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Better Kingdom-Building through Triage

Daniel C. Peterson

Abstract: *We are called to take the Gospel to the entire world, but our numbers are few and our time and resources are limited. This is where cold calculation can help. A field-surgical technique pioneered during the Napoleonic Wars of the early nineteenth century and refined in the butchery of World War I a century later offers a useful model for making our missionary efforts more efficient and more effective.*

Many years ago in Switzerland, I learned a very valuable lesson from my first missionary companion. I say that I "learned" it, but in this case, I'm afraid that my subsequent behavior has, all too often, been a textbook example of "faith without works." I've put it into practice far too inconsistently.

When I arrived in Switzerland, it evidently wasn't yet time for missionary transfers. I would eventually be assigned to Burgdorf, the largest town in the Emmental region of the canton of Bern. For about two weeks, though, I remained in the mission home at Pilatusstrasse 11, on a hill overlooking Zürich, and I went tracting every day with a member of the mission home staff, Elder David J. Cannon, who was assigned to be my temporary senior companion.

I very soon saw for myself what I had already been told before arriving in Switzerland, that tracting was hard and frustrating work, that very few of the very few people who were home during the daytime were interested in talking with us. Time after time after time, doors were closed in our faces. Usually politely, but not always.

On a few occasions, though, we were able to speak at least briefly with those we met, and one of those occasions has remained etched rather clearly in my memory.

A man invited us into his apartment and sat us down, obviously quite willing to speak with us. This was exciting. It was such a refreshing change of pace from rejection after rejection after rejection. We began to lay out the story of the Restoration. Soon, though, he interjected his opinion that churches such as ours were all about financial gain — an assertion that he repeated multiple times, quite calmly and in a matter-of-fact tone of voice, while rubbing his thumb and his index and middle fingers together as if he were manipulating cash. He continued to do so even after we indicated that we were serving at our own expense. (He didn't believe us.). All religion was a scam. Our religion was a scam. We were just in it for the money. (Why didn't we just come clean and admit it?)

After ten minutes or so of this sort of exchange, my missionary companion, Elder Cannon, politely thanked him for his time, indicated that we had other obligations, and stood up to go.

Once we were outside, I asked him why we had left. At least this fellow was willing to *talk* to us! We had managed to get through a door!

I've never forgotten what this more experienced missionary told me: Zürich, he said, was a fairly large city, and there were far more people in it than we would ever be able to contact. We had no time to waste on folks who weren't interested, even if they enjoyed arguing with us. We weren't there to argue. We were there to find those who could be benefited by the message that we had been divinely called to bring to them. Maybe that fellow's time would come someday, but it plainly wasn't his time *then*.

I've thought about that simple but important point quite a bit since that day in Zürich. In October 2007, Elder Dallin H. Oaks, then a member of the Quorum of the Twelve Apostles of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, delivered a conference talk under the title of "Good, Better, Best" that is closely related to what I want to say here. The opening words of that talk convey an important principle:

> Most of us have more things expected of us than we can possibly do. As breadwinners, as parents, as Church workers and members, we face many choices on what we will do with our time and other resources.

> We should begin by recognizing the reality that just because something is *good* is not a sufficient reason for doing it. The number of good things we can do far exceeds the time available to accomplish them. Some things are better than good, and these are the things that should command priority attention in our lives. …

As we consider various choices, we should remember that it is not enough that something is good. Other choices are better, and still others are best. Even though a particular choice is more costly, its far greater value may make it the best choice of all.[1]

A striking illustration from the late Stephen R. Covey has also lingered in my mind long after the first time that I saw it, and I think it relevant here. Whether it occurs in one or more of his books, I cannot say; I remember it from a video recording of one of his lectures.[2]

Imagine yourself standing before a table on which are arranged a large glass jar along with a jug of water, a half dozen fairly large pebbles, a larger number of smaller stones, and a small pail of sand. Your mission, should you choose to accept it, is to put as many of those things as possible into the glass jar.

Going for quantity perhaps, you pour the sand into the jar, and then the multitude of smaller pebbles on top of it, along with the water. So far, so good! But there isn't enough room to put even a single larger stone into the jar.

Alternatively, you start with the larger pebbles first. Then you put in the smaller little rocks and, especially after you shake the jar, they fit rather well in the spaces between the bigger rocks. Then you pour the sand in and shake it and, once more, it fits well into the spaces between the stones. Finally, you pour the water in, and everything is now inside the jar.

Brother Covey's point was that the bigger rocks represent your most important responsibilities or tasks. If you give them your primary attention, you're much more likely to get them done. If, on the other hand, you attend first to the more numerous smaller pebbles and to the vastly more numerous but also vastly smaller grains of sand before you on the table — which is to say, to the innumerable but often trivial matters that come up and distract us daily — the chances of accomplishing your most important tasks and discharging your most significant responsibilities will be greatly reduced.

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1. Dallin H. Oaks, "Good, Better, Best," *Ensign* (November 2007), https://www.churchofjesuschrist.org/study/ensign/2007/11/good-better-best.

2. For a video of Stephen Covey teaching this principle in a business setting, see https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=zV3gMTOEWt8. There are scores of videos available on YouTube that teach the same principles, but to my understanding, Covey was the first.

It's a matter of budgeting time and energy and, sometimes, money. An hour devoted to a television sitcom is one hour less for gardening or spending time with children or doing family history or learning Spanish. The fifty dollars spent on a restaurant meal are fifty dollars that won't go toward the missionary fund or toward a new mattress or fixing a broken bicycle. Not always wrong, of course but, done to excess, potentially destructive of your own goals and priorities.

I spent about two weeks in the mission home with that wise senior companion, Elder Cannon, before being assigned for roughly two months to Burgdorf (where my companion, Elder Friedman, was a convert from Judaism). David J. Cannon remained a friend ever afterward, until his untimely recent death. We served together again as zone leaders based in Ostermundigen, once more in the Canton of Bern, just before he was released from his mission. I was then sent to Interlaken, the principal town in the Bernese Oberland and the gateway to that indescribably beautiful region of the Swiss Alps. Interlaken was a life-changing assignment for me, in many ways. But it was there, too, that certain words of Jesus from the New Testament began to hit me especially hard. I can still recall quoting them in a letter from Interlaken to my parents:

> And Jesus went about all the cities and villages, teaching in their synagogues, and preaching the gospel of the kingdom, and healing every sickness and every disease among the people.
>
> But when he saw the multitudes, he was moved with compassion on them, because they fainted, and were scattered abroad, as sheep having no shepherd.
>
> Then saith he unto his disciples, The harvest truly is plenteous, but the labourers are few;
>
> Pray ye therefore the Lord of the harvest, that he will send forth labourers into his harvest. (Matthew 9:35–38)

We should, of course, pray that God will raise up more and more qualified missionaries to take the news of the Restoration to the world. And we should play our parts in developing and supporting such missionaries, with our children and grandchildren and those for whom we have ecclesiastical responsibility, and in serving ourselves where appropriate.

But we should also see to it that the missionary resources that are already available, broadly understood, are effectively and efficiently used. And this brings me to the medical concept of triage.

In medical practice, the process called triage is applied when the immediate demand for medical resources exceeds their availability — when, that is, demand exceeds supply. In ordinary, unfettered economic situations, of course, prices would rise and thus bring demand and supply back into alignment. While many people might want a three-dollar hamburger, far fewer will pay thirty dollars for the same sandwich. Most of us, though, would not be comfortable allocating emergency medical assistance on that same basis. Not many would endorse a rule that choking restaurant patients who can pay a hundred dollars in cash receive the Heimlich maneuver, while those who can't are left to fend for themselves. One thousand dollars in cash for a defibrillator; two thousand for mouth-to-mouth resuscitation.

To practice triage is to assign priority to the treatment of patients based on the severity of their condition, the urgency of their need for immediate treatment, and their likelihood of recovery with and without treatment. When available resources are insufficient for all to be treated immediately, triage rations patient treatment efficiently. The term *triage* comes from the French verb *trier*, meaning "to separate," "to sort," "to select."

The Merriam-Webster entry for *triage* might also be helpful here:

> **1a:** the sorting of and allocation of treatment to patients and especially battle and disaster victims according to a system of priorities designed to maximize the number of survivors
>
> **b:** the sorting of patients (as in an emergency room) according to the urgency of their need for care
>
> **2:** the assigning of priority order to projects on the basis of where funds and other resources can be best used, are most needed, or are most likely to achieve success[3]

Modern medical triage seems to have been invented by a field surgeon named Dominique Jean Larrey amidst the horrors of the Napoleonic Wars in Europe. He apportioned treatment for the wounded according to the urgency and the seriousness of their injuries rather than on the basis of their rank and nationality.[4] A century later,

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3. Merriam-Webster Online Dictionary, s.v. "triage ," https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/triage.

