400-year Mesoamerican rainfall,” GSA Data Repository 2012065; Fairchild and Baker, *Speleothem Science*; and Matthew S. Lachniet, “Climatic and environmental controls on speleothem oxygen-isotope values,” *Quaternary Science Reviews* 28/5–6 (March 2009), 312–32, <https://www.sciencedirect.com/science/article/abs/pii/S0277379108003119>. See also Fairchild, Lachniet, and Kennett.

21. See Fairchild and Baker, *Speleothem Science*, and M. Baskaran and R. V. Krishnamurthy, “Speleothems as proxy for the carbon isotope composition of atmospheric CO_2 ,” *Geophysical Research Letters* 20/24 (December 1993), 2905–908, <https://agupubs.onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/abs/10.1029/93GL02690>. See also Fairchild, Webster, Akers, Lachniet, and Kennett.

for precipitation) by comparing it with the carbon concentration ratio of a standard such as Pee Dee Belamnite (PDB) or Vienna Pee Dee Belamnite (VPDB). $\delta^{13}\text{C}$ is normally expressed in parts per thousand ($^0/_{00}$ PDB or VPDB, depending on what standard is used).

$\delta^{13}\text{C}$ is an indirect proxy for rainfall in stalagmites because most plants increase the levels of $^{12}\text{CO}_2$ in the soil, which percolates to the caves where the stalagmites are growing and participates in formation of the calcium carbonate (CaCO_3) that makes up the stalagmite. Higher levels of rainfall create more plant material, which increases the level of $^{12}\text{CO}_2$ in the soil. But a higher amount of ^{12}C decreases the concentration ratio, $^{13}\text{C}/^{12}\text{C}$, used to determine $\delta^{13}\text{C}$. In drier periods, there is less plant growth and lower levels of $^{12}\text{CO}_2$ available to form CaCO_3 , which has the effect of increasing the carbon concentration ratio and $\delta^{13}\text{C}$.

Determining the Age of Measurements

The method of choice for dating stalagmites appears to be uranium-thorium and is commonly referred to as “U-series” dating, although carbon-14 dating has also been used.²² Even lead-210, with a short half-life of 22.2 years, has been used for recent growth portions of stalagmites. Typically, powder from a few of the holes drilled along the central axis of one of the halves of the stalagmite are used to determine dates as a function of distance along the collected stalagmite. These dates are used to generate an age model that can be applied to the delta-isotope measurements that are also a function of distance along the axis of the stalagmite. The age model may be as simple as linear interpolation between dated points or may employ the use of a MATLAB program to perform more sophisticated date estimation techniques. Date accuracies obtained by researchers within the last five years or so have been specified to be on the order of +/- 10 years for samples on the order of 2,000 years old. Accuracies specified in the remainder of this document will be 2-sigma Gaussian values, which correspond to a 95.45% probability that the true values are within two standard deviations (sigmas) of the indicated mean value.

Is Mesoamerica “The Land?” Published Research Results

To date, there are four published papers documenting the analysis of three different stalagmites using techniques with sufficient resolution and that cover the period of interest over 2,000 years ago in the

22. See Lachinet, *et. al.*, “A 2400-year Mesoamerican rainfall,” GSA Data Repository 2012065, and Fairchild and Baker, *Speleothem Science*. See also Fairchild, Webster, Akers, Lachniet, and Kennett.

Mesoamerican area. Two of the stalagmites were collected from two different caves in Belize. The third was collected in the mountains of southern Mexico. Their locations are shown in Figure 1. Oxygen and carbon isotope measurements along with the associated U-series ages can be downloaded from the NOAA National Climatic Data Center²³ for each stalagmite from Yok Balum Cave²⁴ and the Macal Chasm²⁵ in Belize, and from Juxtlahuaca Cave²⁶ in Mexico. The Macal Chasm stalagmite was recently re-analyzed. This new analysis produced higher resolution data and has an age model²⁷ more clearly defined than that in the original published paper.²⁸ They are described below in the date order they were collected.

Macal Chasm (Belize)

The stalagmite obtained from Macal Chasm was designated MC01 by the researchers who conducted the analysis and reported the results.²⁹ It was collected some time in late 1995 or early 1996 and is 92 centimeters in length. Several methods were used to reconstruct the precipitation history recorded in MC01. The results of only two have resolutions high enough to meet the requirements specified above to detect the event recorded in Helaman. The authors refer to these methods as “petrographic examination”³⁰ and “ultraviolet-stimulated luminescence,” or UVL.³¹

Petrographic analysis examines the crystalline structure of the stalagmite to identify transitional boundaries between layers. There are two important types of boundaries that are of interest. As explained by the authors,

Type E surfaces show signs of layer erosion and are associated with increased water flow, while Type L surfaces have layers

23. NOAA National Climatic Data Center (NCDC), Speleothem Data by Location. NCDC, Asheville, North Carolina, 1970–present, <https://www.ncdc.noaa.gov/cdo/f?p=535:6>.

24. See Kennett and Douglas J. Kennett, *et. al.*, “Supplementary Material for Development and Disintegration of Maya Political Systems in Response to Climate Change,” *Science* 338 (9 November 2012), 788.

25. See Webster and Akers.

26. See Lachniet and Lachinet, *et. al.*, “A 2400-year Mesoamerican rainfall,” GSA Data Repository 2012065.

27. See Akers.

28. See Webster.

29. See Webster and Akers.

30. See Akers.

31. See Webster and Akers.

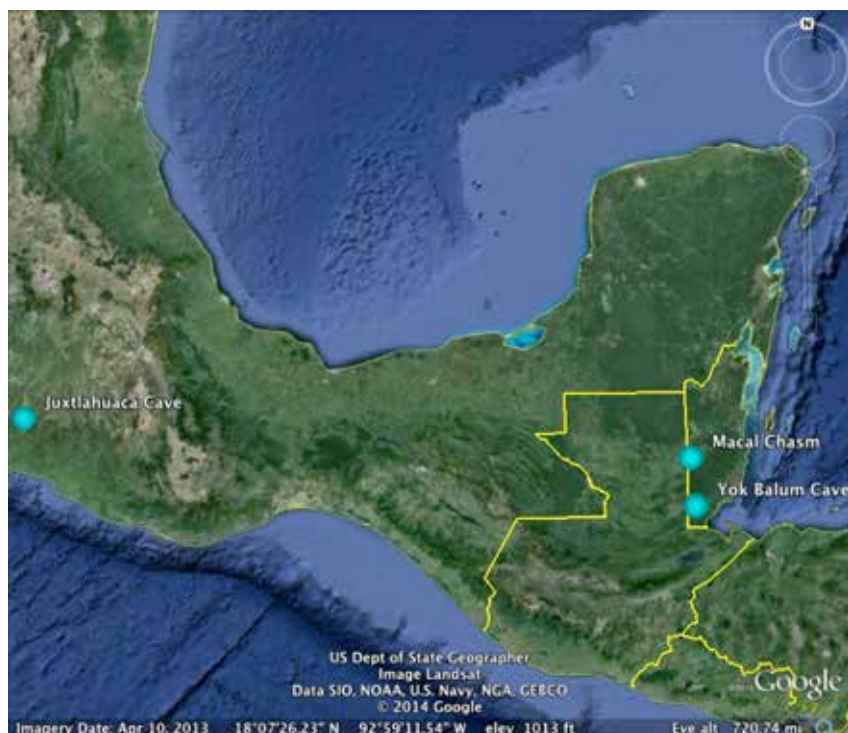


Figure 1. Map of cave locations in Mesoamerica where stalagmites were collected.

that rapidly thin away from the apex and are associated with reduced water flow and lessened CaCO_3 deposition.³²

No Type E boundaries were identified in MC01, while 15 Type L boundaries were found during the period ~4,700 years Before Present (BP), where BP is 1995. Five of these Type L boundary layers coincide with the Nephite Book of Mormon time span and are specified in Table 1.

The authors of the most recent analysis³³ indicate the resolution of the luminescence data has a median pixel interval of .066 mm that corresponds to a median 0.38 years of growth per pixel. This is an improvement from the original analysis³⁴ which was about .5–3 years per pixel, based on a pixel interval of ~.18 mm and estimated stalagmite growth rates of .069 – .402 mm/year.

32. Akers, 273.

33. Akers.

34. Webster.

Depth	Age (Years Before 1995)	Date	95% Confidence Interval	Petrographic Boundary Type
22.8 cm	1,585	410 AD	+/- 347 yrs	L-type
28.7 cm	2,020	-25 AD	+/- 367 yrs	L-type
29.1 cm	2,045	-50 AD	+/- 365 yrs	L-type
33.0 cm	2,320	-325 AD	+/- 336 yrs	L-type
36.0 cm	2,500	-505 AD	+/- 322 yrs	L-type

Table 1. List of Type-L boundaries that Overlap the Nephite Book of Mormon Time Span (Akers, *et. al.*, 2016).

This resolution satisfies the requirements for detecting the drought described in Helaman. However, the confidence intervals of the age model are quite large due to the low uranium concentrations present in MC01. Because of these large confidence intervals, the authors identify somewhat long periods where all precipitation proxies indicate below average rainfall. They call each of these periods a “major dry event” or MDE. An MDE is defined as

a multi-decadal period with sustained values of $\delta^{18}\text{O}$ and $\delta^{13}\text{C}$ substantially higher ($>1\text{‰}$ and $>3\text{‰}$, respectively) than preceding and following values that coincide with UVL values substantially lower (>100 lower) than preceding and following values. Additionally, an MDE will include petrographic evidence of significant dryness in the form of a Type L boundary. The thinning layers associated with Type L boundaries are physical evidence of reduced stalagmite growth and support the conclusion that higher $\delta^{18}\text{O}$ and $\delta^{13}\text{C}$ values coincide with lower UVL indicate drier conditions.³⁵

They also indicate that the “Type L boundaries associated with the MDEs are always found at the end of an MDE; that is, the Type L boundary caps the stalagmite zone with high stable isotope values and low UVL values.”³⁶ Once the MDEs were identified, the authors correlate the associated times with other published results to show that, at least on a multi-decadal time scale, there is agreement between those results.³⁷

In a similar way, we will correlate and compare the Type L boundary events in Table 1, the luminescence data for MC01 with the data from

35. Akers, 274.
36. Ibid., 279.
37. Ibid., 280–81.

other published high-resolution results, and the drought event described in Helaman 11 in a summary section at the end of this paper.

Juxtlahuaca Cave (Mexico)

A stalagmite was collected from deep (~800 meters from the cave entrance) within Juxtlahuaca Cave in May 2010 and designated JX-6 by the researchers who performed the analysis.³⁸ The much longer distance of the stalagmite from the cave entrance is a factor that distinguishes it from the other stalagmites in Belize considered in this article, which were both near their respective cave entrances. This fact significantly affected the age model and date accuracies for JX-6. The age model created by the researchers is based on 20 U-series measurements over a 1,041-mm span of the 1,115-mm long stalagmite. The oldest sample dates to around 4,000 years before the time of collection, but discontinuous growth was evident until about 2,400 years before the time of collection, so the published results span only the most recent 2,400 years.

The reconstructed precipitation history is based on $\delta^{18}\text{O}$ measurements made from micro milling at 1-mm intervals, which corresponds to an average ~3-year resolution. These measurements are available on the NOAA website.³⁹ $\delta^{13}\text{C}$ measurements were made but not published. The researchers used the results to compare and assess the impact of droughts on the inhabitants of the Basin of Mexico and particularly the civilization based at Teotihuacán.

The researchers calibrated the measured oxygen isotope precipitation history by using rainfall records from the Tacubaya climate station near Mexico City from 1880 to 2010 and showed correlation between rainfall patterns in Mexico City and the cave location.⁴⁰ The researchers' analysis indicated a variable time lag for the rainfall water to make its way through ~160 meters of bedrock (epikarst) above the cave to JX-6. While observations of drip rates in the cavern where JX-6 was located indicated seasonality and provided evidence of some fairly direct conduits for the water from the surface to the JX-6 location, most of the water took anywhere from 4 to 14.5 years to make its way to the JX-6

38. *Lachniet and Lachinet, et. al.*, "A 2400-year Mesoamerican rainfall," GSA Data Repository 2012065.

39. NOAA National Climatic Data Center (NCDC), Speleothem Data by Location. NCDC, Asheville, North Carolina, 1970–present, <https://www.ncdc.noaa.gov/cdo/f?p=535:6>.

40. *Lachniet and Lachinet, et. al.*, "A 2400-year Mesoamerican rainfall," GSA Data Repository 2012065.

location. The absolute values of the published correlation coefficients of this analysis are all greater than or equal to .80 for each year in this range, with the peak correlation being .89 at a lag of nine years.⁴¹ Based on this calibration analysis, the researchers also produced a five-year running average dataset of rainfall versus time shown shifted backward in time by the nine-year delay when compared to the raw data set.

The underlying assumption is that this delay is constant over the life of the stalagmite, which, in all likelihood, cannot be proven one way or another. It would seem that over time, mineral-laden waters percolating through bedrock could tend to precipitate out in some places and plug up water channels through the bedrock. This could cause an increased overall delay as time goes on, which could cause the delay observed in modern times to be greater than the delay 2,000 years ago. At the same time, water could dissolve minerals in the epikarst and open up water channels through bedrock. This process obviously occurs, or the cave containing the stalagmite would not have formed in the first place. Which of these processes contributes more over the passage of time is anyone's guess. Personal correspondence with the lead researcher⁴² indicates an innumerable number of water channels through the epikarst, each with a different delay, and that a simple average

41. Lachinet, *et. al.*, "A 2400-year Mesoamerican rainfall," GSA Data Repository 2012065.

42. Email from Dr. Matthew S. Lachniet, 9 January 2017. In response to questions about how the epikarst delays the water reaching the stalagmite, Dr. Lachniet indicated that the epikarst "both delays and smooths the input time signal" and agreed with my proposed idea that the epikarst channel could (if enough information was known) be modeled as a convolution with the input time signal, rather than a constant delay as was done in their published paper. His words were, "Yes, I think you've hit the nail on the head." Modeling it as a convolution process would have the effect of lengthening any drought events in the recorded oxygen isotope signal, which is actually a fortunate circumstance for this stalagmite, because its resolution is on the same order (~3 years) as the length of the drought that needs to be detected. But because of this variable delay, any drought peak events that occur will be longer and can be sampled more times than the resolution would imply. So the 3- to 3.5-year drought described in Helaman should be sampled more than one time in the signal extracted from this stalagmite. For example, a perfectly dry five-year drought that occurred at this cave location, with a perfect delay of all water until year 5, increasing that delay until year 10 and then going to zero (no water, i.e., empty epikarst) would produce a drought signal recorded in the stalagmite that started 5 years after the actual drought began, continued for another 5 years (reaching its peak), and then gradually stopped after another 5 years. So the original drought of 5 years would turn into a recorded signal event in the stalagmite with a duration of 15 years. The middle of the drought would appear 10 years after the drought started. One might not be able to see the

time shift was all that could be done, given what was known about the epikarst, but the true effect of the epikarst is much more complicated than a simple single time delay would imply.⁴³

Yok Balum Cave (Belize)

The stalagmite from the Yok Balum cave in Belize was collected in June 2006 from a spot approximately 50 meters from the cave entrance; it is 607 mm in length and was designated YOK-1. Due to discontinuities and complex growth patterns in the lower (oldest) region, the researchers published results only for the upper (most recent) 415 mm of the stalagmite.⁴⁴ This region was dated to a period from 40 BC to the year of collection in 2006, so this time span barely covers the event in Helaman. The age model is based on 40 U-series measurements on the upper 444 mm of the stalagmite.