4. See Panagiotis N. Skandalakis, et. al., "'To Afford the Wounded Speedy Assistance': Dominique Jean Larrey and Napoleon," *World Journal of Surgery* 30, no. 8 (August 2006): 1392–99, https://pubmed.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/16850154/. An analogous practice, however, seems already to have been in place in Egypt during

during the even worse horrors of World War I, overwhelmed French medical personnel also used the triage technique. Field medics who were responsible for removing the wounded from the battlefield and doctors charged with their care at aid stations behind the front lines afterwards divided the victims into three categories:

- Those who were likely to live, regardless of what care they received.
- Those who were unlikely to live, regardless of what care they received.
- Those for whom immediate care might make a positive difference in outcome.

The analogy to our missionary efforts should, I think, be fairly obvious. Our numbers are small, and we must deploy them in the most efficient and effective way possible. (Wouldn't it be wonderful if every member really *were* a missionary? And, even better, if every member were a really *effective* missionary?) All souls are precious, of course, and every human being on earth is a child of God, but sometimes we need to move on. It may seem heartless to do so, just as it must have been heartbreaking for stretcher bearers and surgeons to move on from those on the battlefields of Europe who could not be helped. But there are people around the world who not only desperately need the message of the Gospel but who desperately want it. They should be our highest priority. The demand is high, but, in a sense, the supply is small. "The harvest truly is plenteous, but the labourers are few."

And yet, every day, I see faithful Latter-day Saints devoting sizable amounts of time and energy online to battling critics who have made it perfectly clear that, for now at least, there is absolutely nothing we can say or do that will convince them to accept the claims of the Restoration or to submit themselves to the requirements of the Gospel of Jesus Christ. And, yes, I'm acutely aware of the fact that I'm among those who are so wasting their time.

I'm trying to change my ways, and I invite others to join me in the change.

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the seventeenth century before Christ: See Joost J. van Middendorp, Gonzalo M. Sanchez, Alwyn L. Burridge, "The Edwin Smith Papyrus: A Clinical Reappraisal of the Oldest Known Document on Spinal Injuries," *European Spine Journal* 19, no. 11 (November 2010): 1815–23, https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC2989268/.

> For there are many yet on the earth among all sects, parties, and denominations, who are blinded by the subtle craftiness of men, whereby they lie in wait to deceive, and who are only kept from the truth because they know not where to find it. (D&C 123:12)

In a separate brief article, also occasioned by some reflections on my mission to Switzerland back in the late Pleistocene Epoch, I suggest a few ways in which lay members of the Church — even those living in the portions of deepest Utah County where sightings of non-members are comparatively rare — can participate in the missionary effort.[5]

It will probably come as no surprise that, in my judgment, contributing to the work of the Interpreter Foundation is among those ways. I want to express my appreciation here to those who have already made Interpreter's existence and its flourishing possible through their donations of time, effort, and, yes, money. I'm grateful to the authors, copy editors, source checkers, and others who have created this volume, and I especially want to thank Allen Wyatt and Jeff Lindsay, the two managing or production editors for the *Journal*. Like all of the other Interpreter leadership, they serve as volunteers and without financial or other compensation. We could not function without their efforts. And I invite others to join us.

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5. Daniel C. Peterson, "Preaching the Gospel Where We Cannot Go," *Meridian Magazine*, July 6, 2021, https://latterdaysaintmag.com/preaching-the-gospel-where-we-cannot-go/.

Nephi's Gethsemane: Seventeen Comparisons from the Literary Record

Taylor Halverson

Abstract: *This note explores a literary comparison between Nephi's confronting of Laban and shrinking from the act of shedding blood, to Jesus's experience in the Garden of Gethsemane of shrinking from the act of shedding blood. Comparing these two stories suggests that we can profitably read Nephi's experience with Laban as Nephi's personal Gethsemane.*

Everyone faces their own moment of truth. That fateful moment when one's life hangs on the thread of decision, an awful decision of the most serious magnitude, a decision that could affect the eternal life of the individual and the salvation of a multitude of souls.

Nephi stood at the anguished crossroad of decision entirely unforeseen, unbeckoned, undesired. If the tormenting possibilities momentarily distorted his view, the darkness of that horrific night covered any signs in the merciful depths of blackness. At his feet lay his personal Goliath,[1] the man who had slandered his brother, stolen the family wealth, and mercilessly sought his life — the infamous Laban. And in his heart the shocking impressions from the spirit reverberated, "Slay him."[2]

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1. "Why Was the Sword of Laban so important to Nephite Leaders?" KnoWhys (website), Book of Mormon Central, February 27, 2018, https://knowhy.bookofmormoncentral.org/knowhy/why-was-the-sword-of-laban-so-important-to-nephite-leaders.

2. For several perspectives on why the story of Laban is included in the Book of Mormon, see the following: Val Larsen, "Killing Laban: The Birth of Sovereignty in the Nephite Constitutional Order," *Journal of Book of Mormon Studies* 16, no. 1 (2007): 26–41, 84–85; John W. Welch and Heidi Harkness Parker, "Better That One Man Perish," in *Pressing Forward with the Book of Mormon: The FARMS Updates of the 1990s*, ed. John W. Welch and Melvin J. Thorne (Provo,

Nephi was no bloodthirsty warrior. Though prone to anger at times because of the awful dilemmas he faced with his older brothers (see 2 Nephi 4:16–35); and even though Laban had sought to violate Nephi's life with various egregious acts and words, Nephi did not delight in the shedding of blood, as evidenced by his anguished response to the Lord. He pled that the constraining impressions flee: "never at any time have I shed the blood of man. And *I shrunk* and would that I might not slay him" (1 Nephi 4:10). The voice of the spirit persisted, urging Nephi to the act of bloodshed, using reasoning such as "It is better that one man should perish than that a nation should dwindle and perish in unbelief" (1 Nephi 4:13).

What is striking about this episode are the potential comparisons between Nephi's most anguished moment and that of Jesus Christ.[3] The Doctrine and Covenants preserves a heart-wrenching first person account from God Himself about His experience in the garden: "Which suffering caused myself, even God, the greatest of all, to tremble because of pain, and to bleed at every pore, and to suffer both body and spirit — and would that I might not drink the bitter cup, *and shrink* — " (Doctrine and Covenants 19:18, emphasis added).

I find compelling that both Nephi and Jesus shrank at the need to shed blood (the obvious and gargantuan difference being, of course, that Christ would have His own blood shed, both by bleeding at every pore in Gethsemane and being slain on the cross, while Nephi would shed Laban's blood). This thought led me to read the two stories for comparative purposes, wondering if we could read Nephi's story as his own personal Gethsemane.[4]

Utah: FARMS, 1999), 17–18; John W. Welch, "Legal Perspectives on the Slaying of Laban," *Journal of Book of Mormon Studies* 1, no. 1 (1992): 119–41; Hugh Nibley, *The Collected Works of Hugh Nibley*, vol. 5, *Lehi in the Desert/The World of the Jaredites/There Were Jaredites* (Salt Lake City and Provo, UT: Deseret Book and FARMS, 1988), 94–104; "Was Nephi's Slaying of Laban Legal?" KnoWhys (website), Book of Mormon Central, January 2, 2017, https://knowhy.bookofmormoncentral. org/knowhy/was-nephis-slaying-of-laban-legal.

3. Though Jesus's death and resurrection are a centerpiece of the Christian testimony of faith (see Romans 14:9; 2 Corinthians 5:15; 1 Thessalonians 4:14), His suffering, from a literary perspective, has been largely overlooked in the New Testament. Only Luke mentions the agonizing blood-sweat Jesus experienced in the garden.

4. This article is not focused on allusion or intertextuality. Rather, this article practices literary comparison. Literary allusion and intertextuality seeks to establish a clear literary connection, dependence or borrowing between texts. Literary comparison does not seek to demonstrate connection, dependence, or borrowing. Instead, literary comparison seeks to read in new ways by reading one story through the lens of another story arc and structure. Literary comparison does not attempt to claim that these new readings are the intentional original

Like Jesus, Nephi had an "argument" with his brothers beforehand. Like Jesus, Nephi took three of his brethren with him. Jesus left Jerusalem at night, while Nephi entered Jerusalem at night. Nephi was led by the Spirit, not knowing beforehand the outcome; Jesus was led by the Spirit *and* knew the outcome. In going forth, Jesus fell down; Nephi encountered a fallen man. The spirit urged the shedding of blood. Nephi shrank from the act of shedding blood; Jesus shrank from the act of shedding His own blood. Nephi wrestled with the Spirit three times, as did Jesus. The act of shedding blood was committed. The life of one man was worth an entire nation. Without this death, the law could not be satisfied.

Following the lead of Nephi, who declared, "I did liken all scripture unto us" (1 Nephi 19:24), this article explores insights we may derive by reading Nephi's experience of killing Laban in comparison to Jesus's experience in the Garden of Gethsemane. This short note looks at seventeen points of literary comparison between Jesus's Gethsemane experience and Nephi's experience of slaying Laban. I propose that this comparative reading may provide an additional way to interpret Nephi's experience with Laban as "Nephi's Gethsemane."[5]

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meaning of the text nor that the authors intended such comparative readings. Furthermore, literary comparison is not some form of parallelomania — the practice in which any potential connection between two ancient texts has been a cause for making claims that the two texts are literarily and intertextually related or dependent. Literary comparison is an act of reading and meaning-making done by readers to explore new angles on existing texts but not with the intent to claim the comparisons demonstrate literary dependence. For some useful readings on the pitfalls of intertextual readings and parallelomania, see the following: Lincoln Blumell, *Lettered Christians* (Leiden, NDL: Brill, 2012), 220; Samuel Sandmel, "Parallelomania," *Journal of Biblical Literature* 81, no. 1 (March 1962): 1–13; Benjamin L. McGuire, "Finding Parallels: Some Cautions and Criticisms, Part One," *Interpreter: A Journal of Mormon Scripture* 5 (2013): 1–59, https://journal.interpreterfoundation.org/finding-parallels-some-cautions-and-criticisms-part-one/ and Benjamin L. McGuire, "Finding Parallels: Some Cautions and Criticisms, Part Two," *Interpreter: A Journal of Mormon Scripture* 5 (2013): 61–104, https://journal.interpreterfoundation.org/finding-parallels-some-cautions-and-criticisms-part-two/. For a strong example of how to read the scriptures from an intertextual perspective, see Ben McGuire, "Nephi and Goliath: A Case Study of Literary Allusion in the Book of Mormon," *Journal of Book of Mormon Studies* (January 2009), 18, no. 1: 16–31.

5. For other potential readings of Nephi's slaying of Laban in 1 Nephi 4, see Taylor Halverson, *The Covenant Path in the Bible and the Book of Mormon* (Springville, UT: Line of Sight Publishing, 2020), 149–87.

1. The Father sent the Son on a mission to save His people.

Soon after fleeing Jerusalem for the wilderness, Lehi had a dream. God commanded Lehi to send his sons on a mission back to Jerusalem to retrieve the plates of brass from Laban, plates that contained words of salvation which would be crucial for the preservation of Lehi's family, God's people (see 1 Nephi 5:10–22).

> Wherefore, the Lord hath commanded me that thou and thy brothers should go unto the house of Laban, and seek the records, and bring them down hither into the wilderness. (1 Nephi 3:4)

In the pre-mortal council, the Son was sent by the Father on a mission to save His people.

> And the Lord said: Whom shall I send? And one answered like unto the Son of Man: Here am I, send me. (Abraham 3:27)

2. The rebellious sons murmured at the mission; the faithful son was obedient.

Laman and Lemuel were unwilling to return to Jerusalem, even though they had not wanted to leave Jerusalem in the first place; "Neither did they believe that Jerusalem, that great city, could be destroyed according to the words of the prophets. And they were like unto the Jews who were at Jerusalem, who sought to take away the life of my father." (1 Nephi 2:13)

Like the Children of Israel in the wilderness, Laman and Lemuel murmured against the Lord's anointed: "And now, behold thy brothers murmur, saying it is a hard thing which I have required of them; but behold I have not required it of them, but it is a commandment of the Lord." (1 Nephi 3:5)

Nephi, on the other hand, had made the sacrifice of time and energy to diligently learn for himself the truths of God. Nephi paid the price to have the Spirit. Nephi did the hard work of preparing his own heart to humbly receive the word of God as a seed planted in fertile ground:

> And it came to pass that I, Nephi, being exceedingly young, nevertheless being large in stature, and also having great desires to know of the mysteries of God, wherefore, I did cry unto the Lord; and behold he did visit me, and did soften my heart that I did believe all the words which had been spoken by my father; wherefore, I did not rebel against him like unto my brothers. (1 Nephi 2:16)

Nephi did not rebel against his father, as his brothers had done.

Similarly, in the premortal world Jesus did not rebel against his Father, as his brothers had done (led by Lucifer).

> "And the Lord said: Whom shall I send? And one answered like unto the Son of Man: Here am I, send me. And another answered and said: Here am I, send me. And the Lord said: I will send the first. And the second was angry." (Abraham 3:27–28)

3. The Son knew that God would prepare a way for the mission to be fulfilled.

Laman and Lemuel rebelled at the idea of the mission. Nephi obediently and faithfully said to his father,

> I will go and do the things which the Lord hath commanded, for I know that the Lord giveth no commandments unto the children of men, save he shall prepare a way for them that they may accomplish the thing which he commandeth them. (1 Nephi 3:7)

Similarly, in the pre-mortal life God presented a plan. Lucifer rebelled, while Jesus in humility presented himself as the champion of the mission to do whatever God commanded:

> And there stood one among them that was like unto God, and he said unto those who were with him: We will go … to see if [we] will do all things whatsoever the Lord [our] God shall command [us]. (Abraham 3:24–25)

Just as Nephi knew that the Lord would prepare a way for the mission to be accomplished, Jesus *is* the way.

4. His brothers argued with him beforehand.

During the mission, Nephi had to overcome the faithlessness, doubt, and antagonism of his brothers. They did not believe they could succeed in the mission. Even after seeing and being rebuked by an angel, they continued to argue with Nephi.

> Now when I had spoken these words, they were yet wroth, and did still continue to murmur; nevertheless they did follow me up until we came without the walls of Jerusalem. (1 Nephi 4:4)

Jesus also had to confront His "brothers," who did not understand His mission.

> But Peter said unto him, Although all shall be offended, yet *will* not I. And Jesus saith unto him, Verily I say unto thee, That this day, *even* in this night, before the cock crow twice, thou shalt deny me thrice. But he spake the more vehemently, If I should die with thee, I will not deny thee in any wise. Likewise also said they all. (Mark 14:29–31)

5. He took three of His brethren with him.

Before his ordeal, Nephi took, or went with, his three brothers on the mission given him by his father.

> Nevertheless they did follow me up until we came without the walls of Jerusalem. And it was by night; and I caused that they should hide themselves without the walls. (1 Nephi 4:4–5)

Before his ordeal Jesus, too, brought three of his brethren to accompany Him.

> And he taketh with him Peter and James and John, and began to be sore amazed, and to be very heavy; And saith unto them, My soul is exceeding sorrowful unto death: tarry ye here, and watch. (Mark 14:33–34)

6. Jerusalem at night (Nephi entered, Jesus left).

In Nephi's story, he entered Jerusalem by night.

> Nevertheless they did follow me up until we came without the walls of Jerusalem. And it was by night; and I caused that they should hide themselves without the walls. And after they had hid themselves, I, Nephi, crept into the city and went forth towards the house of Laban. (1 Nephi 4:4–5)

In Jesus's story, He left Jerusalem by night.

> And he came out, and went, as he was wont, to the mount of Olives; and his disciples also followed him. (Luke 22:39)

> And they came to a place which was named Gethsemane. (Mark 14:32)

7. Both Nephi and Jesus were led by the Spirit.

Though Nephi was led by the Spirit, he did not know what the outcome would be. He went forward, trusting that God's plan would unfold.

> And I was led by the Spirit, not knowing beforehand the things which I should do. (1 Nephi 4:6)

Jesus knew beforehand what would happen to Him. Nevertheless, He went forth, while trusting God.

> Behold, the hour cometh, yea, is now come, that ye shall be scattered, every man to his own, and shall leave me alone: and yet I am not alone, because the Father is with me. (John 16:32)

> And Jesus saith unto them, All ye shall be offended because of me this night: for it is written, I will smite the shepherd, and the sheep shall be scattered. But after that I am risen, I will go before you into Galilee. (Mark 14:27–28)

> And truly the Son of man goeth, as it was determined. (Luke 22:22)

8. Going forth, they encountered a fallen man.

As Nephi proceeded into the city, he found a fallen man, Laban, who was drunk with wine.