Reconstructed precipitation histories based on $\delta^{18}\text{O}$ and $\delta^{13}\text{C}$ measurements were published and are available from NOAA.⁴⁵ More than 4,200 stable isotope measurements were made on the upper 415 mm of YOK-1. The sample holes were milled at 0.1 mm intervals, resulting in a resolution from .01 to 3.68 years. Of the three stalagmites reviewed in this paper, the reconstructed histories of YOK-1 have both high resolution and the best accuracies. However, the authors indicate a major divergence between the $\delta^{18}\text{O}$ and $\delta^{13}\text{C}$ measurements during the most recent 150 years of the datasets and that the $\delta^{18}\text{O}$ measurements are not consistent with the known historical precipitation records for this area in Belize, but the $\delta^{13}\text{C}$ measurements are consistent with those records. The researchers could not explain the reason for this divergence in the $\delta^{18}\text{O}$ measurements but indicated that the $\delta^{18}\text{O}$ measurements before this time are valid.

Correlating the Proxy Precipitation Histories

Figure 2 displays the various proxy precipitation histories measured from each stalagmite that overlap some portion of the -600 AD to +425 AD time

entire 15-year signal due to noise effects, but it would still be there, buried in the noise.

43. Lachinet, *et. al.*, "A 2400-year Mesoamerican rainfall," GSA Data Repository 2012065.

44. Kennett and Kennett, *et. al.*, "Supplementary Material."

45. NOAA National Climatic Data Center (NCDC), Speleothem Data by Location. NCDC, Asheville, North Carolina, 1970–present, <https://www.ncdc.noaa.gov/cdo/f?p=535:6>.

of Nephite civilization. All graphs are oriented so that increasing dryness is in the direction toward the top of the page. Increasing wetness is therefore in the direction toward the bottom of the page. Various horizontal solid and/or dashed lines have been drawn across each graph to specify various averages and/or drought thresholds. These are labeled to the right of each graph in the corresponding legend. These thresholds are unique to each stalagmite and measurement type and reflect what the corresponding researchers specified as the definition of a drought or what would correspond to average precipitation. Determining the width or duration of a drought is somewhat problematic because each duration depends on the threshold used with a particular data set. And comparing those durations across multiple data sets using different thresholds is somewhat an “apples to oranges” comparison. The best that can be done in this regard is to determine if the various observed droughts are “consistent” with the account in Helaman. The first step will be to correlate the possible droughts across each proxy history and identify those that have commonality between the various histories recorded in each stalagmite. This will provide assurance that the same event was recorded by each stalagmite and was not due to some local phenomenon or something unique to a particular cave. The second step will involve focusing down to the period of interest recorded in the account in Helaman, around -20 AD, and making similar comparisons there.

There are two graphs from the Juxtlahuaca Cave. The first at the top is the graph of the raw measured $\delta^{18}\text{O}$ values versus time. A value of 8.0 is the average for this graph. There are two dashed lines above this average. The upper line is labeled as “2- σ From Average” and represents the threshold of drought defined for this data set. There are four “error bars” just under the horizontal time axis at the top of this graph that define the 95% confidence intervals at the peak of each drought at about -50, -92, -195, and 310 AD. Corresponding vertical grey bars extend down across the next two graphs to correlate these droughts from the Juxtlahuaca graphs with the Macal Chasm graph.

The second Juxtlahuaca graph is a five-year running average rainfall over the same time span as the oxygen isotope ratio graph. As explained previously, the researchers calibrated the raw data in the first graph, shifting it by nine years into the past and smoothed the result by calculating the five-year running average shown in the second graph. This averaging process, by definition, will broaden/lengthen any defined drought peaks by about five years in this graph when compared to the raw oxygen isotope ratio graph. The vertical grey bars that define the

the drought seen in the graph could have occurred. In other words, one could grab the peak and stretch or pull the peak to the left or to the right within the defined confidence interval. There are also four confidence intervals above the peaks in this running average rainfall graph. They are wider than the corresponding confidence intervals in the raw oxygen isotope ratio graphs to take into account the subtraction of the average nine-year lag. This nine-year lag is really a random variable with a standard deviation that affects the resulting variance associated with each peak.⁴⁶

This visual “correlation” approach is used because the peaks and events of the third graph for the Macal Chasm, as previously specified in Table 1, have very large confidence intervals and cannot be reliably used for determining the dates of events unless they are compared and correlated with other, more accurately dated events from the other two stalagmites. Only these four droughts are referenced from the Juxtlahuaca stalagmite because only the Juxtlahuaca precipitation proxy histories overlap the Macal Chasm for the period before 40 AD, when the Yok Balum record begins. All other drought events later than -40 AD are referenced using the Yok Balum record because it has the highest

46. The *Lachniet* time lag correlogram graph contains three plots for three different correlation scenarios that correlate known rainfall with observed oxygen isotope ratio measurements for slightly different time spans: 1) raw data correlogram from 1880 to 2010 AD, 2) five-year smoothed data from 1880 to 2008 AD, and 3) five-year smoothed data from 1880 to 1988 AD. This last correlogram, #3, was used as the basis for their conclusion of an average nine-year lag for the drip water to reach the stalagmite because the peak of .89 occurs at a lag of nine years. The peaks of each of these plots are somewhat “broad,” which indicates that other lags are nearly equally likely. From #3, for example, the correlation values at a lag of 4 and 14.5 years are each about .8, which is not significantly different from the peak at .89. The other two plots are consistent with this lag range to define the width of their corresponding correlogram peaks. If this range is used to define an approximate standard deviation of the average lag of nine years, the 1-sigma standard deviation of the lag is about $(14.5 - 9) = \pm 5.5$ years and the variance is $5.5 \times 5.5 = 30.25$. The 2-sigma accuracy is therefore $2 \times 5.5 = \pm 11$ years. This value represents a minimal value for the actual standard deviation. The actual standard deviation is likely to be larger than this value because the correlograms show significant correlation for lags greater than 14.5 years. It should also be noted that the accuracy of two random variables added (or subtracted) together is the square root of the sum of their variances. The U-series 1-sigma accuracy is $9/2 = 4.5$. Squaring this produces a variance of 20.25. Assuming Gaussian distributions, subtracting a nine-year lag with a variance of 30.25 from a date with a variance of 20.25 produces a variance of 50.5. The square root of this value produces a 1-sigma accuracy of 7.1 or a 2-sigma accuracy of about ± 14 years.

reported accuracy of the three stalagmites. The error bars defining those 95% confidence intervals are therefore just above the horizontal time axis at the bottom of the Yok Balum graph and the grey bars extend upward across all the other graphs of the other stalagmites.

The Macal Chasm graph contains the Type L boundary layer events in addition to the luminescence precipitation proxy history. These boundary events appear as vertical lines at the indicated date. It is clear that the left-most and right-most of the four Juxtlahuaca drought events at -325 AD and -50 AD correlate very well with corresponding Type L boundary layers and luminescence peaks in the Macal Chasm record. The other two drought events in between these two dates do not appear to have corresponding peaks in the Macal Chasm record. But it is significant that the Macal Chasm luminescence graph does show exactly two other peaks that would each qualify as a drought at values of less than or equal to 100 pixel intensity during this time span. They could correspond to these two Juxtlahuaca drought events because they are well within the ± 300 -year 95% confidence intervals associated with the Macal Chasm data. This is illustrated by the two arrows pointing from the Macal Chasm peaks to the corresponding Juxtlahuaca peaks. Between these two drought events in both stalagmite records is a single, pronounced, “wet” period or a “dip” around 175 AD. This provides solid evidence that the two stalagmites are recording the same events, despite the large confidence intervals specified for the Macal Chasm record.

The Book of Mormon is silent with regard to events that might be related to climate around the time of any of these four drought events. They may have been weak in severity or not important enough to mention in Mormon’s abridgement. Or perhaps the reason the Helaman account is the only mention of a drought over a 1,000-year history was that it was the only one specifically requested by a prophet of God, that it came to pass as requested, and that it ended as requested, understandably an important lesson to teach and record in a religious record.

The Yok Balum stalagmite record is used as a reference to correlate with drought events for the other two stalagmites for the time span later than 40 AD, when the Yok Balum record begins. It is readily apparent that the carbon isotope ratio graph is much less “noisy” than the oxygen isotope ratio graph, with very well defined peaks that define potential drought events. The carbon isotope ratio is used here as the basis for defining potential drought events using the 1-sigma above average threshold at -7.4 ‰ VPDB (right vertical axis) as long as there is a corresponding peak, above the 2-sigma threshold, in the Yok Balum

oxygen isotope ratio graph that is within the 95% confidence interval associated with the carbon isotope ratio peak. The Yok Balum oxygen isotope scale is defined by the left vertical axis of the graph.

There are eight possible drought events about -15, 117, 183, 213, 235, 258, 277, and 347 AD that meet the defined criteria. Of these, the only possible drought event that correlates with the other two stalagmite records is the one at -15 AD. The only peaks less than the 100-pixel intensity drought threshold present in the Macal Chasm graph are those at -15 AD and 410 AD. Both these peaks also have an associated Type L boundary. The 410 AD peak appears to be present only in the Juxtlahuaca Rainfall graph because of the nine-year left shift from the calibration process and the five-year averaging. It would also appear in the top raw data plot if the horizontal axis would have been extended another 15 years or so. But a peak is not present in the Yok Balum carbon isotope ratio graph at this time and yet is present in the Yok Balum oxygen isotope graph.

It is interesting to note, however, that even the Macal Chasm graph indicates drier conditions beginning around 180 AD, which coincides with clear peaks in both Yok Balum isotope ratio graphs and the Juxtlahuaca graphs. And it appears there may have been multiple successive droughts or consistently drier than normal years that spanned nearly 100 years until around 280 AD. The Book of Mormon narrative just prior to and around 183 AD is very brief. However, sometime between 111 AD and 201 AD, there were some people who revolted from Christ's church and became Lamanites. It is pure speculation, but could this long span of below-normal precipitation have been a contributing, underlying factor of this revolt?

Figure 3 "zooms in" to the time span from -120 to 40 AD to provide a closer look at the details of this single drought event that correlates across all the precipitation histories of the three stalagmites and compares it to what is known about the drought described in Helaman 11. In these graphs, the center point of the drought is defined using the width of the drought event. The width of the drought event for each stalagmite proxy record is defined to be the center point between the two points that cross the corresponding threshold for each stalagmite/data type graph. These widths are annotated in the legend for each graph.

The width of the Juxtlahuaca oxygen isotope ratio plot is about 10.6 years, and for the Juxtlahuaca rainfall plot it is about 14 years. The difference of 3.4 years between the drought event widths measured between the two graphs is not surprising because the five-year running average process will broaden all peaks. This stalagmite was also deep within a cave, where the drip water was estimated to take anywhere from

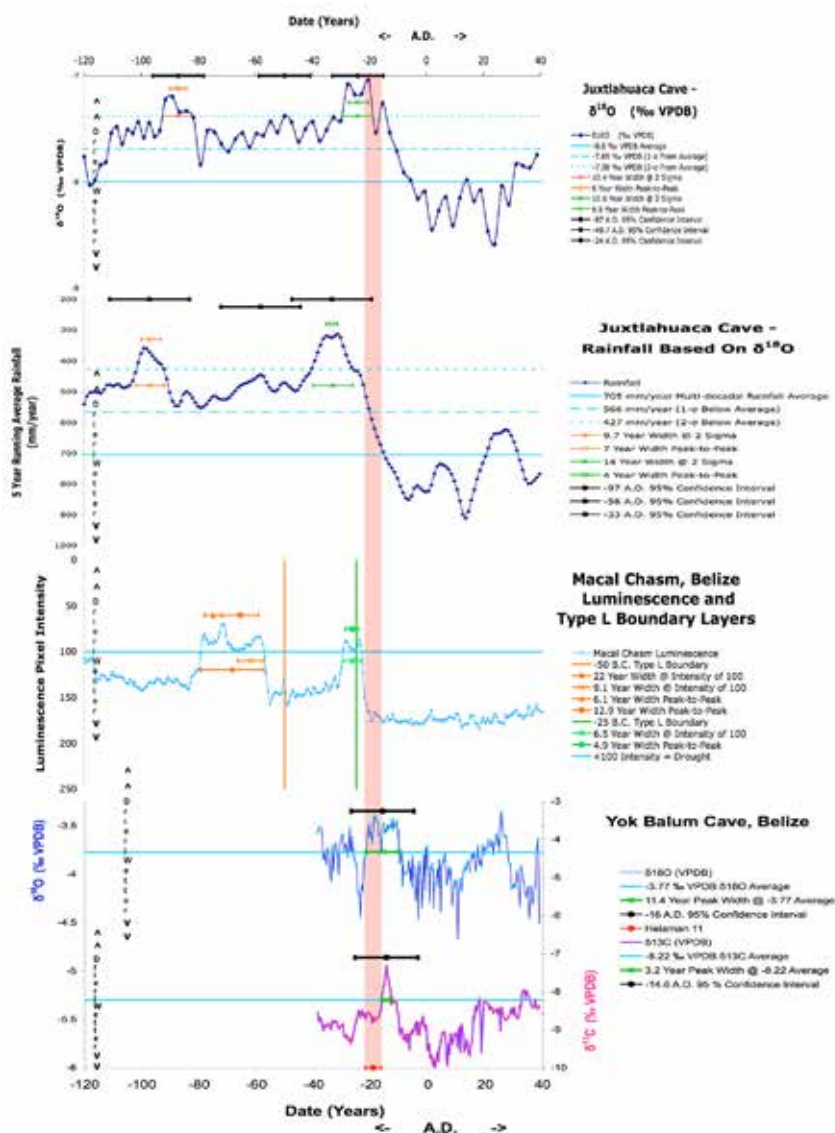


Figure 3. Comparison of precipitation proxy data for the Helaman 11 period (Lachniet, *et al.*, Akers, *et al.*, Kennett, *et al.*, NCDC).

4 to 14.5 years (with an average of 9 years) to reach the stalagmite. The 3.5-year drought described in Helaman 11 could therefore appear as an event in the oxygen isotope ratio graph that was 7.5 to 18.0 years in duration or, if the average is used, a duration of 12.5 years. This 10.6-year drought duration is consistent with the conditions that formed the stalagmite and the account in Helaman 11.