> And as I came near unto the house of Laban I beheld a man, and he had fallen to the earth before me, for he was drunken with wine. And when I came to him I found that it was Laban. (1 Nephi 4:7–8)

As Jesus proceeds into the garden of Gethsemane He finds Himself falling down while drinking the bitter dregs of the sins of the world, drunk with the wrath and fury of God.

> And he went forward a little, and fell on the ground. (Mark 14:35)

> 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 drink it again: But I will put it into the hand of them that afflict thee; which have said to thy soul, Bow down, that we may go over: and thou hast laid thy body as the ground, and as the street, to them that went over. (Isaiah 51:22–23)

> I have trodden the winepress alone; and of the people *there was* none with me: for I will tread them in mine anger, and trample

them in my fury; and their blood shall be sprinkled upon my garments, and I will stain all my raiment. (Isaiah 63:3)

And I will tread down the people in mine anger, and make them drunk in my fury, and I will bring down their strength to the earth. (Isaiah 63:6)

Wherefore *art thou* red in thine apparel, and thy garments like him that treadeth in the winefat? I have trodden the winepress alone; and of the people *there was* none with me: for I will tread them in mine anger, and trample them in my fury; and their blood shall be sprinkled upon my garments, and I will stain all my raiment. (Isaiah 63:2–3)

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. (Isaiah 51:17)

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 drink it again. (Isaiah 51:22)

And would that I might not drink the bitter cup, *and shrink* — Nevertheless, glory be to the Father, and I partook and finished my preparations unto the children of men. (D&C 19:18–19)

9. The Spirit urges the shedding of blood.

The Spirit urges Nephi to shed blood.

And it came to pass that I was constrained by the Spirit that I should kill Laban. (1 Nephi 4:10)

Jesus also was urged to shed blood — His own. Here we note that in the scriptures, to "shed blood" means to kill, and certainly Christ was offering Himself as a sacrifice to have His blood be shed for us on the cross. But the loss of His blood on our behalf began in the Garden of Gethsemane: "great drops of blood" fell to the ground as He began taking our sins upon Him (Luke 22:44), and this can, with a little poetic license, also be described as the shedding of His blood.

> For behold, I, God, have suffered these things for all, that they might not suffer if they would repent; But if they would not repent they must suffer even as I; Which suffering caused myself, even God, the greatest of all, to tremble because of pain, and to bleed at every pore, and to suffer both body and spirit. (D&C 19:16–18)

10. They shrank from the act of shedding blood.

In Nephi's symbolic Gethsemane, he shrank from the act of shedding blood.

> And it came to pass that I was constrained by the Spirit that I should kill Laban; but I said in my heart: Never at any time have I shed the blood of man. And *I shrunk* and would that I might not slay him. (1 Nephi 4:10)

Jesus also shrank from the task of shedding blood.

> For behold, I, God, have suffered these things for all, that they might not suffer if they would repent; But if they would not repent they must suffer even as I; Which suffering caused myself, even God, the greatest of all, to tremble because of pain, and to bleed at every pore, and to suffer both body and spirit — and would that I might not drink the bitter cup, and shrink. (D&C 19:16–18)

> And he went a little further, and fell on his face, and prayed, saying, O my Father, if it be possible, let this cup pass from me. (Matthew 26:39)

Of course there is a major difference between Jesus's atoning shedding of blood, which can save everyone, and Nephi's private experience of killing Laban. Nephi did not create atonement. Still, the comparison is instructive, since in both instances the key actor shrank at the task of shedding blood, and the death of one man led to the salvation of a nation.

11. Both wrestled with the Spirit three times.

Nephi wrestled three times with the Spirit over the urging to shed blood.

> And it came to pass that I was constrained by the Spirit that I should kill Laban. (1 Nephi 4:10)

> And the Spirit said unto me again: Behold the Lord hath delivered him into thy hands. (1 Nephi 4:11)

> And it came to pass that the Spirit said unto me again: Slay him, for the Lord hath delivered him into thy hands. (1 Nephi 4:12)

Jesus also wrestled three times in prayer over the need to shed blood.

> And he went forward a little, and fell on the ground, and prayed that, if it were possible, the hour might pass from him. And he said, Abba, Father, all things *are* possible unto thee; take away this cup from me: nevertheless not what I will, but what thou wilt. (Mark 14:35–36)

> And again he went away, and prayed, and spake the same words. (Mark 14:39)

> And he cometh the third time, and saith unto them, Sleep on now, and take *your* rest: it is enough, the hour is come. (Mark 14:41)

12. The act of shedding blood is committed.

After mighty struggles and desiring to shrink from the deed, Nephi ultimately shed blood.

> Therefore I did obey the voice of the Spirit, and took Laban by the hair of the head, and I smote off his head with his own sword. (1 Nephi 4:18)

After might struggles and desiring to shrink from the deed, ultimately Jesus shed blood.

> Saying, Father, if thou be willing, remove this cup from me: nevertheless not my will, but thine, be done. And there appeared an angel unto him from heaven, strengthening him. And being in an agony he prayed more earnestly: and his sweat was as it were great drops of blood falling down to the ground. (Luke 22:42–44)

13. The life of one Man saves an entire nation.

One man died to save an entire nation.

> It is better that one man should perish than that a nation should dwindle and perish in unbelief. (1 Nephi 4:13)

Jesus was the one Man who died to save an entire nation of those who would be God's people.

But one of them, Caiaphas, who was high priest that year, said to them, 'You know nothing at all! You do not understand that it is better for you to have one man die for the people than to have the whole nation destroyed.' He did not say this on his own, but being high priest that year, he prophesied that Jesus was about to die for the nation, and not for the nation only, but to gather into one the dispersed children of God. (John 11:49–52)

14. Without this death, the law could not be satisfied.

Without the death of that one man, the law could not be satisfied.

> Yea, and I also thought that they could not keep the commandments of the Lord according to the law of Moses, save they should have the law. (1 Nephi 4:15)

Without the death of that one man, Jesus, the law could not be satisfied.

> Behold, I am he that gave the law, and I am he who covenanted with my people Israel; therefore, the law in me is fulfilled, for I have come to fulfil the law; therefore it hath an end. (3 Nephi 15:5)

15. The slaying of Laban is like the story of Abraham and Isaac, which is a similitude of Jesus.

Well known is the symbolic comparison of Abraham's near sacrifice of Isaac with the sacrifice God the Father made of His own Son, Jesus Christ.[6] In such a comparison, Abraham is like God the Father, and Isaac is a symbol of the humble, dutiful, willing, and obedient son. Though Laban's death had no final saving power for anyone, the comparisons are intriguing. Like Abraham, Nephi went up to Jerusalem. Like Abraham, Nephi did not know how the situation would turn out in advance. Like Abraham, Nephi found a ram caught in a thicket (Laban, who was drunk). Like Abraham, Nephi ultimately was willing to sacrifice the provided ram so God's plan could roll forth. Like Abraham, Nephi returned from Jerusalem with an unexpected lad with him. For Nephi, he was Zoram. For Abraham, he was Isaac.

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6. For comparing the Nephi vs. Laban story to Abraham on Mount Moriah, Moses vs. Pharaoh, and David vs. Goliath, see Halverson, *The Covenant Path*, 153–73.

16. The blood of the Firstborn is shed on Passover.

Nephi's encounter with Laban may have occurred on Passover.[7] This ancient Israelite holiday celebrated the death of a firstborn lamb dedicated to God to preserve God's people, while each of the firstborn in Egypt was slain. Just as Jesus liberated the faithful through His death, so too does the death of Laban liberate the word of God to now be accessible to all the faithful.[8]

17. The Word of God is acquired through the shedding of blood.

Nephi went forth by the command of God to obtain the word of God. Those words represented salvation. Those words provided salvation to the people of Nephi. Similarly, Jesus went forth *as the Word of God* to fulfill all of God's words. In each instance, the shedding of blood marked the acquiring of the word. By blood, Nephi received the word of God. By blood, Jesus fulfilled the word. The words of salvation for Nephi and his kin and the Word of Life for all of us were secured by blood.[9]

Conclusion

There are deep and beautiful patterns throughout scripture that testify of and reinforce the gospel plan. When we compare the story of Nephi confronting Laban to the story of Jesus, reading through the lens of the excruciating ordeal of suffering that ended in the shedding of blood, we see a host of common instructive themes. Nephi is a Christ figure who must confront His own mortality and His own unwillingness to act according to God's plan to save His people. Like Jesus, Nephi masters his will by aligning his will with the will of God. By so doing, like Jesus, Nephi sheds blood that leads to the salvation of untold multitudes of souls.

Reading Nephi's agonizing encounter with Laban through the lens of Jesus's suffering, we see that Nephi had his own personal Gethsemane,

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7. Don Bradley, *The Lost 116 Pages: Reconstructing the Book of Mormon's Missing Stories* (Salt Lake City: Greg Kofford Books, 2019), 135–37.

8. My thanks to Jeff Lindsay for suggesting this insight.

9. My thanks to Jeff Lindsay for also suggesting this insight. Jeff suggested additional comparisons, such as "the act of taking on the clothing of the one whose blood was shed." Garments represent authority. "By taking on the clothing and imitating the deceased, Nephi was able to gain access to sacred knowledge from a treasury and then was able to pass that blessing on to his family and many others." When we take on the garments of Jesus and seek to imitate Him, such as at the sacrament or in temple covenants, we gain access to His saving power.

when he shrank from the act of shedding blood but eventually trusted and acted within God's plan for the salvation of many.

[**Author's Note:** My thanks to the reviewers who helped to improve the message and clarity of this article.]

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The Implications of Some Standard Assumptions of New Testament Scholars: Responding to a Modern Anti-Christ

John Gee

Review of Raphael Lataster, *Questioning the Historicity of Jesus: Why a Philosophical Analysis Elucidates the Historical Discourse* (Leiden, Netherlands: E. J. Brill, 2019). 508 pages. Hardback, $210.

Abstract: *In a recent book, Raphael Lataster correctly argues that the acceptance of the general premises of New Testament scholarship, exemplified in the writings of Bart Ehrman, brings into question whether Jesus ever existed. Latter-day Saints who are serious about their witness of Jesus Christ need to be aware that acceptance of these presuppositions undermines their witness of the reality of Jesus Christ and his atonement and makes their faith vain.*

Why Should We Bother?

When the Proclamation on the Family came out in 1995, it was immediately attacked by those who would now probably characterize themselves as "progressive." And the attacks have persisted. As a consequence, I expected a similar response when the First Presidency and the Quorum of the Twelve issued a proclamation called "The Living Christ" back in 1999. More recently they have had the following to say about it:

> In recent decades the Church has largely been spared the terrible misunderstandings and persecutions experienced by the early Saints. It will not always be so. The world is moving away from the Lord faster and farther than ever before. The adversary has been loosed upon the earth. We watch, hear,

read, study, and share the words of prophets to be forewarned and protected. For example, "The Family: A Proclamation to the World" was given long before we experienced the challenges now facing the family. "The Living Christ: The Testimony of the Apostles" was prepared in advance of when we will need it most.[1]

The importance of the Savior's mission was emphasized by the Prophet Joseph Smith, who declared emphatically that "the fundamental principles of our religion are the testimony of the Apostles and Prophets, concerning Jesus Christ, that He died, was buried, and rose again the third day, and ascended into heaven; and all other things which pertain to our religion are only appendages to it." It was this very statement of the Prophet that provided the incentive for 15 prophets, seers, and revelators to issue and sign their testimony to commemorate the 2,000th anniversary of the Lord's birth. That historic testimony is titled "The Living Christ." Many members have memorized its truths. Others barely know of its existence. As you seek to learn more about Jesus Christ, I urge you to study "The Living Christ."[2]

These statements indicate that the Church leaders at the highest levels expect challenges when it comes to our understanding of Jesus Christ. The repeated emphasis on the name of the Church and its symbols should be seen as part of this effort.

Given these statements, we would do well to be aware of efforts to undermine our faith in Jesus Christ. I will examine one attempt to counter the doctrine of Christ. Though concerns about faith might motivate my examination, my treatment will look at the scholarship and misuse thereof.

The work under consideration here is not terribly well written and has not garnered a lot of attention. It desperately needed editing. The author — Raphael Lataster, a lecturer in Centre for Continuing Education at the University of Sydney where he received his PhD — does not read any ancient languages and, despite his opinion to the contrary, is not in a good position to evaluate the historicity of Jesus. So why should we consider his arguments?

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1. Robert D. Hales, "General Conference: Strengthening Faith and Testimony," *Ensign* (November 2013): 7, https://www.churchofjesuschrist.org/study/general-conference/2013/10/general-conference-strengthening-faith-and-testimony.

2. Russell M. Nelson, "Drawing the Power of Jesus Christ into Our Lives," *Ensign* (May 2017), https://www.churchofjesuschrist.org/study/general-conference/2017/04/drawing-the-power-of-jesus-christ-into-our-lives.

First, he is a vociferous advocate for the intellectual position that Jesus of Nazareth never existed. He is thus "anti-Christ" in the Book of Mormon's usage of the term[3] rather than the current Christian usage of the term. He may ramble and repeat himself, but he does put forward an argument. If one wishes to deal with the arguments that Jesus never lived, one can at least find them in his book.

Second, unlike many who write on the subject, he is clear on his major assumptions. He does not attempt to hide them. It is useful to examine those assumptions.

Third, he makes some valid points worth considering. I agree with some of his minor premises while I disagree with his major argument.

Some have disparaged an "emphasis on propositional claims"[4] and claimed that "the early church father Origen is one of the early authorities Latter-day Saints should study most appreciatively."[5] Origen is held up as a model because "Origen was reluctant to respond to the critics for the following reason. He insisted that 'the doctrine [itself is] a better answer than any writing' he could make by way of response. More to the point, he added, the strongest defense of Christianity 'rests on … that power of Jesus which is manifest to those who are not altogether devoid of perception.'"[6] This individual thus calls for an apologetics that consists of "unfolding the full power and scope and beauty of Christ's ongoing ministry,"[7] whatever that may mean. This comes from a talk in response to the previous year's speaker, who had told the same organization, "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."[8] While the reluctance of Origen is praised, Origen, nevertheless, provided a point-by-point refutation

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3. Alma 30:6: "[H]e was Anti-Christ, for he began to preach unto the people against the prophecies which had been spoken by the prophets, concerning the coming of Christ."

4. Terryl Givens, "Apologetics and Disciples of the Second Sort" in *BYU Neal A. Maxwell Institute for Religious Scholarship Annual Report 2019* (Provo, UT: Neal A. Maxwell Institute for Religious Scholarship, 2020), 45–46.

5. Ibid., 42.

6. Ibid., 43.

7. Ibid., 54.

8. Jeffrey R. Holland, "The Maxwell Legacy in the 21st Century," in *BYU Neal A. Maxwell Institute for Religious Scholarship Annual Report 2018* (Provo, UT: Neal A. Maxwell Institute for Religious Scholarship, 2019), 14.

of his intellectual opponent and explicitly dealt with the propositions. Keeping a hand firmly in the face is more than just referring individuals to Church doctrine. It is actively refuting bad argumentation and providing counter arguments. Furthermore, a theological approach to an argument like Lataster's is worse than useless as it falls into the trap that he has laid.

Assumptions

Lataster works in the realm of Historical Jesus research, where he distinguishes three camps: "Lay fundamentalist Christians and conservative Bible scholars alike tend to believe in a miracle-working, divine, Biblical, Christ of Faith. Mythicists tend to cluster at the opposite end of the spectrum, proposing a 'mythical' (i.e., entirely fictitious) Jesus. Most secular scholars (such as Bart Ehrman) tend to lie somewhere in between, proposing a so-called Historical Jesus, devoid of divinity and miracles" (156). Lataster is a mythicist who argues that the middle ground of the secular scholars is incoherent and that they should join his camp.

Lataster's book is a response to the book by University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill Professor of Religious Studies Bart D. Ehrman, entitled, *Did Jesus Exist?*[9] Ehrman, once an evangelical Christian and now an agnostic, and Lataster, an avowed atheist, share a number of assumptions:

1. There are no contemporary or near contemporary sources for the existence of Jesus (33–35).
2. There are no eyewitness accounts of Jesus's life (33).
3. We do not know who the authors of the Gospels were (33–34).
4. All the Gospel narratives are late (34).
5. Much of the Gospels and other sources about Jesus were fabricated (37).

To be fair, almost all these assumptions are shared by a majority of New Testament scholars. They are not idiosyncratic to Ehrman and Lataster.

Lataster also has his own assumptions that he may or may not share with Ehrman:

1. There is no God (15).

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9. Bart D. Ehrman, *Did Jesus Exist? The Historical Argument for Jesus of Nazareth* (New York: HarperOne, 2012).