The Macal Chasm drought event is about 6.5 years in duration or about double the duration of the event described in Helaman 11. If the “peak-to-peak” definition of the drought is used, the duration drops to 4.9 years. It is also interesting to note that the drought in the Juxtlahuaca and the Macal Chasm graphs also appear to have the same shape, with distinct peaks near the beginning and the end of the drought.

The “noisy” Yok Balum oxygen isotope ratio graph has a width of 11.4 years, while the Yok Balum carbon isotope ratio graph has a peak width of 3.2 years. This last graph has a width highly consistent with the duration of the drought described in Helaman 11. But the two isotope records for this stalagmite don’t seem to be consistent with regard to the duration of the drought.

The drought durations as measured using the various defined thresholds indicate a drought sometime between 3.2 and 11.4 years in duration, excluding the Juxtlahuaca rainfall width, which is lengthened by the five-year averaging. This compares with the account in Helaman 11 of 3.0 to 3.5 years. This exercise illustrates the difficulty in attempting to determine drought event durations and comparing them between different stalagmites using a variety of data types and their corresponding drought thresholds. There is certainly consistent evidence that the drought was less than about one decade, and very likely fewer than 6.5 years in duration, if the noisy Yok Balum oxygen isotope results are removed.

Similar to Figure 2, the 2-sigma or 95% confidence intervals are shown above each drought event (peak) for the Juxtlahuaca and Yok Balum stalagmites, although in this case the mid-point of the confidence interval coincides with the middle of the drought defined by the threshold crossings of the drought peak rather than the year corresponding to the maximum peak value. The Macal Chasm confidence intervals are not shown in Figure 3 because they would simply be lines that span the entire width of the graph without providing any additional information. They can be seen in Figure 2. The period that defines the range of possible drought mid-points from the Helaman 11 account is represented by the light red vertical column that spans across all graphs. The most important result of this graph and this paper is that this time span derived from the Helaman 11 account intersects all 95% confidence intervals at the only time when all these 95% confidence intervals overlap. A five-year shift in either direction would have missed intersection with one or more confidence intervals in the Juxtlahuaco or Yok Balum graphs. Even the Macal Chasm drought with the corresponding Type L boundary layer at -25 AD is very close (~5 to 7 years) to the expected

time frame despite the associated, large (+/- 367 years) 95% confidence interval.

Conclusion

It is simply remarkable that dating analysis methods applied to stalagmites can now be used to estimate:

- A drought occurred just over 2,000 years ago in Mesoamerica.
- This drought happened within a few years of when the Book of Mormon account says it should have happened, based on estimates from multiple proxy precipitation records from three different stalagmites in the Mesoamerican area.
- To the extent that a rough duration of this drought can be measured with the available proxy data and defined thresholds, they indicate a drought duration of somewhere between 3.2 to 11.4 years, a range that includes the 3- to 3.5-year duration described in the Book of Mormon.

Whereas there may be other places in the North/South American continents where droughts occurred during the same time frame, based on these results, the Mesoamerican area cannot be excluded as a candidate for a place where the events in the Book of Mormon occurred. The evidence from these stalagmites can now be added to a continually increasing body of evidence that points to Mesoamerica as the setting for the Book of Mormon.

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Addendum

With respect to the possibility that the Helaman 11 drought event took place in the present-day United States, somewhere east of the Mississippi River, there is evidence against that hypothesis. To date, the author has found

one stalagmite with nearly the required resolution for the period of interest a little over 2,000 years ago in the eastern United States. It was collected from the DeSoto Caverns in northern Alabama in 2008. The analysis, presented in a master's thesis, indicates that the time from -72 AD to +28 AD was one of the wettest 100-year periods in the previous 1,500 years.⁴⁷ This 100-year period is shown in Figure 4 by the darker grey-colored bar.

The analysis explains that the time series used in the plots were generated by the ARAND Time Series Analysis Software, but the time series values were not included in the thesis, other than in plots. The $\delta^{18}\text{O}$ and $\delta^{13}\text{C}$ measurements were included in the thesis at 0.1-mm intervals along with a table of dated samples. The author contacted Mr. Aldridge to obtain the time series, but he indicated that the hard drive where his data was kept was destroyed in hurricane Harvey in 2017. So the author constructed a plot by estimating the time series from the table of dated samples and the isotope measurements. The author believes it is adequate to provide some conclusions.

The plots in Figure 4 show the measurements for $\delta^{18}\text{O}$ (left Y axis) and $\delta^{13}\text{C}$ (right Y axis) over a 1,550-year span from -1500 to 50 AD for the DeSoto Cavern stalagmite. The 100-year period centered around -22 AD from -72 to 28 AD includes one of the two wettest periods during this 1,550-year time span as indicated by the more negative excursions from a ~2,000 year average equal to $-3.0 \pm .5$ for $\delta^{18}\text{O}$ and shown by the top horizontal line passing through the upper plot. The short-term $\delta^{18}\text{O}$ average over the 100-year period centered at -22 AD is -3.45. This is .94 sigmas below average/"normal" on the "wet" side of average. The long-term average $\delta^{13}\text{C}$ value over a ~2,000-year period is -6.8 ± 1.2 is shown by the bottom horizontal line. The short-term $\delta^{13}\text{C}$ average over the same 100-year period, centered at 22 AD, is 8.28. This is 1.2 sigmas below average/"normal" on the "wet" side of average. The 2-sigma date accuracy for this short term, 100-year time, is 46 years. The measurement samples in this region of the stalagmite are spaced about every 2.8 years, possibly somewhat less during periods when the stalagmite was rapidly growing. This resolution is about 1 year longer than desired, but is high enough to detect a drought event as short as 3.5 years with one or two samples.

47. David E Aldridge, "Hydroclimate Time-Series Archived in a 4300 Year Old Stalagmite from DeSoto Caverns," Master of Science Thesis, University of Alabama (2014), 29–31. In the graphs on page 29, peaks are associated with wet periods (rather than dry periods in the graphs of this paper), and 2000 years BP corresponds to 50 AD, since BP corresponds to 1950 AD

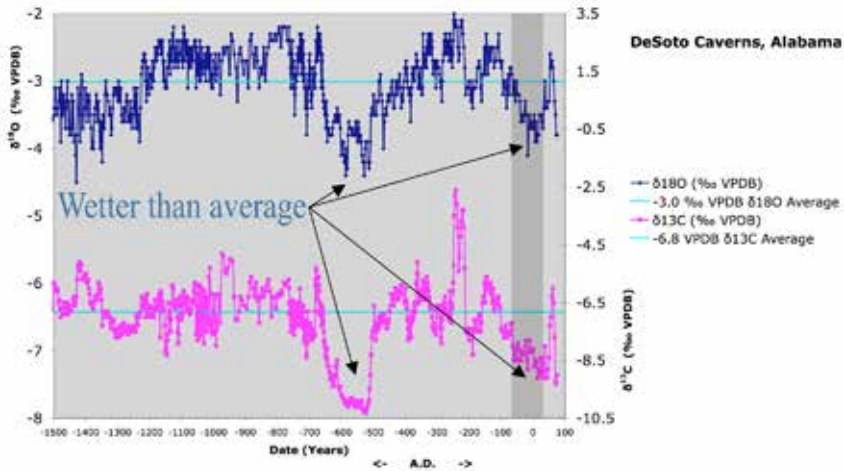


Figure 4. Precipitation proxy data for the DeSoto Cavern stalagmite (Aldridge).

These results indicate that it is unlikely that a drought occurred anywhere near northern Alabama within ± 50 years of the time the drought described in the Book of Mormon occurred for the following specific reasons:

1. The $\delta^{18}\text{O}$ direct proxy for rainfall indicates significantly higher precipitation (rainfall) than average within ± 50 years of the expected drought time frame.
2. The $\delta^{13}\text{C}$ indirect proxy for rainfall indicates significantly higher precipitation (plant growth) than average within ± 50 years of the expected drought time frame.
3. The measurement resolution is high enough (<2.8 years) that it is not likely that a 3.5-year drought event would have been “missed.” There should have been at least one and possibly two sample(s) indicating a drought. Instead, over this 100-year period, there are only 5 samples (out of 36 samples) of $\delta^{18}\text{O}$ that barely achieve the expected average level of -3.0 (-3.0, -3.0, -2.9, -2.8, -2.8). There are no $\delta^{13}\text{C}$ samples that achieve the long-term average of -6.8, let alone indicate any kind of drought during this relatively short, 100-year period.
4. The 100-year period was selected because the 2-sigma date accuracies associated with these measurements are just less than 50 years. If the center of this interval at -22 AD is really up to ± 46 years from -22 AD (the 2-sigma accuracy specified above) because of date estimation error, the previous three statements are still true (to the significance of 2-sigma accuracy) because

the results still include the time of the expected drought event at -22 AD. Also, it should be noted, if this short-term interval is reduced by half to +/- 25 years, the results indicate even higher precipitation over this shorter time interval.

Conclusion: The data produced by the DeSoto Cavern stalagmite do not support the hypothesis that the drought event described in Helaman 11 in the Book of Mormon occurred anywhere in the vicinity of the DeSoto Caverns in northeastern Alabama. In addition to most of Alabama, this vicinity would likely include adjacent areas of northern Mississippi, northern Georgia, and central Tennessee, since regional precipitation patterns in this area are very likely to be highly correlated.

GOSSAMER THIN: 2 NEPHI'S "FLAXEN CORD" AND THE ANTI-MASONIC THESIS

Gregory L. Smith

Abstract: *Some have seen evidence of anti-Masonic rhetoric in the Book of Mormon and cite 2 Nephi 26:22 in support of this theory, since Satan leads sinners "by the neck with a flaxen cord." It is claimed that this is a reference to Masonic initiation rituals, which feature a thick noose called a cable-tow or tow-rope. Examining the broader rhetorical context of 2 Nephi demonstrates that the "flaxen cord" more likely refers to something slight and almost undetectable. To test this hypothesis, I undertake a survey of the use of the phrase flaxen cord in 19th century publications. I also examine analogous phrases from the Bible. I examine fifty examples, seven of which are excluded because they do not contain enough information to support either claim. Of the remaining 43 examples, a full two-thirds (67%) describe a cord that is trivial or easily snapped. Only 7% denote a thick, strong rope, and 17% describe a thin rope that is strong. Given (1) the rhetorical context of 2 Nephi, (2) an expression that usually refers to a cord of trivial thickness and strength, and (3) virtually all poetic, scriptural, or allegorical uses imply fragility, the evidence overwhelmingly contradicts the anti-Masonic thesis.*

Joseph Smith's production of the Book of Mormon in roughly 63 working days is a literary accomplishment virtually without parallel.¹ Even before the book's publication, allies and critics were lining up for a battle over its origins, a battle that shows little sign of abating.

1. 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: Brigham Young University Studies, 2005), 102, <https://byustudies.byu.edu/content/opening-heavens-coming-forth-book-mormon-chapter-only>.

Many 20th century critics have returned to the one theory that most of Joseph's friends, family, and critics regarded as untenable: Joseph wrote it himself, drawing heavily on his own life and experiences to do so.² It is not clear why their assessment of Joseph's capacities ought to outweigh that of those who knew him best.³ This stance has many strands: one such filament is the claim that Joseph was gripped by the anti-Masonic fervor swirling around New York and the United States in the late 1820s. And thus, some readers have found evidence of anti-Masonic language in Joseph's frontier scripture.

One lynch pin of this theory was the claim that *secret combination* was a phrase that applied only to Freemasonry during the period of the Book of Mormon's composition. Were this true, it would add more weight to the suggestion that other potential parallels to Masonry are real, not imagined.

Given that the claim that secret combinations must always refer to Freemasonry has been shown to be definitively false for Joseph's time and place,⁴ we might well ask whether other supposed Masonic parallels are equally dubious.

2. The apotheosis of this approach is Dan Vogel, *Joseph Smith: The Making of a Prophet* (Salt Lake City: Signature Books, 2004). Critiques of this approach are available in Alan Goff, "Dan Vogel's Family Romance and the Book of Mormon as Smith Family Allegory," *FARMS Review* 17, no. 2 (2005): 321–400, <https://publications.mi.byu.edu/fullscreen/?pub=1449&index=9> and "How Should We Then Read? Reading Mormon Scripture After the Fall," *FARMS Review* 21, no. 1 (2009): 137–78, <https://publications.mi.byu.edu/fullscreen/?pub=1464&index=12>; Andrew H. Hedges and Dawson W. Hedges, "No, Dan, That's Still Not History," *FARMS Review* 17, no. 1 (2005): 205–22, <https://publications.mi.byu.edu/fullscreen/?pub=1430&index=8>; Larry E. Morris, "Joseph Smith and 'Interpretive Biography,'" *FARMS Review* 18, no. 1 (2006): 321–74, <https://publications.mi.byu.edu/fullscreen/?pub=1446&index=16>.

3. Eber D. Howe, moving force behind the first anti-Mormon book, was at least honest when he said he accepted the Spalding theory "because I could better believe that Spalding wrote it than that Joe Smith saw an angel." [Interview with E.D. Howe, in E.L. Kelley, *Public Discussion of the Issues between the Reorganized Church of Jesus Christ of Latter Day Saints and the Church of Christ (Disciples), Held in Kirtland, Ohio, Beginning February 12, and Closing March 8, 1884, between E. L. Kelley, of the Reorganized Church of Jesus Christ of Latter Day Saints, and Clark Braden, of the Church of Christ* (St. Louis: Christian Publishing and Smart, 1884), 83, <https://archive.org/details/publicdiscussion00kell/page/82>.]

4. See Gregory L. Smith, "Cracking the Book of Mormon's 'Secret Combinations'?" *Interpreter: A Journal of Mormon Scripture* 13 (2014): 63–109, <http://www.mormoninterpreter.com/cracking-the-book-of-mormons-secret-combinations>.

The Flaxen Cord in the Anti-Masonic Thesis

One of the advocates of the anti-Masonic thesis (AMT) argues that the Book of Mormon contains a criticism of Masonic ritual:

Despite the assertion that the “elaborate initiation rituals” [of Freemasonry] are absent from the Book of Mormon, researchers have long believed that 2 Nephi 26:22 alludes to the Masonic initiatory cable-tow ritual. In describing the corrupt churches and priestcrafts of the last days, Nephi adds: “And there are also secret combinations, even as in times of old, according to the combinations of the devil, ... and he leadeth them by the neck with a flaxen cord, until he bindeth them with his strong cords forever” (2 Nephi 26:22). In the Masonic ritual, the initiate is blindfolded and led into the lodge by a rope around his neck, the cable-tow.⁵

This Book of Mormon passage (2 Nephi 26:22) claims to be the work of Nephi, a Hebrew from Jerusalem circa 600 BCE. The first question we must ask is whether the presence of a *flaxen cord* is anachronistic. If Nephi were unfamiliar with ropes made of flax, the phrase must come from Joseph Smith (as either translator or author). An anachronistic flax rope makes a better case for the AMT.

Archaeological evidence of flax cultivation goes back 34,000 years, including twisted fibers “used to make ropes or strings.”⁶ The Gezer calendar — a 3.5 x 6 inch limestone fragment, dated to the “late tenth century or the very early ninth century BCE,” and written in either early Canaanite or Phoenician — “describes seasonal agricultural activities — sowing, harvesting, and processing of flax and barley.”⁷ Samson’s bands are compared to ropes of flax (Judges 15:14). Clearly, flax and ropes made from it are not anachronistic to the ancient Near East.

It is thus possible for Nephi to write about “flaxen cords.” But what does this have to do with Freemasonry?

5. Dan Vogel, “Echoes of Anti-Masonry: A Rejoinder to the Critics of the Anti-Masonic Thesis,” in *American Apocrypha: Essays on the Book of Mormon*, ed. Dan Vogel and Brent Lee Metcalfe (Salt Lake City: Signature Books, 2002), 283.

6. Amy Lavoie, “Oldest-known fibers to be used by humans discovered,” *The Harvard Gazette* (10 September 2009), <https://news.harvard.edu/gazette/story/2009/09/oldest-known-fibers-discovered/>.

7. Christopher A. Rollston, “What’s the Oldest Hebrew Inscription?” *Biblical Archaeology Review* 38, no. 3 (May/June 2012): 39–40.

The *Cable-tow* in Masonry

To understand the thrust of the AMT's claim, we must briefly review the *cable-tow* or *tow-rope* used in Masonic initiations. One 1828 anonymous exposé of Masonry, nearly contemporaneous with the translation of the Book of Mormon, provides a useful reference for how Joseph Smith's contemporaries would have thought of the cable-tow in the hotbox of anti-Masonic fervor. In it the author details the use of the tow-rope in Masonic ceremonies.⁸ He enumerates two instances of its use and their intended symbolism.

The first:

Every Mason who wishes to be admitted into the Scotch degrees, and even into all other degrees of Masonry, is first taught that, until that period, he has lived in slavery, and it is on that account only, that he is admitted into the presence of the other brethren with a rope about his neck, praying that he may be delivered from his bonds.

The intent of *rope* (not a *cord*) is to symbolize the initiate's pre-Masonic enslavement; thus, the rope is presumably of sufficient size and weight to convey this message. A small thread or string would not suffice; it would, in fact, convey precisely the opposite idea.

The second use of the rope occurs later:

When he [the initiate] aspires at the third Scotch degree ... he must appear in a far more humiliating costume. The candidate is shut up in a dark cell, a rope with four slip knots is twisted round his neck, he is stretched out upon the floor; there, by the dull light of a twinkling lamp, he is abandoned to himself to meditate on the wretched state of slavery in which he exists. ... At length one of the brethren comes and introduces him to the lodge, leading him by the rope, holding a drawn sword in his right hand, as if meant to run him through the heart, in case he made any resistance.

8. Henry Dana Ward, *Free Masonry: Its Pretensions Exposed in Faithful Extracts of Its Standard Authors; with A Review of Town's Speculative Masonry: Its Liability to Pervert the Doctrines of Revealed Religion, Discovered in the Spirit of Its Doctrines, and in the Application of its Emblems: Its Dangerous Tendency Exhibited in Extracts from the Abbe Barruel and Professor Robinson; and Further Illustrated in Its Base Service to the Illuminati* (New York, 1828), 295, <https://books.google.ca/books?id=FAAAAAAYAAJ&pg=295>.

As before, the rope symbolism is not subtle.⁹ The initiate has a hangman's noose around his neck in a "dark cell." He is then led by the rope and threatened with a sword if he resists — this imagery requires a robust cord.

This anti-Masonic work contains no images or engravings, but a later work, the classic *Duncan's Masonic Ritual*, illustrates how during a first degree ("Entered Apprentice") initiation, "The Deacon now ties a handkerchief or hoodwink over his eyes, places a slipper on his right foot, and after-wards puts a rope, called a cable-tow, once round his neck, letting it drag behind," and then provides an illustration (Figure 1).¹⁰ The use of the rope continues for second degree ("Fellow Craft") masonic initiation¹¹ and third degree ("Master Mason").¹²

The intent of the ritual is not to hide these bonds but instead to make them unmistakable. Any man so bound cannot be ignorant of his situation. That is the entire point of their ritual use.

The Book of Mormon's Rhetorical Intent

Does this, then, match the Book of Mormon imagery? It may appear convincing to read of a rope in Masonry leading someone by the neck, and find borrowing in a cord likewise used to lead someone in the Book of Mormon. A closer look, however, demonstrates that the Book of Mormon's use of this symbolism is almost the inverse of the

9. "Every initiated person, whether prince, peer, or peasant, is bound, at least once during his Masonic career, to pass through this emblematical feature of his profession, as an unmistakable pledge of fidelity. He may not like it. He may object to it. He may think it degrading. But he has no option. He cannot avoid it." [Malcolm C. Duncan, *Duncan's Masonic Ritual and Monitor or Guide to the Three Symbolic Degrees of the Ancient York Rite and to the Degrees of Mark Master, Past Master, Most Excellent Master, and the Royal Arch, Explained and Interpreted by Copious Notes and Numerous Engravings*, rev. ed. (New York: Dick & Fitzgerald, 1866), 28n1, <http://www.sacred-texts.com/mas/dun/>.]

10. Duncan, *Duncan's Masonic Ritual and Monitor*, 28–29.

11. Ibid., 59.

12. Ibid., 89. In Illinois, where Joseph Smith encountered Freemasonry, only the first through third degrees of Masonry were implemented. Other auxiliary degrees were not introduced there until 1857 (See "Question: Was Brigham Young a '33rd degree' Mason?" *FairMormonAnswers Wiki*, accessed 25 February 2018, https://www.fairmormon.org/answers/Mormonism_and_Freemasonry/Brigham_Young%27s_involvement#Question:_Was_Brigham_Young_a_.2233rd_degree.22_Mason.3F). See also Greg Kearney's discussion, "The Message and the Messenger: Latter-day Saints and Freemasonry" (Presentation, FAIRMormon Conference, Sandy, UT, August 5–6, 2005), <https://www.fairmormon.org/conference/august-2005/the-message-and-the-messenger-latter-day-saints-and-freemasonry>.

Masonic scenario offered by the AMT. (It makes scant difference whether we believe that Nephi or Joseph Smith wrote the text or chose the precise wording. We simply ask how the Book of Mormon text uses the phrase.)

The imagery occurs in the context of the prophet Nephi's polemic against apostasy and evil in the last days. The verses that immediately precede the "flaxen cord" declare:

And the Gentiles are lifted up in the pride of their eyes, and have stumbled, because of the greatness of their stumbling block, that they have built up many churches; nevertheless, they put down the power and miracles of God, and preach up unto themselves their own wisdom and their own learning, that they may get gain and grind upon the face of the poor.

And there are many churches built up which cause envyings, and strifes, and malice. (2 Nephi 26:20-21)

After predicting the Book of Mormon's appearance (2 Nephi 27), Nephi returns to these themes:

For it shall come to pass in that day [the latter days] that the churches which are built up, and not unto the Lord, when the one shall say unto the other: Behold, I, I am the Lord's; and the others shall say: I, I am the Lord's; and thus shall every one say that hath built up churches, and not unto the Lord. (2 Nephi 28:3)

This is, then, the same polemic against the same targets: that the corrupt churches built up by men which precede the Nephite record's



Figure 1. First-degree masonic candidate prepared for initiation with the "cable-tow" or rope.

translation (and which necessitate its coming forth) are still in business after its production and are guilty of precisely the same sins.

Nephi condemns these sins, which are identical to those he has already mentioned in 2 Nephi 26:

Table 1. Condemnation parallels between 2 Nephi 26 and 28.

Sins in 2 Nephi 26:20-21	2 Nephi 28
Pride	"puffed up in their hearts" (v. 9); "because of pride, and because of false teachers ... their churches have become corrupted, and their churches are lifted up; because of pride they are puffed up" (v. 12); "because in their pride they are puffed up" (v. 13); "they wear stiff necks and high heads; yea and because of pride" (v. 14)
The buildup of many churches	"the churches which are built up, and not unto the Lord. ... thus shall every one say that hath built up churches, and not unto the Lord" (v. 3)
Putting down the power of God	"deny the power of the holy One of Israel...there is no God today, for the Lord and the Redeemer hath done his work, and he hath given his power unto men" (v. 5)
The denial of miracles	"if they shall say there is a miracle wrought by the hand of the Lord, believe it not; for this day he is not a God of miracles; he hath done his work" (v. 6)
The preaching of one's own wisdom, learning	"teach with their learning" (v. 4)
Persecution of the poor	"they persecute the meek and the poor in heart"; "rob the poor" (v. 13)
Getting gain	"rob the poor because their fine sanctuaries ... [and] because of their fine clothing" (v. 13)
Envy, strife, and malice	"contend one with another; and their priests shall contend one with another" (v. 4)

Having seen the close parallels (and at times almost wholesale duplication) between the two halves of the polemic, we can now address the verse of interest to us:

And there are also secret combinations, even as in times of old, according to the combinations of the devil, for he is the founder

of all these things; yea, the founder of murder, and works of darkness; yea, and he leadeth them by the neck with a flaxen cord, until he bindeth them with his strong cords forever. (26:22)

These ideas from the first half of the polemic are also found, unsurprisingly, in the second half. There, Nephi returns to the idea of secret combinations, whose oath-bound societies spread murder and evil: “they shall seek deep to hide their counsels from the Lord; and their works shall be in the dark. And the blood of the saints shall cry from the ground against them” (28:9–10).

The second half of the polemic then turns — as it does in the first half — to a description of Satan’s tactics: “for he is the founder of all these things” (26:22). Satan will “rage in the hearts of” humanity, seeking to bind them “with his everlasting chains, and they be stirred up to anger, and perish” (28:19–20).

The “everlasting chains” or “awful chains from whence there is no deliverance” of the second half of the polemic (v. 19, 22) are clear parallels to Satan “bind[ing] them with his strong cords forever” in the first half (v. 22).

But what, then, is the analogue to being led “by the neck with a flaxen cord”? The AMT assumes (tacitly, if not explicitly) that the tow-rope is a stand-in for the demonic chains. And this *is* a possible reading. The second half of the polemic, however, offers another option:

And others will he pacify, and lull them away into carnal security, that they will say: All is well in Zion; yea, Zion prospereth, all is well — and thus the devil cheateth their souls, and leadeth them away carefully down to hell. (2 Nephi 28:21)

In this imagery, Satan is far less overtly aggressive. He does not chain his victims up right away, nor does he stir them to violent anger, as he does some. Instead, he soothes them and pacifies them. He “lulls” them, and “leadeth them away *carefully* down to hell.” The control or bonds he has on his dupes are hardly perceptible.

The second half of the polemic clearly offers an image quite different from the AMT’s tow-rope with its hangman’s noose. It rather pictures Satan exerting a slow, gradual, almost imperceptible control that his targets neither feel nor see. (And how “careful” can one be when hauling the victim by a rope?)

An Alternative to the Anti-Masonic Thesis

As we have seen, a close reading of the Book of Mormon text offers an interpretation that is completely different from the Masonic tow-rope.

I propose that the "flaxen cord" is in fact a symbol that is the *inverse* of the tow-rope. The Book of Mormon's "flaxen cord" is not heavy or easily detected at all. It is, one might say, spider-web thin — its use requires great care on Satan's part, for it could easily snap, were his target to become aware of it. The soft, smooth, supple flax neither chafes nor weighs heavily. Only when he has accomplished his long, drawn-out, ever-downward seduction do the "everlasting" and "strong" chains then bind. (There is also an ironic counterpoint between the heavy, inviolable chains with which they will one day be bound, and the thin line with which Satan "carefully" leads them unawares toward that end.)

On textual grounds alone, I judge my reading the stronger. I offer it as a competing hypothesis to the one inherent in the AMT. The question now before us is *Can an examination of the language choices made by Joseph Smith's contemporaries incline us toward one hypothesis or the other?*

For example, does nineteenth century usage often use a "flaxen cord" to portray the Masonic cable-tow? If the AMT was correct, we might expect so. To our twenty-first century ears, "cord" might sound like a sizeable attachment, even a rope, and not a thread or small string. If, on the other hand, my thesis is correct, we might expect the phrase *flaxen cord* to mean "fragile," "weak," or "of little consequence."

An Example

A particularly striking visual example is available from 1872¹³ and shown in Figure 2. In it, a Christian parent's natural love for a child is compared to a "cord that binds you to a mother's heart":

Hold fast ... [an] old cord that touches your mother; it reaches out from her up to the skies. ... Yes, hold fast the cord of mother-love, little one.

However, the mother is then exhorted to use "example," with which she communicates "more emphatically *than the flaxen cord from the distaff*. ... Remember, stronger than a silken cord drawing heavenward is a good life."¹⁴

Here the "flaxen cord" is a symbol of being small or slight; the better, stronger cord of righteous example outstrips the flaxen cord of mere positive feelings for the child.

The symbolism is driven home by the accompanying illustration (Figure 2) — it includes the "distaff" (the spindle upon which flax is wound to spin thread) carried by the mother, which the article argues is weaker

13. "Come Along!," *Illustrated Christian Weekly* 2, no. 31 (3 August 1872): 372.

14. *Ibid.*, emphasis added.



Figure 2. A mother with distaff and its “flaxen cord.”

than the mother’s “example ... [of] a good life.” The mass of thin, threadlike cord (“from the distaff,” as the ornate prose puts it) thus produced is clearly visible, bunched at her right hand and trailing barely perceived to her left. Clearly, in this case, by “flaxen cord” we should understand thread or fine yarn, not rope. The illustration precludes any other interpretation.¹⁵

We thus have at least one case that sustains my thesis over that of the AMT, albeit from a later date. But is this an outlier?

15. Note, too, how this thin thread binds and draws the soul to heaven, while Satan’s in the Book of Mormon draws souls carefully to hell. The imagery is remarkably similar — some might even claim Joseph Smith stole it, did it not postdate the Book of Mormon by more than 40 years. The symbolic parallels are much closer than are those of the cable-tow.