2. There are no miracles: Lataster rejects "miraculous claims, appeals to the supernatural, or a theological assertion of the truth of the Christ of Faith" (156).
3. Scholarship must proceed on "naturalistic assumptions" (17).
4. Jesus is inherently implausible: "This book will certainly not focus on the implausibility of the Biblical Jesus. That will be taken for granted" (16).
5. We do not need to know ancient languages: "Academics and lay-people need not learn Greek or fully acquaint themselves with ancient Greek culture" (7).
6. Christians cannot be trusted to be objective and should not be permitted to discuss the matter of whether Jesus existed (14–22).

One argument about method on which I agree with Lataster is that history cannot be founded on speculated sources (39–68). Lataster takes Ehrman to task because "he has no way of verifying the contents of his non-existing sources that he is merely — and fallaciously — appealing to the possibility, and that he ought to be more reserved, despite this approach being the cornerstone of his entire case" (48). Scholars are free to speculate about sources that no longer exist. After all, most sources from ancient history no longer exist. But their content cannot be used for history because the content no longer exists. For example, we know that tax records from pharaonic Egypt existed, based on those that have survived, but we cannot reconstruct the content of those that did not survive.

The force of Lataster's argument is that if one shares the five assumptions that Ehrman and Lataster share, then it is difficult to argue that Jesus was an actual historical person. Lataster is correct.

The Outgrowth of Assumptions

The five assumptions that Lataster and many — if not the majority of — New Testament scholars accept are the consequence of one particular solution to a very old problem. The synoptic problem can be stated as follows: How can one account for the similarities — in some cases verbatim — between the gospels of Matthew, Mark, and Luke. Traditional solutions to the problem go back to historical evidence from the second century. Protestants, however, who only accepted scripture (*sola scriptura*) and rejected the use of tradition, rejected this solution. One proposed solution was that Matthew, Mark, and Luke all borrowed from a hypothetical earlier source denoted *Q* from German *Quelle*, "source." There was no historical evidence for this source, but at least it did not follow Catholic tradition.

Hypothesizing a source Q forced scholars to date the gospels all later than that (assumption 4), which in turn meant there were no extant contemporary or near contemporary sources for Jesus (assumption 1) and, given the typical dates hypothesized for the gospels, no eyewitness accounts of Jesus (assumption 2). Rejecting tradition also meant we could not trust the traditional attributions of the gospels (assumption 3). We would also have to reject the correct handing down of the details of Jesus's life, so at least some of them must have been made up (assumption 5).

Lataster does not seem to realize that historically the acceptance of the five assumptions that he shares with Ehrman depends on the acceptance of a hypothetical source that he rejects. Be that as it may, he does take the assumptions to their logical conclusions. If the gospels are late, then the earliest New Testament source would be Paul, who never knew Jesus during his mortal life[10] and who does not discuss Jesus's mortal life in his epistles (262–347). The burden then falls on Mark: "If the epistles and saying documents may be inauthentic, lack biographical detail, or are referring to a non-earthly Jesus, the gospels are crucial in establishing Jesus as a literal human being in a specific historical — and earthly — setting. Given that the gospels of Matthew, Luke, and John come after and expand on Mark's gospel, the reliability of Mark's gospel as historical testimony is paramount" (221). Lataster dismisses Mark because "the author of Mark is unknown, and it was written around four decades or more after the death of Jesus. No original copy of Mark is extant" (246). "Like the author, the genre of Mark is unknown, though it does contain fabrications and myth" (248). Lataster substantiates most of this by reference to secondary or tertiary sources.

Having dismissed the New Testament sources, Lataster dismisses Josephus "as fraudulent, in whole, or in part" (193), Tacitus as "a later Christian interpolation" (203), Thallus because we "cannot be sure that Thallus mentioned Jesus" (207), Pliny as already referring to a celestial rather than an earthly Jesus (208), and the Talmud as offering "little to no useful information with regards to the historical Jesus" (211). Having rejected the possibility of any historical sources, it is unsurprising that Lataster finds nothing historical in the sources. He is merely taking the stated assumptions to their logical conclusion.

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10. 1 Corinthians 15:8.

Bayesian Bunk

Lataster insists that true historians engage in probabilistic history. For this he resorts to a Bayesian analysis of a sort. He claims to present the following "Bayes's Theorem in a natural language format" (164):

The probability our explanation is true

$$= \frac{\text{How typical our explanation is} \times \text{How expected the evidence is if our explanation is true}}{\{\text{repeat the above}\} + \{\text{How atypical our explanation is} \times \text{How expected the evidence is if our explanation isn't true}\}}$$

When Lataster puts this into practice, he says, "I would argue that employing Bayesian reasoning without calculations is potentially more useful and reliable, given that a multitude of errors can be made when assigning quantitative values" (171). He then defines a historical hypothesis (that Herod was killed by an angel) as *h*. After some argumentation, he concludes, "So we can rationally and formally judge *h* to be extremely improbable; so close to 0% that we needn't seriously entertain the notion, despite the lack of 'absolute proof' that Acts is inaccurate here. As this case study demonstrates, Bayesian reasoning can be formally and mathematically valid, even if accurate calculations are not actually carried out" (172). Sorry, that is cheating. If one is actually going to take a probabilistic approach, then one needs to deal with real numbers which, because they are probabilities, will be between zero and one. The Bayesian approach is not valid if one simply declares the result without actually doing the calculation.

Lataster's equations look funny. The usual way that Bayes' Theorem is expressed is:

$$P(A|B) = \frac{P(B|A) \times P(A)}{P(B)}$$

Where P(A|B) means the probability that A is true given that B is true. One can substitute in the denominator by breaking down the probability of B being true whether A is true or not true:

$$P(B) = P(B|A) \times P(A) + P(B|\sim A) \times P(\sim A)$$

Thus, one gets the equation for Bayes's Theorem as:

$$P(A|B) = \frac{P(B|A) \times P(A)}{P(B|A) \times P(A) + P(B|\sim A) \times P(\sim A)}$$

This looks at least superficially similar to the equation that Lataster produced, but it is not. In translating Bayes's Theorem into words, Lataster has changed the meaning of the equation. Lataster is simply copying the mistakes of Richard Carrier.[11] Carrier tries to use Bayes's Theorem to support his adoption of the logical fallacy of negative proof.[12] It is difficult to decide whether Carrier is incompetent in his use of mathematics (as illustrated by his nonstandard notation and misinterpretation of the equations),[13] or if he knows what he is doing but is being disingenuous about it (as illustrated by his "even more generous numbers" that make it appear that a made up case is more probable than a historical one).[14] Neither Lataster nor Carrier states or uses Bayes's Theorem correctly.

To see what difference it makes, consider the conditional expression in the numerator of Lataster's equation (which is the P(B|A) in the mathematical equation). For Lataster, P(B|A) is "how expected the evidence is if our explanation is true." Thus, A is "our explanation is true" and B is "our evidence is expected." Thus, if Lataster were following Bayes's Theorem, then with his P(B|A) defined as he does, what he would be calculating is the probability of whether our explanation is true if the evidence is expected. Since, for Lataster, the evidence that Herod would be killed by an angel is so unexpected as to equal zero, then P(B) = 0 and Lataster would be dividing by zero, which is allowed neither by Bayes's Theorem nor mathematics. One can see why Lataster says that "employing Bayesian reasoning without calculations is potentially more useful" because it allows him to use mathematics to bamboozle his audience without actually doing the math.

Mathematically, for Lataster's conclusion to actually be true following his own formula, either the explanation must be completely atypical, or the evidence must be unexpected for the truth of the explanation. In Lataster's case, however, the hypothesis (*h*) he is considering is the report in Acts that Herod was killed by an angel. All one has to do is look at ancient medical manuals —say the first two preserved tablets of the *Diagnostic and Prognostic Series* (DPS) — to see that being afflicted with diseases is often considered to be by the hand of a supernatural being[15]

11. Richard Carrier, *Proving History: Bayes's Theorem and the Quest for the Historical Jesus* (Amherst, New York: Prometheus Books, 2012), 50.

12. Ibid., 52, 117–19; for the fallacy, see David Hackett Fischer, *Historians' Fallacies: Toward a Logic of Historical Thought* (New York: Harper, 1970), 47–48.