King James Bible: Samson

In considering whether this approach to flaxen cords is an outlier, the AMT analysis cited above ignores one biblical passage that bears scrutiny, in which Samson's binding cords are compared to flax that has been burned with fire:

And when he came unto Lehi, the Philistines shouted against him: and the Spirit of the LORD came mightily upon him, and the *cords that were upon his arms became as flax that was burnt with fire*, and his bands loosed from off his hands. (Judges 15:14, emphasis added)

Here we certainly have ropes or bands of considerable size and strength, but they are described *as if* of flax weakened by fire to convey their fragility before Samson's strength. An 1835 piece encouraging non-Latter-day Saint mission efforts asks, have reader's

hearts sighed at the thought that your years are stealing away so rapidly, and leaving behind them so little accomplished for the Lord? ... It need not be: you may be more useful. The church is not bound down by so fatal a chain that her activity shall be for ever fettered. No, she will arise and *burst the green withes and the flaxen cords*; and when she shall bow herself with all her might, then shall the fabric of error fall.¹⁶

This passage directly invokes the Samson material, for he later tells Delilah that if he is bound with "seven green withs [withes]" (seven fresh bowstrings) his strength will leave him. This misdirection is embarrassing for the Philistines, when they find that Samson easily "brake the withs, as a *thread of tow [flax]* is broken when it toucheth the fire" (Judges 16:7–9, emphasis added). The imagery is one of effortless rupture of a weak strand.

An 1849 work published in Philadelphia turns the "cords ... as flax that was burnt" explicitly into "flaxen cords":

Some have slumbered long under the power of the grave, but Jesus will shortly descend from heaven with the voice of the archangel. ... The grave — you can hold your victims no longer

16. Absalom Peters, ed., *The Home Missionary, and American Pastor's Journal* 7, no. 10 (1 February 1835): 166 <http://books.google.ca/books?id=IKYPAAAAIAAJ&pg=RA3-PA166>, emphasis added.

— your iron folds and bars become like the *flaxen cords* on Sampson's arms that were as though burnt with fire.¹⁷

A second 1849 effort reads:

The Bible must be put within reach of all; ... the Sabbath school must be sustained; ... and no effort may be spared to furnish every family with the productions of the religious press. But, in instrumentality high above all this, and to which all else is subsidiary is the holy MINISTRY [sic], ordained of heaven to command all men everywhere to repent. ... Aside of this, every other instrumentality is as powerless to subdue and bind the man of sin, as the green withes and flaxen cords of the Philistines to conquer the son of Manoah.¹⁸

And a third:

Our educational, moral, and religious appliances must be long and perseveringly employed. ... But above all, is the influence of the holy ministry. Aside from this, every other instrumentality becomes as feeble as the green withes and *flaxen cords* in which it was attempted to bind the son of Manoah.¹⁹

The biblical model then — and later 19th century use of its imagery — sees a “flaxen cord” as a symbol of something broken easily and effortlessly. This simply does not fit the anti-Masonic picture of the Book of Mormon's description of a tow-rope.

Methodology

I searched digital databases of 18th and 19th century texts for the phrase *flaxen cord*. Though I make no claim to the search being complete or exhaustive, I report all examples found except duplicates.

I began first by reviewing the use of this imagery in the King James Version of the Bible, a text with obvious affinities to Book of Mormon language. Having already examined the KJV and four nineteenth-century examples that appeal to it, I now report 45 additional examples of *flaxen cord* from 1771–1902.

17. George Storrs, *An Inquiry: Are the Wicked Immortal? Also Have the Dead Knowledge?* (Philadelphia: George Storrs, 1849), 84, <http://books.google.ca/books?id=hcE3AQAAMAAJ&pg=PA84-IA22>.

18. “God has a Work to be Done by Man,” *Home Missionary* 22, no. 6 (October 1849): 136.

19. “Jubilee of the Massachusetts Home Missionary Society,” *Independent* 1, no. 28 (14 May 1849): 110.

We will ask: *Does this flaxen cord sound like the sort required for the AMT's Masons?* Or is it more like the nigh-undetectable strand suggested by my reading of the second half of Nephi's polemic and the Christian newspaper examined earlier? Is it weak — and therefore not suitable for leading forcibly — as implied in the Samson story?

We will find that usage in the late 18th century and throughout the 19th century overwhelming favors this view. To Joseph Smith's audience, a *flaxen cord* would have likely been the furthest thing from a cable-tow.

Results

I have identified a total of 50 examples in publications from the United States and Great Britain between 1712 and 1902. I do not, however, include all 50 examples in my analysis; I have made a total of eight exclusions. Five examples are from dictionaries or concern word etymologies.²⁰ I have excluded these from the rest of the analysis, since their intent is, by their nature, to cover a wide variety of usages, even though I think that on balance they incline towards portraying a *flaxen cord* as relatively thin. Under the most pessimistic reading of the data for my thesis, they do not *exclude* a thin string or cord from being intended.

Three additional examples do not include enough information to classify the cords by either their strength or size. These three describe

- Chinese rope making, which says that flaxen rope or cord will not be as strong as hemp (1832b);
- Polynesian cloak with a cord that ties it on at the neck (1857b); and
- the fact that Samson was bound with flaxen cords as a literary prelude to a technical treatise on flax husbandry (1863b).

The first and third seem to me of little evidentiary value one way or the other. The Polynesian *cloak tie* is likely a smaller, possibly not strong line, but in the interest of conservatism, I have excluded it as well (see Appendix II, Table 6).

This leaves us with 42 references. Appendix I contains the text of each of these examples with brief commentary. I have categorized each reference by (1) genre; (2) whether the cord is said to be thick, thin, or undetermined in diameter; and (3) whether the cord is portrayed as weak, strong, or unstated. Readers who disagree with this or that

20. 1795b, 1826, 1828, 1856, 1885.

categorization can thus easily adjust the scoring as they think best. Percentages are rounded to the nearest whole number.

Drawing on the raw examples in Appendix I, I have tabulated them in Appendix II, Table 2, Table 3, and Table 4, respectively. A master table with classification of all examples is found in Table 5.

Arguments for the Anti-Masonic Thesis

A few of the examples support the AMT. The ropes that bind priests' belts in two examples (1712a, 1897a) would probably match the tow-rope. Most importantly, one melodramatic mention of a hangman's noose uses the precise term *flaxen cord* (1848a). Thus, only $3/42$ (7%) fit the tow-rope in size and presumed strength, and none of these date to within Joseph Smith's lifetime, much less the Book of Mormon's translation window. The literal noose is, however, the example that fits best with the anti-Masonic model.

Seven additional examples are strong while their thickness is either "thin" or "undetermined": two bowstrings, a ligature used to bind an animal testis, a garrote, a rope to draw water from a well, and two references to the fine mesh that supports a hot-air balloon.²¹

Thus, ten of the examples describe cords that are either said to be (or may reasonably be concluded to be) strong and resistant to breakage — but of these, only three agree with the cable-tow in size.

We conclude that an anti-Masonic reading might seem a *possible* one, granted a broad date range, though the complete lack of matching metaphorical or poetical usage should give us pause.

Arguments Against the Anti-Masonic Thesis

It must be noted that metaphoric/poetic use or biblical allusions do not match the AMT at all: all but one ($21/22 = 95\%$) have weakness as a central aspect of their symbolism. (The lone exception seems to describe a garroting — it is thus likely thin, unlike the tow-rope, but strong enough to permit the murder — see 1832b.) Thus, in the genres most applicable to the Book of Mormon passage, no examples support the AMT.

Twenty-two examples [$(19+3)/42 = 50\%$] have cords that are obviously weak, and count against the Masonic hypothesis. Can we narrow down the remaining ten "thin cord" cases that do not describe the strength?

Of these ten entries which are thin and do not mention the strength of the cord, six are in a context which strongly suggests that breaking them would be easy if desired:

21. These strands are strong in the aggregate, but likely weak in isolation, given their relatively low weight and caliber.

- Hygrometer holding a small bob (1771a, republished repeatedly, e.g., in 1797, 1819)
- Tied paper message (1838a)
- Medical thread (1838b)
- Drawing or describing lines in geometry (1844b, 1878a)
- Tying a bundle of herbs (1847a)

Including these with the other weak entries gives 67% $[(22+6) \div 42 = 28/42]$ of the examples contradicting the anti-Masonic model.

By contrast, of these ten thin cords of unstated strength, we might expect more strength in the remaining four:

- the surgical line which holds a two-pound weight (1829a);
- stitching to repair a saddle (1834a);
- a surgical ligature (1841a); and
- the line used to bind a row of chickens about the neck (1891a).

Considering the first three, though such surgical ties or thread are strong enough to avoid tearing when in place — and thus might be classed as “strong” — they are nevertheless easily torn or snapped by the surgeon or tailor if tied around someone to lead them. Anyone bound with a surgical ligature or stout thread could break it easily. By contrast, the fourth cord keeping a mass of chickens attached to each other is likely stronger.

If we grant this, then the AMT gains an additional point (the row of chickens), and my proposal another three. In the interests of simplicity and conservatism, I have simply not credited these last four examples to either theory.

Limitations

No study is perfect, and the present case is no exception. Thirty-three of the works were published in America; the British examples may have less relevance to American usage, though the intellectual cross-fertilization and frequent publication of the same work on both side of the Atlantic leads me to suspect that this is a relatively minor issue.

More importantly, published works may not capture the vernacular of a non-elite such as Joseph Smith. We must, however, work with what we have, for non-elites were much less likely to write or be published at all.

Searches of scanned databases are limited by what has been preserved and scanned. I believe I have cast the net reasonably widely, however, and we have a good cross-section of time, place, and subject matter.

Scoring such citations is necessarily a subjective exercise in some cases. As demonstrated above, I have tried to err on the side of

conservatism. The full data are provided in Appendix I for any who wish to decide for themselves.

The most serious defect, I believe, is the relative lack of early material from the United States. Some examples do exist, but they are not as numerous as we might wish. (There are, however, *no* examples of a thick, strong cord as the AMT would require, so my hypothesis is not disadvantaged compared to the alternative.)

There does not seem to be any sign of semantic drift from the early to late 19th centuries (or, for that matter, from Britain to the United States), and I would predict that if further sampling from the first decades of the century is undertaken, we will likely find no great surprises.

Conclusion

Even in a conservative reading of the data, fully two-thirds of the examples ($^{28}/_{42} = 67\%$) portray a cord that is trivial or easily snapped. By contrast, the stronger, thicker ropes are found in only $^3/_{42}$ (7%). A further $^7/_{42}$ (17%) are strong but too thin to be clear matches to a Masonic cable-tow.

Furthermore, and perhaps most importantly, when we consider rhetorical and poetical uses or biblical allusions — arguably the genres that match the Book of Mormon most closely — we find the data virtually unanimous: $^{21}/_{22}$ (95%) of the examples used in a poetic, metaphoric, or biblically allusive sense do so in order to convey fragility or tenuousness, nor does the lone exception match the AMT.

When we combine this lopsided data set with the internal evidence provided by the two halves of Nephi's polemic, the anti-Masonic explanation of the flaxen cord becomes difficult to sustain. The search for Masonic parallels has resulted in a reading most probably a genuine inversion of the Book of Mormon's meaning *and* at variance with contemporary 19th century usage.

Nephi is not talking about a large, visible rope or hangman's noose — he is describing a subtle and fragile connection that could be easily snapped if mortals “awake to the awful situation of those that have fallen into transgression” (Mosiah 2:40).

Given the failure of other predictions made by the AMT, one can only hope that it will soon enter a long-overdue retirement. On the issue of the cable-tow, that thesis — like Nephi's flaxen cord itself — is now gossamer-thin.

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degree. He was an associate editor of the Mormon Studies Review at BYU's Neal A. Maxwell Institute for Religious Scholarship from 2011–2012. He works as a rural family doctor providing cradle-to-grave care.

Appendix I: Citations and Commentary

In each entry in this appendix, all italics in quotes represent emphasis in the original and all bold type represents my added emphasis. Five additional examples are discussed in the main text (one in “an example,” and four in “King James Bible: Samson.”) These five have been included in the statistics and analysis of the main paper.

1712a London: Description of Franciscan Monks' Dress

We begin with a point for the AMT. A text from 1712 (also reprinted in 1812) describes members of the Franciscan order:

Friars of the order of St. Francis. ... [wear a] habit of ... a coarse brown cloth, hanging down to their heels. ... Their feet and legs always bare; about their middle they are girded with **a flaxen cord with knots**, and there hang their beads, with the image of our Saviour upon the cross.²²

In this case, the cord seems more in keeping with a stout rope, acting as a sort of belt on a monk's habit. This is one of the few examples in which a more robust line is intended.

Size: Thick **Strength:** Strong **Genre:** Priest Garb

1762a England: Describing Turkish Bows

The Turks are very expert in the use of their bows and arrows, the former being made of an ox horn, and a **tough flaxen cord**, fattened with glew.²³

22. William Oldys and John Malham, *The Harleian Miscellany; or, A Collection Of Scarce, Curious, and Entertaining Pamphlets and Tracts, As Well In Manuscript as In Print, Found in the Late Earl of Oxford's Library, Interspersed with Historical, Political, and Critical Notes*, Vol. 11 (London: Robert Dutton 1810), 180, <http://books.google.ca/books?id=60sNAAAAIAAJ&pq=PA180>. See similar usage at footnote 73.

23. Samuel Derrick, *A Collection of Travels, Thro' various Parts of the World; But More particularly thro' Tartary, China, Turkey, Persia and the East-Indies; An accurate and entertaining Account of the Religion, Laws, Manners, Commerce, and Constitution of many different Nations* (London: John Wilkie, 1762), 1:173.

A bow-string is thin but tough; it is not a thick rope.

Size: Thin **Strength:** Strong **Genre:** Description

1771a England: Technical Drawing of Hygrometer by Royal Society

A hygrometer model first published in the *Proceedings of the Royal Society* was frequently reprinted throughout the 19th century.²⁴ A technical drawing with the label “FG” is described:

FG, in both figures, represents a **flaxen cord**, about 35 inches long, suspended by the tuning peg. ... This cord is that which is called by net makers in London *flaxen three-threads laid*, and is between one-20th and one-30th of an inch in diameter.²⁵

Clearly, this is a very fine string or thread (0.8–1.2 mm in diameter), and nothing like the cable-tow of Masonry.

Size: Thin **Strength:** Unstated **Genre:** Scientific/Medical

1795a London and Edinburgh: Bow-string in poetry

William Wilkie’s *Epigoniad* includes the lines

The only boon I claim ...
Is, that my hands that weapon may embrace,
And on the **flaxen cord an arrow place**.²⁶

This second reference to a bowstring is hardly a rope — it is, as the name implies, a “string,” though a strong one.

Size: Thin **Strength:** Strong **Genre:** Poetry/Metaphor

24. For example, see *Cyclopedia; Or, Universal Dictionary of Arts, Sciences, and Literature*, s.v. “Hygrometry,” (London: Longman, Hurst, Rees, Orme, & Brown, 1819), <http://books.google.ca/books?id=OM4MJMyvBxIC&pg=PT458>.

25. John Smeaton, “XXIV. Description of a new hygrometer,” *Philosophical Transactions of the Royal Society* 61 (1771): 201, doi:10.1098/rstl.1771.00242053-9215.

26. William Wilkie, *The Works of the British Poets with Prefaces, Biographical and Critical*, ed. Robert Anderson (London/Edinburgh: John and Arthur Arch; Bell & Bradburn; J. Mundell & Co., 1795), 11:44.

1795b New York: Homeric Vocabulary

Charles Anthon, a well-known figure connected with Martin Harris's Book of Mormon authentication efforts, defines the Homeric word *Λινον* (linon) as: "a flaxen cord," "a fishing line," "a fishing net."²⁷

Fishing nets and lines can hardly be compared to a hangman's noose. They are thin and fragile in isolation. Indeed, fishermen's nets rely on the strength of the whole — a small tear can quickly destroy an entire net if the individual strands are not mutually supporting.

Size: Either **Strength:** Unstated **Genre:** Dictionary

1805a Salem, New York: Clothesline in Poetry

Across the yard at three the line was strung,
On which the treasures of the tubs were hung:
Loud blew the winds; **the flaxen cord** was rent,
And in the mud the cleansed garments went!²⁸

A clothesline is certainly more than a string — but here, that line has snapped, and the "flaxen cord" imagery seems intended to convey its fragility and the inevitable (if relative) tragedy of the remuddied clothes.

Size: Either **Strength:** Weak **Genre:** Poetry/Metaphor

Philadelphia and Elsewhere: Poetry on Haiti's Slave Rebellion

Behold! oh, horror! Hayti's [Haiti's] bloody strand!
Mark! how the lesson erst by white-men giv'n,
Not vainly taught the barb'rous sable band,
To claim the *birth-right* held alone from Heav'n.
Dark rose the negroes: 'twas the dread resolve,
That *right* to rescue, or with *it* expire,

27. Charles Anthon, s.v. "Λινον (linon)," in *The First Six Books of Homer's Iliad with English Notes, critical and Explanatory, A Metrical Index, and Homeric Glossary* (New York: Harper & Brothers, 1848), 788, <http://books.google.ca/books?id=6itJAAAYAAJ&pg=PA788>. (One hopes that the shade of Anthon will be grateful to be cited in Latter-day Saint historiography about a matter other than his encounter with Harris.) See similar examples at footnotes 32, 63, and 72.

28. William C. Foster, *Poetry on Different Subjects, Written Under the Signature of Timothy Spectacles* (Salem, NY: John M. Looker, 1805), 23, <http://books.google.ca/books?id=z2dWAAAYAAJ&pg=PA23>.

Bade the strong bolts that bound their flesh dissolve,
Like flaxen cords before devouring fire.²⁹

The parallels with Samson are instructive — here we have “strong bolts” that bind slaves, but these bands have become like the fragile “flaxen cord” in a fire. The imagery is intended to invoke flimsiness and fragility.

Size: Either **Strength:** Weak **Genre:** Poetry/Metaphor

1809a London and Edinburgh: Cattle Husbandry

This account describes a classical author’s approach to sex selection in cattle breeding:

Democritus affirms, that it depends upon our own pleasure whether a male or a female be conceived; and directs, that when we desire a male, we ought to bind the left testicle of the stallion, or other male, with **a small flaxen cord**; and when a female, the right testicle.³⁰

A thick rope or cord will not remain long around a bull’s testis — only a relatively thin thread or small string can be bound in this way.³¹

Size: Thin **Strength:** Strong **Genre:** Scientific/Medical

1826a England: Greek Lexicon

Of the Greek term Ἀπολινωω (apolinow) this lexicon translates “to bind with **a flaxen cord**; to make a **ligature**.”³²

29. “Elegiac Stanzas, Extracted from an Address to the Cincinnati of Connecticut,” *Literary Magazine and American Register* 3, no. 20 (May 1805): 398, <https://books.google.ca/books?id=5BwAAAAAYAAJ&pg=PA398>.

30. John Lawrence, “Neat Cattle — Various Opinions, &c.,” in *A General Treatise on Cattle, the Ox, the Sheep, and the Swine: Comprehending Their Breeding, Management, Improvement, and Diseases*, 2nd ed. (London & Edinburgh: Sherwood, Neely, and Jones; J Harding; Archibald Constable and Co., 1809), 199, <http://books.google.ca/books?id=TOM8AAAAYAAJ&pg=PA199>.

31. See footnotes 34, 45, and 47.

32. James Donnegan, *A New Greek and English Lexicon; Principally on the Plan of the Greek and German Lexicon of Schneider: The Words Alphabetically Arranged; Distinguishing Such as are Poetical, of Dialectic Variety, or Peculiar to Certain Writers and Classes of Writers; with Examples, Literally Translated, Selected from the Classical Writers* (London/Glasgow/Oxford/ Cambridge/York/Derby/ Edinburgh/Dublin: Cowie, Low, and Co.; Deighton and Sons; Wilson and Sons; H Mozley; Waugh and Innes; Currie, Jr. and Co., 1826), 117, <http://books.google>.

"In surgery," a ligature is "a cord or string for tying the blood vessels, particularly the arteries, to prevent hemorrhage."³³ Ropes do not work well for such a purpose; strong thread or small string is required. (A further example of a flaxen cord being used as a medical ligature is discussed below.)

Size: Either **Strength:** Unstated **Genre:** Dictionary

1828a New York: Webster's Dictionary

Noah Webster's dictionary defined a cord as "a string, or small rope, composed of several strands twisted together."³⁴ Something on the smaller side is envisioned.

Size: Either **Strength:** Unstated **Genre:** Dictionary

1829a Boston: Medical Journal Case Report

A physician's report of his method of immobilization and traction applied to a fractured thigh-bone includes the use of a flaxen cord:

A silk handkerchief was then passed around the ankle, and tied at the bottom of the foot. To this projecting portion of the handkerchief was fastened **a small flaxen cord** ... [which] supported a small weight.³⁵

This article was republished in multiple venues; one 1830 summary reported of the small weight, "Dr. Daniell thinks that in general, a weight of two pounds will be sufficient."³⁶

The emphasis is on a *small* cord suspending a small weight — this is not a cable-tow.³⁷

Size: Thin **Strength:** Unstated **Genre:** Scientific/Medical

ca/books?id=mZkCAAAQAAJ&pg=PA117. (We note the presence of the prefix "Απο" = "away, off, apart" and the verb form "λινωω" from "λινον" = linen cord or fishing line.) See similar examples at footnotes 27, 62, and 73.

33. Noah Webster, s.v. "ligature," in *An American-Dictionary of the English Language* ... (New York: S. Converse, 1828), <https://archive.org/details/americandictionary01websrich>.

34. Webster, s.v. "cord."

35. William C. Daniell, "IV. Method of treating Fracture of the Thigh Bone," *The Boston Medical and Surgical Journal* 2, no. 27 (18 August 1829): 423, <http://books.google.ca/books?id=7co9AQAAAJ&pg=PA423>.

36. Daniel Drake, ed., *The Western Journal of the Medical and Physical Science* 3, no. 3 (October, November, & December 1829): 446, <http://books.google.ca/books?id=teUJAQAAMAAJ&pg=PA446>.

37. Compare footnote 45.

1832a London: Advice to Unitarian Ministers

May our ministers universally be convinced that it is their duty to attach their flocks by the enduring bond of principle, and that **all ties** of a nature merely personal, are **at best but flaxen cords!**³⁸

Here the imagery is meant to convey fragility and flimsiness.

Size: Either **Strength:** Weak **Genre:** Poetry/Metaphor

1832b London: Poetic Reference to a Garotte

An allegorical poem that reports several “visions,” places the villain of the piece in a filthy prison:

It was a gloomy cell,
Where, through cross'd bars, the feeble glimpses fell
Against the wall, where hung a broken chain,
Whose rusted links gave back no light again....
There, in a corner, where a rotting bed
Of straw was flung, a naked corpse was spread;
'Tis he, the ruthless wretch! whose envious feet
Trampled on virtue in her holiest seat;
Who brought the storm of war to cloud the sky,
Whose very brightness pain'd his jealousy.
A flaxen cord was twisted round his neck;
Upon his blue lips lay a crimson speck³⁹

This does not seem to be a hanging: the poet addresses the instrument of the villain's death:

O thou most stern avenger! ...
But *thou* — no other heart save thine can know
What made thee strike so merciful a blow;
It were no sin, if justice only sped
Her hallow'd vengeance at the felon's head. ...

38. Charles Fox, ed., *The Unitarian Chronicle and Companion to the Monthly Repository* 5 (June 1832): 73, <http://books.google.ca/books?id=07UnAAAYAAJ&pg=PA73>.

39. William Edmondstoune Aytoun, *Poland, Homer, and Other Poems* (London/Edinburgh: Longman, Rees, Orme, Brown, Green & Longman/Adam Black, 1832), 28, <https://archive.org/details/polandhomerando00netwgoog>.

Tis a strange law, or else we greatly err,
For murderer to slay a murderer.⁴⁰

This is not, then, a judicial execution by hanging. It is technically a felony — a murder, but one the poet sees as justified because the victim was a murderer beyond the reach of normal justice. His death is likely one accomplished by guile and stealth — probably by a thin “linen cord” that acts as a garotte, not a noose.

Size: Thin **Strength:** Strong **Genre:** Poetry/Metaphor

1834a Philadelphia: Novel

After a hotly-contested race, one character returns “with the saddle torn to fitters between his hands, and his person exhibiting tokens of severe ill-usage.” The saddle is said to be “mutilated,” and later “Phil began to repair the pony’s saddle, while [his wife] Poll twisted the **flaxen cords** according as her husband required them.”⁴¹

A saddle cannot be repaired with rope, it requires thread or string. Poll is clearly making the thread/string by twisting flax (perhaps with a distaff?)

Size: Thin **Strength:** Unstated **Genre:** Description

1834b Boston: Chinese Rope Making

A general discussion of ropes “of all sorts and sizes”:

In this country, the greater part of our ropes, of all sorts and sizes, are made of hemp: it is the same in Europe. For the ship’s cable, nothing would probably be so strong or durable. For some of the common purpose of life, **the flaxen rope or cord** would last longer; but then it costs more.⁴²

The use of “rope and cord” may suggest that cord is seen in a class different from that of rope, likely somewhat smaller.

Size: Either **Strength:** Unstated **Genre:** Description

1835b New York: Historical Novel

An intrepid hero attempts to breach a door in this historical novel:

40. Ibid., 30.

41. “The Collegians,” *Novelists’ Magazine* 1, no. 1 (January 1834): 37, 100.

42. “Chinese method of rope making,” *Parley’s Magazine: With Fifty Engravings* 2, no. 7 (July 1834): 36.

The door evidently felt the force of the shock — one of the bars having been heard to give way. “Again!” shouted Luttrell, assisting in an effort which the hope of success rendered irresistible. **As if but a flaxen cord**, the whole paraphernalia of fastenings was broken, and the entrance lay open to the invaders.”⁴³

Flaxen cord here denotes a bond easily broken or ruptured.

Size: Either **Strength:** Weak **Genre:** Poetry/Metaphor

1838a London: Fiction

A fictional adventure story describes the arrival of a message: “Ireton produced the packet; it was a small despatch [sic], and fastened with **a plain flaxen cord** and ordinary seal. ... Within this was a small letter ... bound with a skein of white floss silk.”⁴⁴

A rope would hardly be used to seal a message or envelope.

Size: Thin **Strength:** Unstated **Genre:** Description

1838b Louisville, Kentucky: Surgical Thread

An operation on nasal polyps:

The metallic curve and eyed probe, five inches long, **threaded** with **a flaxen cord**, was introduced into the nose, and carried, the eye foremost, beyond the posterior nares; from which point, with a long and delicate pair of forceps, and end of the **thread** was taken from the probe, and brought out of the mouth; the probe being withdrawn, the ends of the **thread** were so tied together, as to cause that part of it that passed through the nose to lie perfectly flat on the palatine bone.”⁴⁵

Here the identity of the “flaxen cord” is clearly “thread” — the word is used twice in the same paragraph to refer to it. This explicit medical

43. Herbert Wendall: *A Tale of the Revolution in Two Volumes* (New York, Harper and Brothers, 1835), 2:17, <http://books.google.ca/books?id=wGOh-rQBHmAC&pg=RA1-PA17>.

44. Henry William Herbert, *Cromwell: An Historical Novel: By the Author of “The Brothers”* ... (New York: Harper & Brothers, 1838), 2:117.

45. John C. Brent, “Extraction of a Nasal Polypus, on the 14th of August, 1837,” *The Louisville Journal of medicine and Surgery* 1, no. 1 (1838): 45.

usage of *thread* in the same context likely illuminates other uses of *flaxen cord* in medical or veterinary procedures.⁴⁶

Size: Thin **Strength:** Unstated **Genre:** Scientific/Medical

1839a Boston: Metaphor of Weak Bonds

Of affection or inclination, this author argues:

They are, it is true, natural, but they are no more than nature. However amiable our feelings, — the common bonds of humanity, — they **are weak as flaxen cords** in the giant hands of our selfishness, unless strengthened by duty.⁴⁷

Such bonds' transience or weakness is the dominant image.

Size: Either **Strength:** Weak **Genre:** Poetry/Metaphor

1841a Louisville: Medical Treatment of Anal Fistula

One fairly graphic account of a surgeon's treatment of an anal fistula — a tract which runs from the large bowel to an opening on the skin, allowing the seepage of feces — describes the use of a flaxen cord as an alternative to the use of a scalpel. The physician's somewhat condescending attitude toward those who dislike the use of the knife in the preanaesthetic era permeates the account:

the horror which most persons have of cutting instruments, has very naturally led to the search out and substituting of various other methods [for treating *fistula in ano*], amongst which is that by the ligature. ...

[In this case] I introduced through the external orifice of the fistulous canal, by means of a slippery elm bougie [a flexible probe or guide inserted along the tract], one end of a **common flaxen cord**, which I brought out at the end of the anus. The part to be cut through was thus included in the ligature, which I tied in a manner that I cannot very easily describe. No matter. The twisting of the two ends of the ligature [i.e.,

46. See footnotes 30, 35, and 48.

47. Jones Very, *Essays and Poems* (Boston: Charles C. Little and James Brown, 1839), 77, <http://books.google.ca/books?id=pki0pawynJgC&pg=PA77>. Compare to reference 61 for similar imagery.

suture], which should be well waxed, or tying them in what is called the singe bow knot, answers as well as any other *can*.⁴⁸

Such a procedure would be impossible with a large rope — such a ligature is much more like string than a tow-rope. And, significantly, this is a “common” thing for the author — so common that he need not give further details to his surgical audience as to either its precise identity, or how to tie it.⁴⁹

Size: Thin **Strength:** Unstated **Genre:** Scientific/Medical

1843a Philadelphia: Jesus’ Power over Death

An account of the Resurrection uses “linen cord” to convey fragility:

Jesus, the conqueror of hell, broke asunder, as though they had been **flaxen cords**, the bands of death, rose up in renewed vitality, and walked forth from the tomb.⁵⁰

Size: Either **Strength:** Weak **Genre:** Poetry/Metaphor

1844a Boston: A Near-drowning Victim

A paper dedicated to seamen published an account:

He had just shaken hands and bid farewell to a brother officer who was floating near him, both of them expecting that beneath the next rolling wave they would sink to rise no more. His companion, with eight others, was lost, while he, when seized by a friendly hand, was senseless; and when drawn into our boat, and laid upon me for support, he was **limber as a flaxen cord**, and near half an hour elapsed before his stupor passed away.⁵¹

The intent is to convey how lacking in resistance or muscular tone this near-drowning victim was — a thick rope conveys this far less than a small string or thread.