13. Carrier, *Proving History*, 50, 67, 69.

14. Ibid., 56–60.

15. DPS 3.10, 12, 13–14, 15–16, 17, 18, 19, 43, 44, 47, 53, 64, 65, 81, 82, 83, 84, 85, 87, 88, 89, 90, 93, 100, 101, 102, 103, 104, 4.1, 2, 3, 4, 7, 8, 10, 11, 13, 14, 16, 17, 18, 19,

and is thus a typical ancient explanation. Or one can look at the so-called magical texts and find explicit references to angels being able to kill and destroy.[16] Looking at this from a modern medical point of view, Lataster may attribute the death of Herod as being from other causes, but he is not doing ancient history. If he were, he could not see the explanation in the book of Acts as atypical or the evidence ancient authors provided as unexpected. One can see why Lataster does not see the need for either himself or his audience to be acquainted with ancient culture (7).

Comparative Ancient History

Lataster's naiveté about the practice and challenges of ancient history is in large part because he has not actually tried to do any ancient history outside the narrow confines of the New Testament, whose historical authenticity he rejects. A broader exposure to the actual discipline might have tempered his certitude. I will highlight only three examples: the historicity of the Old Testament, the anonymity of historical sources, and the gap between a text and manuscripts for the text.

(1) Lataster often draws a parallel to the Old Testament, where he follows the minimalist position to assert that it was all made up late (e.g., 2, 63, 156n112). In this regard it is instructive to read what Israel Finkelstein, the archaeologist most appealed to by minimalists, says about the subject:

> It is inconceivable that the [biblical] authors invented stories — that they made up history. The biblical history was written to serve an ideological platform, and as such, it must have been written in a way that would sound reliable to the reader and/or listener. … Needless to say, the authors would have otherwise lost their credibility and failed to transmit their messages and achieve their goals. It follows that one cannot simply assume that Abraham, or Moses, never existed.[17]

The ancient historical record is incomplete. It is very selective both in terms of what was originally recorded and what has survived. The

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20–21, 22, 24, 25, 26, 28, 31, 32, 33, 34, 35–36, 37, 38, 39a, 39b, 40, 41, 44, 50, 54–55, 56–57, 59, 61, 62, 63, 64, 66–67, 75, 76, 77, 78, 79, 80, 81, 82, 83, 84, 115, 116–17, 123, 124, 125, 143, in JoAnn Scurlock, *Sourcebook for Ancient Mesopotamian Medicine* (Atlanta: Society of Biblical Literature, 2014), 13–41.

16. *PGM* I 98–127, in Karl Preisendanz, *Papyri Graecae Magicae: Die griechischen Zuberpapyri* (Berlin: B. G. Teubner, 1928–31), 1:8.

17. Israel Finkelstein, "A Short Summary: Bible and Archaeology," in *The Quest for the Historical Israel*, ed. Brian B. Schmidt (Atlanta: Society of Biblical Literature, 2007), 185.

vast majority of ancient people left no historical trace. In terms of most ancient historical individuals, Jesus of Nazareth is comparatively well attested. Do I wish that we had more information? Of course. Am I willing to completely discount the information we do have based on Lataster's arguments? If I were and were consistent, I might as well abandon ancient history entirely.

(2) Lataster complains that "the gospel authors are also anonymous, so it cannot be simply presumed that they are eyewitnesses, reliably appealing to eyewitnesses, or even otherwise well informed" (213–14). Not knowing the author of historical sources is not that usual, nor does it necessarily invalidate the history. For example, none of the authors of the twenty-four Assyrian or Babylonian chronicles is known,[18] but that does not make the events narrated in them fabricated. Sixty-three anonymous historical works are known from papyri,[19] but this does not automatically make them invalid or inaccurate.

(3) Lataster argues that the gap between text and manuscript somehow invalidates or brings into question its reliability: "No original copy of Mark is extant; the oldest manuscript which contains some sections of Mark's Gospel, *Papyrus 45*, dates to the third century" (246). This would be about two centuries later.

Let's look at the time lag between text and manuscript. It is not unusual to have a gap of several centuries between when a text was written and the earliest manuscript of that text. Let us consider some examples from the genre of history (arranged from shortest to longest span):

- The Roman historian Dio Cassius may have lived in the late second century AD,[20] but the earliest manuscript of his work is fifth or sixth century.[21] There is thus a gap of 300 or 400 years between the writing and the earliest manuscript.
- Xenophon lived from about 428 BC to 354 BC.[22] A third century AD fragment of his *Anabasis* survives, and the first

18. A. K. Grayson, *Assyrian and Babylonian Chronicles* (Locust Valley, NY: J. J. Augustin, 1975).

19. Orsolina Montevecchi, *La Papirologia* (Milano: Vita e Pensiero, 1988), 363.

20. Alexander Hugh McDonald, s.v. "Dio (2) Cassius," *Oxford Classical Dictionary*, 2nd ed., eds. N. G. L. Hammond and H. H. Scullard (Oxford, UK: Clarendon Press, 1970), 345.

21. *Dio's Roman History I: Fragments of Books I–XI*, ed. E. Cary (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1970), xxviii.

22. Derek J. Mosley, s.v. "Xenophon," *Oxford Classical Dictionary*, 1141.

full manuscript dates to the fourteenth century.[23] Thus there are about 500 years between the historian and the earliest surviving manuscript of his work.

- Gaius Plinius Caecilius Secundus (ca. AD 61–112) at the end of the first century generated a mass of correspondence with the emperor Trajan (ruled AD 98–117), which he then collected and published at the beginning of the second century.[24] This is a useful treasure trove of primary documents, but the earliest surviving manuscript dates to the ninth century,[25] at least 700 years later.

- Cornelius Tacitus was born about AD 56 and died apparently after AD 115.[26] The earliest manuscript of his *Annals* dates to the ninth century.[27] Thus there are about 700 years between the two. His *Histories* are first attested later, in the eleventh century,[28] with at least 900 years between the two.

- Gaius Julius Caesar was born about 100 BC and was assassinated in 44 BC.[29] The earliest manuscript of his Gallic Wars dates to the ninth century,[30] about 900 years after it was written. The earliest manuscript of his account of the civil war is tenth century.[31] This makes it about 1,000 years after it was written.

- Herodotus of Halicarnassus was born a little before the Persian War (499–449 BC) and lived until the Peloponnesian War (431–404 BC).[32] The earliest manuscript of Herodotus dates to

23. *Xenophontis Opera Omnia*, ed. E. C. Marchant (Oxford, UK: Clarendon Press, 1904), 3:xiv.

24. A. N. Sherwin-White, s.v. "Pliny (2) the Younger," *Oxford Classical Dictionary*, 846–47.

25. *C. Plini Caecili Secundi Epistularum Libri Decem*, ed. R. A. B. Mynors (Oxford, UK: Clarendon Press, 1963), 3.

26. Martin P. Charlesworth and Gavin B. Townend, s.v. "Tacitus," *Oxford Classical Dictionary*, 1034.

27. *Cornelii Taciti Annalium*, ed. C. D. Fisher (Oxford, UK: Clarendon Press, 1906), viii.

28. *Cornelii Taciti Historiarum Libri*, ed. C. D. Fisher (Oxford, UK: Clarendon Press, 1911), viii.

29. G. Edward F. Chilver, s.v. "Caesar," *Oxford Classical Dictionary*, 189–90.

30. Caesar, *The Gallic War*, ed. H. J. Edwards (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1986), xvii.

31. *C. Iuli Caesaris Commentariorum*, ed. Renatus du Pontet (Oxford, UK: Clarendon Press, 1901), 3:iii.

32. John D. Denniston and Lionel Pearson, s.v. "Herodotus," *Oxford Classical Dictionary*, 507.

the end of the first century or early second century AD,[33] about 500 years later. The earliest manuscript upon which editions are based of Herodotus is tenth century AD,[34] at least 1,300 years later.

- Thucydides was born between 460 and 455 BC and probably died about 400 BC.[35] The earliest manuscript for Thucydides, however, is fourteenth century AD,[36] at least 1,700 years later.

The length of time between the writing of the gospels and their earliest manuscripts is less than any of these, no matter when one dates the gospels.

The Date of the Gospels

Lataster accepts the assumption of Ehrman that the gospels are late. This assumption, which I do not share, is widespread if not dominant among New Testament scholars. It is part of a number of assumptions and theories I have already enumerated. It is important to remember that they are all hypotheses and that there is not a shred of historical evidence for any of them. Some of the hypotheses can be questioned on other grounds.