Size: Either **Strength:** Weak **Genre:** Poetry/Metaphor

48. M. L. Linton, “Fistula in Ano,” *The Western Journal* 4, no. 4 (October 1, 1841): 318, <http://books.google.ca/books?id=LAUDAAAAYAAJ&pg=PA318>. See footnotes 30, 35, and 46.

49. Compare footnote 45.

50. “The Easter Season,” *Episcopal Recorder* 20, no. 5 (22 April 1843): 18.

51. Charles Rockwell, “My Shipmates,” *Street Anchor* 2, no. 1 (6 January 1844): 1–2.

1844b New York and London: Geometry

In a practical guide for carpenters, a technique for inscribing an ellipse is described:

At f and f place two pins, and another at c; tie a string about the three pins, so as to form the triangle, ffc; remove the pin from c, and place a pencil in its stead; keeping the string taut, move the pencil...it will then describe the required ellipsis. ... In making an ellipse **by string or twine**, that kind should be used which has the least tendency to elasticity. For this reason, a cotton cord, such as chalk lines are commonly made of, is not proper for the purpose: **a linen, or flaxen cord is much better.**⁵²

A geometrical figure made with pins and a pencil could hardly be done with a rope — this flaxen cord is better thought of as “string” or “twine.”

Size: Thin **Strength:** Unstated **Genre:** Geometry

1846a New York: Doggerel in Adventure Story

A potboiler from the mid-nineteenth century contains the lines:

The strong man snaps the **flaxen cord** with one of his fingers
The Rope which no man can break, is of flaxen cords
twisted together.

In union there is strength.⁵³

This example is particularly striking, in that *flaxen cords* can be snapped with a finger, while many such cords are required to make a rope — including, one presumes, a hangman's noose or cable-tow.

Size: Either **Strength:** Weak **Genre:** Poetry/Metaphor

1846b New York: On the Coalition to Defeat Napoleon

Early Book of Mormon critic Alexander Campbell writes of the alliance formed against Napoleon I:

52. R.G. Hatfield, *The American House-Carpenter: A Treatise Upon Architecture, Cornices and Mouldings, Framing, Doors, Windows, and Stairs. Together with the Most Important Principles of Practical Geometry* (New York & London: Wiley and Putnam, 1844), 42, <http://books.google.ca/books?id=2vNYAAAAAYAAJ&pg=PA42>.

53. E. Winchester, ed., “Wilfred Montessor; or The Secret Order of the Seven. A Romance of Mystery and Crime,” *The Golden Rule Odd-Fellows' Family Companion* 5, no. 3 (18 July 1846): 34, <http://books.google.ca/books?id=oXhIAAAAYAAJ&pg=RA1-PA34>.

The Belgian, French, English, Scotch, and Prussian phalanxes stood side by side, ... but all such alliances weaken and wane as the occasions pass away which called them into being. Their own respective and antagonistic interests ultimately rise in importance, and **consume the flaxen cords of ephemeral interest** which, during a short lived truce, produce a feeble and transient union.⁵⁴

The emphasis is on the fragile and ephemeral.

Size: Either **Strength:** Weak **Genre:** Poetry/Metaphor

1846c Boston: Attachments of the World before the Power of Religion

Samson's flaxen cords (without mention of fire) are invoked by an author to convey the fragility of worldly attachments before the power of God:

The reason, then, why we have no more revivals lies with ministers and the church; ... Let the church stand up in her full strength, full of faith and prayer, and the Holy Ghost, rebuking sin in high places, and theatres, with places of amusement, together with infidelity, in their varied forms, doubled and twisted around the moral world, would be **like the flaxen cords** that bound Sampson.⁵⁵

Size: Either **Strength:** Weak **Genre:** Biblical Allusion

1847a London: Veterinary Medicine of the Pig

A discussion of management of diseases in swine describes a method advised by a classical author:

[To treat] swine as have swellings of the glands under the throat. ... [Columella writes that] Some think it a more present and effectual remedy when they pour into each of them, through a horn, three cupfuls of ... salt-fish pikle; then they bind cloven tallies, or **cuttings of fennel-giant with a flaxen**

54. Alexander Campbell, "Our Colleges," *The Millennial Harbinger: Series III* 3, no. 7 (July 1846): 386, <http://books.google.ca/books?id=1ZEoAAAAAYAAJ&pg=PA386>.

55. Bryan Morse, "Present State of the Church," *Zion's Herald & Wesleyan Journal* 17, no. 6 (11 February 1846): 21.

cord, and hang them about their necks so that the swellings shall be touched with the fennel giant cuttings.⁵⁶

A small bundle of herbs and the like cannot be tied up with a rope — a smallish string would be needed.

Size: Thin **Strength:** Unstated **Genre:** Scientific/Medical

1848a Boston: A Hangman's Rope in Fiction

Here we find a lone example which matches the anti-Masonic thesis' noose:

Ere a word could be uttered or a hand interposed, she seized the **dread, flaxen cord**, whose viper-like folds clung so significantly to the throat of Wilmot, and coiled the slack around her own dazzling neck. ... "Now **you may hang Wilmot**, if you will, but know that the cord which presses too closely his neck, shall be my death!"⁵⁷

Size: Thick **Strength:** Strong **Genre:** Hangman's Noose

1849d New York: Weak Bonds as Contrasted with the Strong Bonds of Alcoholism

A temperance newspaper recounts the story of a dissipated man (shown in an image dancing and playing court with many women on his wedding night) who was also given to drink. As he began to have children, his problems with drink worsened:

Henry Greenfield had become so much enslaved, that even he took the alarm, and made some ineffectual efforts to break away from the bondage in which he was held. But he was not as a strong man tied with **light flaxen cords**; but as a child bound with ropes. He felt, for a time, the struggle to be in vain.⁵⁸

56. William Youatt, *The Pig: A Treatise on the Breeds, Management, Feeding, and Medical Treatment, of Swine; With Directions for Salting Pork, and Curing Bacon and Hams* (Cradok and Co: London, 1847), 81-82, <http://books.google.ca/books?id=t90DAAAQAAJ&pg=PA81>.

57. Calvin Porter, *Leslie Wilmot: Or, Witchcraft: Calvin Porter* (Boston: F. Gleason, 1848), 38.

58. "Henry Greenfield on His Wedding Night," *New York Organ & Temperance Safeguard* 8, no. 40 (31 March 1849): 290.

The flaxen cords binding a man are held to be light and insignificant, as opposed to the ropes of alcoholism which bind him tightly.

Size: Either **Strength:** Weak **Genre:** Poetry/Metaphor

1850a South Carolina: Weak Ties between Different Christian Denominations

Clergy object to misleading claims of rapprochement between denominations:

There is a modern Catholicism [ecumenical spirit] whose praises are often “said and sung” in anniversary speeches, which seeks to bring into the most intimate relations those having only the most remote affinities. But if the bonds of such a union are too weak to withstand the breadth of prayer, let it not be baptized by the name of Christian Unity; and if its object is the advancement of the Redeemer’s Kingdom, the sooner the **flaxen cords** are consumed by the flame of devotion, the better it will be.⁵⁹

The cords represent “the most remote affinities” which create “bonds” that are “too weak.”

Size: Either **Strength:** Weak **Genre:** Poetry/Metaphor

1850b Indiana: Constitutional Convention

On democracy’s risk of tyranny of the majority, one speaker declares:

They are fulfilling the unhappy truth, that written Constitutions are only made to be violated, and in the hands of a triumphant majority are but as **the flaxen cord in the hands of a giant**.⁶⁰

The author doubles down on the simile — as weak as flaxen cords (already a common symbol for fragility) when confronted with a giant of even greater strength than a normal man. One wonders if this is intended to invoke Jonathan Swift’s Gulliver, who found himself bound by “several slender ligatures,” but “had the fortune to break the strings”

59. “Article III: Report of Committee. Adopted by the Board of Managers of the American Bible Society,” *Southern Presbyterian Review* 2, no. 1 (July 1850): 74.

60. H. Fowler, *Report of the Debates and Proceedings of the Convention for the Revision of the Constitution of the State of Indiana* (Indianapolis, Indiana: AH Brown, 1850), 581, <http://books.google.ca/books?id=Gd8WAAAAYAAJ&pg=PA581>. Compare to reference 48 for similar imagery.

with which the diminutive Lilliputians had bound him.⁶¹ A gallant effort on the part of the wee folk, we might think, but surely not one whose outcome was in doubt.

Size: Either **Strength:** Weak **Genre:** Poetry/Metaphor

1856a New York: Translation of Aeschylus

For thus thou art not dead; not even though thou didst die, for children are to the deceased reputation preserving; and like corks they buoy up the net, upholding the twist of the **flaxen cord** from the deep.⁶²

We again encounter the Greek for "flaxen cord" or "fishing line."⁶³

Size: Either **Strength:** Unstated **Genre:** Dictionary

1857a: Habits of Body Weak Compared to Habits of the Soul

A religious author compares the physical binding of hemp ropes against the skin by the mad with false mental ideas:

And the man who sets forth his false dogmas, only makes a parade of a soul blotched all over. ... There have been those who put humps upon their shoulders ... because disease had put them on others' shoulders. ... And there have been those who put wooden shoes upon their feet, and hempen cords about their chests, because others did the same; and by turns we have laughed at their folly and raved at their madness. But these in the comparison are innocent follies. They affect the body; but he who fastens about his mind, not **a flaxen cord, but an iron chain** ... must blush with shame.⁶⁴

61. Jonathan Swift, *Gulliver's Travels Into Several Remote Nations of the World* (London: W. Baynes and Son, 1824), 29–30, <https://books.google.ca/books?id=ulJMAAAAcAAJ&pg=PA29>.

62. George Burges, trans., *The Tragedies of Aeschylus. Literally Translated. With Critical and Illustrative Notes, and an Introduction by Theodore Alois Buckley, B.A., of Christ Church, Oxford. To Which is Added An Appendix, Containing the New Readings of Hermann's Posthumous Edition* (New York: Harper & Bros, 1856), 162, https://books.google.ca/books?id=7so_AQAAMAAJ&pg=162.

63. See similar examples at footnotes 27, 32, and 72.

64. "Art. I. Radicalism versus Conservatism," *Freewill Baptist Quarterly* 5, no. 3 (1857): 245.

Even a thick hemp rope is a small matter compared to sins of the mind: such sins are not the weak, apparently insignificant “flaxen cord,” but instead “an iron chain.”

Size: Either **Strength:** Weak **Genre:** Poetry/Metaphor

1857b New York: Polynesian Dress

A report of Polynesian dress:

Their dress was very simple. ... The most valued dress was formed of dog-skins. It was in shape somewhat like a cloak, and was fastened about the neck of the wearer by means of a **flaxen cord**.⁶⁵

This does not sound like a thick rope; it is more probably like what we would term a “string.”

Size: Either **Strength:** Unstated **Genre:** Description

1859a Ireland and 1863a New York: Netting Surrounding an Airship or Balloon

A newspaper account of a lighter-than air craft, the balloon being surrounded by a net of rope:

The circumference of ... the balloon proper, measured around the long diameter is 387 feet; ... The netting is kit of a **flaxen cord**, about ½ of an inch in diameter, which was made expressly for this purpose. ... At the top of the globe, this netting is fastened to a hempen rope, 1¼ inches in diameter, and which will resist a strain of 50 tons. ... [The netting] weighs 325 pounds — the length of cord used in the construction being more than 15 miles. The cord will resist a strain of 400 pounds, so that the strength of the net is ample.⁶⁶

Strong as this rope is, it remains fairly thin — only ½ of an inch.

Size: Thin **Strength:** Strong **Genre:** Description

Another balloon description also emphasizes the strength of the netting, but we must remember this is in the aggregate, not necessarily true of any one cord. The cords are presumably larger, however, than thread or thin string:

65. Charles Nordhoff, *Stories of the Island World* (New York: Harper & Brothers, 1857), 260.

66. “The New Air-ship,” *The Cork Examiner* 3394 (7 October 1859): 4.

Round the balloon circles a net-work of **flaxen cord**,
 manufactured expressly for the purpose, and calculated to
 resist a strain of 160 tons.

From this cord depends [hangs] a basket, and below the
 basket a boat.⁶⁷

Size: Either **Strength:** Strong **Genre:** Description

1859b Massachusetts: Allegory of Weak Restraints

Again, this unrivaled moral power of the pulpit is in no small measure the effect of those HIGHER MOTIVES which the preacher employs. ... But all these motives are not better than **a flaxen cord** to bind a man when exposed to the flames of excited passions. Then he needs the restraints imposed by the fear of God.⁶⁸

Clearly, the "flaxen cord" is meant to imply great fragility; it cannot be counted on.

Size: Either **Strength:** Weak **Genre:** Poetry/Metaphor

1862a Washington, D.C.: Abraham Lincoln Correspondence

Lincoln's Secretary of State wrote of how, after receiving a dispatch from France: "President [Lincoln] ... wrote to Mr. Dayton a long harangue ... about 'the popular mass surged by the voice of demagogues,' and 'a Confederacy of discordant States bound by **a flaxen cord**.'"⁶⁹

Lincoln hopes to portray the rebellious states as bound by interests or ties that will soon fragment — and thus discourage France from supporting them due to their lack of staying power.

Size: Either **Strength:** Weak **Genre:** Poetry/Metaphor

67. "Transatlantic Ballooning," *Harper's Weekly* 3, no. 143 (24 September 1859): 143.

68. Henry A. Sykes and First Congregational Church, *Proceedings at Suffield, September 16, 1858: on the occasion of the one hundred and fiftieth anniversary of the decease of the Rev. Benjamin Ruggles, first pastor of the First Congregational Church* (Springfield: Samuel Bowles and Co., printers, 1859), 20.

69. William Bradford Reed, Charles Ingersoll, and Joseph Reed Ingersoll, *The Diplomatic Year: Being a Review of Mr. Seward's Foreign Correspondence of 1862* (Philadelphia: J. Campbell, 1863), 7.

1863b Albany, NY: Treatise on Preparing Flax

Samson is invoked as an introduction to the topic of flax: “The manufacture of flax was among the first known to civilized man. ... Samson was delivered into the hands of the Philistines bound with **flaxen cords**.”⁷⁰

This tells us little about how the cords were seen outside of the scripture — but it demonstrates that the scriptural image was very well known: well enough that it could serve to introduce a slightly less familiar topic such as flax husbandry. Given that the Samson story has the flaxen cords being easily burst, this reinforces the impression that *flaxen cords* was strongly associated in readers’ minds with the weakness of bonds.

Size: Either **Strength:** Unstated **Genre:** Scientific/Medical

1878a Bath, England: Something Thin and Ephemeral, Like a Line in Geometry

What is a line? Thin air. Look it out in the dictionary — **flaxen cord**. What is straight? The past participle of the old word *streccan*, to stretch. We have kept up the etymology of stretched cord.⁷¹

Here the “linen cord” is said to inspire the one-dimensional line of geometry — potentially of infinite length, but of infinite thinness too.

Size: Thin **Strength:** Unstated **Genre:** Geometry

1885a London: Greek Vocabulary

A work on the comparative linguistics of Polynesian languages and Indo-European tongues defines the Greek *Λινον* (linon) as: “anything made of flax, flax itself, **a flaxen cord**, fish-line, linen cloth.”⁷²

A fish-line would be thin, but the definition does not rule out a thicker “flaxen cord.”

Size: Either **Strength:** Unstated **Genre:** Dictionary

70. “Preparation of Flax Fiber,” *Country Gentleman* 22, no. 7 (13 August 1863): 106.

71. “The Beginnings of Exact Knowledge,” *The Bath Chronicle* 6251 (November 21, 1878): 7, DOI: ID3230808116.

72. Abraham Fornander, *An Account of The Polynesian Race and the Ancient History of the Hawaiian People to the Times of Kamehameha I. Vol 3: Comparative Vocabulary of the Polynesian and Indo-European Languages* (London: Trübner & Co., 1885), 199, <https://books.google.ca/books?id=K4alXc-7IicC&pg=PA199>. See similar examples at footnotes 27, 32, and 63.

1891a Rope Holding a String of Chickens

She had been eating eggs in Lent! She must be punished. Here she came. All her sinful hens which had ventured to lay eggs in Lenten season were tied together with the same **great flaxen cord**; and they were cackling their protest against being thus wrapped about her neck, like a living rope of flesh and feathers which also covered her shoulders and fell upon the ground.⁷³

Here the flaxen cord is said to be "great" — yet it can hardly be too thick to be tied tightly around the neck of a row of chickens. Thus even this relatively thin cord is labeled "great" — which could indicate either thickness *or* length. Contrast this entry with the entry for 1902 below.

Size: Thin **Strength:** Unstated **Genre:** Description

1897a New York: Priest's Belt

There is a second example of a priest's garb:

Then Father Lucas rises, robed to administer the sacrament.
... Over his long white *alb* girt round his waist by **flaxen cord**, floats a *stole* of simplest make.⁷⁴

Here as before a more substantial rope is envisaged if it is to act as a sort of belt.

Size: Thick **Strength:** Strong **Genre:** Priest Garb

1899a New York: Kite String

As a substitute for the ordinary kite string or cord, the Weather Bureau ... uses fine piano wire, which is smaller and much stronger in proportion than any hempen or **flaxen cord**.⁷⁵

73. Frank Wakeley Gunsaulus, *Monk and Knight: An Historical Study in Fiction*, 2 Vols. (Chicago: A.C. McClurg and Company, 1891), 1:118, <https://books.google.ca/books?id=nvY0AAAAMAAJ&pg=PA118>.

74. Archibald Clavering Gunter, *Pt. 2 Ballyho Bey: The Sequel to Susan Turnbull* (New York: The Home Publishing Co., 1897), 40. See similar usage at footnote 22.

75. Ray Stannard Baker, *The Boy's Book of Inventions: Stories of the Wonders of Modern Science* (New York: J. J. Little & Co and Doubleday, McClure & Company, 1899), 231.

The emphasis is on both the thinness and relative fragility of flax versus wire. No kite string can be more than a strong thread, easily snapped by a man being led by it.

Size: Thin **Strength:** Weak **Genre:** Scientific/Medical

1902a: Small Rope to Draw Water

... already quite near at hand, was a Samaritan woman.

She was still young [and] ... carried a large earthen water-pitcher upon her head and a **slender flaxen cord** wrapped about her arm, for Jacob’s well is more than fifty cubits deep.⁷⁶

Here the cord is said to be “slender,” which suggests that thicker cord was not unusual. Contrast this entry with that in 1891a. Clearly, at least in the late 1800s, “flaxen cord” does not unerringly refer to either a slender or thicker line. That said, despite the weight of water to be hauled, as the airship entry of 1859a demonstrates, a thin flaxen cord could bear a surprising amount of weight if one was not seeking to break it.

Size: Either **Strength:** Strong **Genre:** Description

Appendix II: Raw Data Scoring

Table 2. Examples by genre.

Genre	Examples
description	8
hangman’s noose	1
priestly garb	2
geometry	2
scientific/medical	7
poetry/metaphor	17
biblical allusion	5

Table 3. Cord size.

Size of Rope	Examples
Thick	3

76. Aaron Dwight Baldwin, *The Gospel of Judas Iscariot* (Chicago: Jamieson-Higgin Co., 1902), 250, <http://tinyurl.galegroup.com/tinyurl/6jSUN0>.

Size of Rope	Examples
Thin	18
Either	21

Table 4. Cord strength.

Strength (stated or implied)	Examples
Strong	10
Weak	22
Unstated	10

Table 5. Scoring of examples included in analysis (see section “Results > Inclusions”).

No.	Date	Genre	Note	Size	Strength
1	1712a	priest garb	belt	Thick	Strong
2	1762a	description	bowstring	Thin	Strong
3	1771a	scientific/medical	hygrometer	Thin	Unstated
4	1795a	description	bowstring	Thin	Strong
5	1805a	poetry/metaphor	cord rent	Either	Weak
6	1805b	poetry/metaphor	cords dissolve	Either	Weak
7	1809a	scientific/medical	bind testis	Thin	Strong
8	1829a	scientific/medical	small 2 lb weight	Thin	Unstated
9	1832a	poetry/metaphor	fragile ties	Either	Weak
10	1832b	poetry/metaphor	garrote	Thin	Strong
11	1834a	description	repair saddle	Thin	Unstated
12	1835a	biblical allusion	Samson (main text)	Thin	Weak
13	1835b	poetry/metaphor	door fastenings burst	Either	Weak
14	1838a	description	tied paper message	Thin	Unstated
15	1838b	scientific/medical	medical thread	Thin	Unstated
16	1839a	poetry/metaphor	weak cords	Either	Weak
17	1841a	scientific/medical	surgical ligature	Thin	Unstated

No.	Date	Genre	Note	Size	Strength
18	1843a	poetry/metaphor	Jesus's power over death	Either	Weak
19	1844a	poetry/metaphor	drowning victim	Either	Weak
20	1844b	geometry	drawing shapes	Thin	Unstated
21	1846a	poetry/metaphor	easily snapped	Either	Weak
22	1846b	poetry/metaphor	ephemeral cords	Either	Weak
23	1846c	biblical allusion	world's bond vs. God's	Either	Weak
24	1847a	scientific/medical	tie herb bundle	Thin	Unstated
25	1848a	hangman's noose	hangman's noose	Thick	Strong
26	1849a	biblical allusion	Samson (main text)	Either	Weak
27	1849b	biblical allusion	Samson (main text)	Either	Weak
28	1849c	biblical allusion	Samson (main text)	Either	Weak
29	1849d	poetry/metaphor	alcoholism	Either	Weak
30	1850a	poetry/metaphor	weak ecumenicalism	Either	Weak
31	1850b	poetry/metaphor	giant breaks cords	Either	Weak
32	1857a	poetry/metaphor	body vs. mind errors	Either	Weak
33	1859a	description	balloon mesh	Thin	Strong
34	1859b	poetry/metaphor	motives vs. passions	Either	Weak
35	1862a	poetry/metaphor	Confederate states	Either	Weak
36	1863a	description	balloon mesh	Either	Strong
37	1872a	poetry/metaphor	see main text example	Thin	Weak
38	1878a	geometry	thin like a line	Thin	Unstated

No.	Date	Genre	Note	Size	Strength
39	1891a	description	chicken necks tied	Thin	Unstated
40	1897a	priestly garb	belt	Thick	Strong
41	1899a	scientific/medical	kite string	Thin	Weak
42	1902a	description	rope for well	Either	Strong

Table 6. Examples excluded from analysis (see section “Results > Exclusions”).

No.	Date	Genre	Note	Size	Strength
43	1795b	dictionary	Greek	Either	Unstated
44	1826a	dictionary	Greek	Either	Unstated
45	1828a	dictionary	Webster	Either	Unstated
46	1834b	description	types of line	Either	Unstated
47	1856a	dictionary	Greek	Either	Unstated
48	1857b	description	Polynesian dress	Either	Unstated
49	1863b	scientific/medical	Preparing flax	Either	Unstated
50	1885a	dictionary	Greek	Either	Unstated

CHRISTMAS IN TRANSITION: FROM FIGGY PUDDING TO THE BREAD OF LIFE

Spencer J. Condie

Abstract: *While Christmas traditions around the world have evolved, some losing their focus on the Christ child, there is still need for us to center our thoughts and hearts on his message of forgiveness and redeeming love.*

The late President Gordon B. Hinckley observed that “There would be no Christmas if there had not been Easter. The babe Jesus of Bethlehem would be but another baby without the redeeming Christ of Gethsemane and Calvary, and the triumphant fact of the Resurrection.”¹ So it is that Christmas is but the overture to the Savior’s mortal ministry, culminating in His atoning sacrifice that enables all mortals to overcome the bonds of death and manifests His redeeming love to all who come unto Him with full purpose of heart.

There was a time when Christmas truly did commemorate the birth of the Savior of the world as reflected in those sacred hymns such as *O, Little Town of Bethlehem*, *Away in a Manger*, and *Silent Night*. But, alas, through the passage of time, these sacred hymns were partially replaced by *Jingle Bells* and even *Jingle Bell Rock*. Christmas is a joyful time, as reflected in a song of halls bedecked with holly. Neighborhood carolers invariably end their medley of songs with the ever-popular *We Wish You a Merry Christmas*, including the refrain “Oh, bring us some figgy pudding ... and a cup of good cheer.” What once began as a sacred, yet joy-filled,

1. Gordon B. Hinckley, “The Wondrous and True Story of Christmas,” *Ensign* (December 2000) 5.

commemoration of the birth of Christ the Lord has gradually undergone a transition from the “Bread of Life” to figgy pudding.

We lived for several years in Europe, and I remember the overwhelming feeling of dismay one December as large signs in the city were changed from “Christmas Celebration” to “Winterfest.” The city fathers felt that the word “Christmas” might offend those citizens not of any Christian persuasion.

We had some English-speaking friends in a communist-dominated country who asked if we might be able to send them some English children’s books telling the story of the Nativity. We told them we would be pleased to help, so we visited several book shops in search of books for young children about the birth of Baby Jesus. We were disappointed to find a plethora of books about Rudolf the Red-Nosed Reindeer, Frosty the Snow Man, The Night before Christmas, and Santa Claus, but there were no children’s books about shepherds, wise men, Joseph, Mary, and Jesus.

Many countries have perpetuated legends of a saintly soul known for his kindness and compassionate giving. Some traditions refer to this man as St. Nicholas, Kris Kringle, or Santa Claus. Regardless of his origins, this legendary mortal being became a model of generosity and selfless giving. Over the years Santa Claus became the man to whom children would make their demands for gifts. A few years ago in late December, I walked into a department store and spotted a fairly large man in overalls with a white, bushy beard. I approached him and asked enthusiastically: “What are the chances of meeting Santa Claus on his day off?” He smiled and said, “Being Santa isn’t all it’s cracked up to be.” Then he showed me his left hand which was black and blue. He explained, “I was Santa Claus in the middle school last Wednesday afternoon and, unfortunately, we ran out of candy canes and a little rascal seated on my lap was so disappointed not to get his candy cane he bit my hand — hard.” Santa is no longer a symbol of compassionate giving to others; rather, he has become the font for receiving.

In December of 1961 in Germany, my missionary companion and I were invited to spend Christmas Eve in the home of a family comprised of five young children and their parents who all lived in a cozy little apartment. The mother and older children had been baptized. However, the father resisted baptism because of

his addiction to alcohol. Somehow he was able to maintain steady employment, but whenever we visited the family, the room was filled with fumes, and the father invariably slurred his speech.

So, it was with some apprehension that we accepted the invitation to spend a sacred evening with this family. When we arrived in their home, to our pleasant surprise and relief, it was readily apparent that the father had not drunk any alcohol for several hours. The air had a subtle fragrance of pine from the little four-foot tree in the corner of the room with a vestige of smoke wafting from the burning candles. The father uncharacteristically assumed his role as patriarch and invited us all to join in singing Christmas hymns. None of the songs mentioned Rudolf or Frosty or the wish that Santa would replace missing front teeth for Christmas. Each and every hymn was about the Light of the World.

After a considerable length of time singing all the verses of each and every hymn, this young father rose to his role as family patriarch, and with dignity and reverence he opened the Bible. He could have asked one of the elders to read these sacred passages, but he assumed that responsibility and began to read: "And it came to pass in those days, that there went out a decree from Caesar Augustus, that all the world should be taxed" (Luke 2:1). He did not raise his voice, nor was there any dramatic enunciation of the words. Here was a humble father whose life was a tug of war with trials and troubles, and he was re-telling (or reading) a sacred story with the authenticity of an eye witness.

He continued: "And she brought forth her firstborn son, and wrapped him in swaddling clothes, and laid him in a manger; because there was no room for them in the inn" (Luke 2:7). Reading further he spoke of "shepherds abiding in the field" and the voice of an angel declaring: "For unto you is born this day in the city of David a Saviour, which is Christ the Lord" (Luke 2:6, 10). The shepherds "came with haste, and found Mary, and Joseph, and the babe lying in a manger. And when they had seen it, they made known abroad the saying which was told them concerning this child ... But Mary kept all these things, and pondered them in her heart" (Luke 2:16–17, 19).

I have had the blessing and privilege of attending General Conference sessions, temple dedications, solemn assemblies, and countless testimony meetings, but I have seldom felt the Spirit being manifest more strongly than in that cozy cottage with an alcoholic father and his little family on Christmas Eve.

Of all the hymns about the Savior, perhaps the one most beautiful — because it is the most personal — is the “Song of Redeeming Love.” After Alma relinquished the civic office of chief judge in order to devote full time as a high priest over the church, he went first to the people in Zarahemla, where he asked them a series of 42 soul-searching questions. Among these questions he asked: “[I]f ye have experienced a change of heart, and if ye have felt to sing the song of redeeming love, I would ask, can ye feel so now?” (Alma 5:26). During that Christmas Eve so long ago, we truly felt the song of redeeming love. That young father eventually entered the waters of baptism, and he, too, was able to sing the song of redeeming love, the song extolling the Atonement of Christ and the miracle of forgiveness, the greatest Christmas gift of all.

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