Because some will find my assertion that there is no historical evidence for these hypotheses offensive, perhaps I should explain what evidence counts as historical and why it fails on those counts. The assertions are not those that one can cite historical evidence from an ancient text to demonstrate; they must be argued. The gospels themselves carry no historical dates or facts about their writing. This is not unusual for two reasons. The first is that ancient documents carrying dates are generally either legal or commemorative in nature. Even things we customarily date in the modern world, like letters, were usually not dated back then. Writings might carry indications of date but not generally the dates themselves; they are datable but not dated. Thus the date of most ancient documents is not given but must be argued from those indications of date. The second is that the focus of the gospel writers was on Jesus, not themselves. The historical evidence for the writing of the gospels is

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33. Montevecchi, *La Papirologia*, 361.

34. *Herodoti Historiae*, 3rd ed., ed. Carolus Hude (Oxford, UK: Clarendon Press, 1927), 1:v.

35. Henry Theodore Wade-Gery, s.v. "Thucydides," *Oxford Classical Dictionary*, 1067.

36. *Thucydidis Historiae*, ed. Henry Stuart Jones (Oxford, UK: Clarendon Press, 1942), 1:ix.

preserved in a variety of testimonia of later Christian authors[37] rather than in some narcissistic scene-stealing attention grab by the ancient authors. Most ancient historians — like Herodotus or Plutarch — do not talk much about themselves. Even Julius Caesar, who did, talked about himself in the third person rather than the first person. The focus remains on the subject of investigation not the investigator.

Since the gospels themselves are not dated, every date applied by modern scholars presumes an argument about the date. This is the argument behind my dates.

Lataster cites with approval the following statement: "Of the hundreds of Christian works that survive from the first three centuries of the Common Era, no reliable histories exist aside perhaps from fragments of the five books of Papias" (224). Given that we share so few initial assumptions, this is at least a common starting point. Papias lived and wrote in the early second century, having heard the apostle John himself and being an associate of Polycarp.[38] According to the Papias, "Mark having become the interpreter of Peter, wrote down exactly as much as he remembered of the things that were said and done by the Lord, though not in order. For he had neither heard the Lord nor followed him, but later, as he said, of Peter, who fitted his teaching according to the requirements but did not make an ordered account of the things of the Lord so that Mark did not mistake in writing down what he remembered for he took care to omit nothing that he heard or to falsely state anything in them."[39] Though Mark's account is secondhand, it was made with the intention of being accurate. Mark had first been a companion of Paul,[40] and then Barnabas,[41] and these events apparently occurred before he was a companion of Peter. Thus, Mark's gospel would have been written a number of years after the council of Jerusalem recorded in Acts 15. This provides us a *terminus post quem*, a date after which the gospel of Mark must have been written.

Papias records the following of Matthew: "Matthew ordered the accounts in the Hebrew dialect; each interpreted these as he was able."[42] According to Papias, Matthew originally wrote in Hebrew, and in the

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37. These are conveniently gathered in *Synopsis Quattuor Evangeliorum*, 12th ed., ed. Kurt Aland (Stuttgart, DEU: Deutsche Bibelgesellschaft, 1976), 531–48.

38. Irenaeus, *Against the Heresies*, V.33.4; Eusebius, *Ecclesiastical History*, III.39.1.

39. Papias, fragment 3, cited in Eusebius, *Ecclesiastical History*, III.39.15.

40. Acts 12:25.

41. Acts 15:37–39.

42. Papias, fragment 3, cited in Eusebius, *Ecclesiastical History*, III.39.16.

beginning there were variant translations into Greek, but most of the quotations come from a standardized translation.

Before we get to the date of Matthew, let's date a non-canonical text: the *Didache*. At the end of the first century, Ignatius knows of the following ecclesiastical offices: apostle,[43] bishop,[44] elder,[45] and deacon.[46] The office of apostle already seems to be in the past rather than the present.[47] After the time of Ignatius, only the offices of bishop, elder, and deacon remain. The time of Ignatius at the end of the first century marks a firm date after which only those offices remain. Other offices, like prophet[48] and evangelist,[49] which are current in the middle of the first century, are not found in the church after the first century.

The *Didache*, however, treats both apostles[50] and prophets[51] as current offices as well as bishops[52] and deacons.[53] These are attested in book of Acts[54] and the epistles of Paul[55] in the middle of the first century. The *Didache* must date to sometime in the first century.

The *Didache* is labeled as "the teaching of the Lord to the Gentiles through the twelve apostles"[56] It cannot date before the opening of the gospel to the Gentiles recounted in Acts 10. Based on the chronology of Paul's life, this would have to be before Paul's mission to the Gentiles in Tarsus.[57] The *Didache* also refers to disciples as "Christians"[58] which occurs after the mission of Paul and Barnabas to Antioch.[59]

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43. Ignatius, *Epistle to the Ephesians* 3.1, 6.1, 7.1.

44. Ignatius, *Epistle to the Ephesians* 2.2, 3.2, 4.1, 5.2, 6.1; Ignatius, *Epistle to the Magnesians* 2–3.2, 6.1–2, 7.1, 13.1, 15; Ignatius *Epistle to the Trallians* 2.2; 3.1; Ignatius, *Epistle to the Philadelphians* 2.1; Ignatius, *Epistle to the Smyrnians* 8.1.

45. Ignatius, *Epistle to the Ephesians* 2.2, 4.1; Ignatius, *Epistle to the Magnesians* 2–3.1, 6.1, 7.1, 13.1.

46. Ignatius, *Epistle to the Magnesians* 6.1, 13.1.

47. Ignatius, *Epistle to the Ephesians* 3.1.

48. Acts 11:27; 13:1; 15:32; 21:10; 1 Corinthians 12:28–29; Ephesians 4:11.

49. Acts 21:8; Ephesians 4:11; 2 Timothy 4:5.

50. *Didache* 11.3–6.

51. *Didache* 11.3–12; 13.1–7; 15.2.

52. *Didache* 15.1.

53. *Didache* 15.1.

54. Acts 13:1, 6, 15; 15:32; 21:10.

55. 1 Corinthians 12:29; 14:29; Ephesians 2:20; 3:5; 4:11.

56. *Didache* title.

57. Acts 9:30.

58. *Didache* 12.4.

59. Acts 11:26.

Significantly, however, the *Didache* contains none of the instructions to the Gentiles on circumcision deriving from the Jerusalem council.[60] The instructions of the Jerusalem council also contain none of the basic Christian teachings and practices enumerated in the *Didache*. The pronouncements of the Jerusalem council seem to be an appendix to the *Didache*. The *Didache* thus predates the Jerusalem council.[61] This places the *Didache* sometime between Acts 11 and 15.

The *Didache* three times refers to something it calls "the gospel,"[62] which is in the singular. It knows only one. When it quotes Jesus, the quotations are from Matthew 6:9–13[63] and 7:6,[64] not from Luke or Mark. The gospel of Matthew must predate the *Didache* and thus must date sometime before Acts 15 at latest, which puts it before the gospel of Mark.

Matthew, however, preserves the injunction of Jesus to his apostles not to preach to the Gentiles.[65] Such prohibitions are absent from Luke and Mark, which were written after the permission to preach to the Gentiles. Thus, Matthew must have been written before the prohibition was lifted in Acts 9–10. This puts the writing of Matthew within a few years of the resurrection.

Other individuals date Matthew differently, and some may wish to dispute my arguments. I, however, have provided my reasoning for dating Matthew when I do. Those who disagree have an obligation to provide reasoned arguments for their dates.

This dating of Matthew based on historical sources has an unintended benefit when applied to the presuppositions that Lataster, Ehrman, and most New Testament scholars share. It will be remembered that they presuppose:

1. There are no contemporary or near contemporary sources for the existence of Jesus (33–35). Dating Matthew within a few years of the resurrection means that it is a near contemporary source.
2. There are no eyewitness accounts of Jesus's life (33). Putting Matthew as a near contemporary source means that it can be an eyewitness source as Papias claimed it was.

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60. Acts 15:20–24.
61. This does not preclude the possibility that the text has been tampered with. *Didache* 7.3 is an example of such a passage.
62. *Didache* 8.2, 15.3, 4.
63. *Didache* 8.2.
64. *Didache* 9.5.
65. Matthew 10:5–6.

3. We do not know who the authors of the Gospels were (33–34). If the gospel of Matthew dates so early, there is no reason to doubt Papias's attribution.

4. All the Gospel narratives are late (34). If the dating of Matthew is correct, it is not late.

Dating Matthew when I do has the added benefit of eliminating both the possibility of and need for the hypothetical sources to which both Lataster and I object.

Eyewitnesses

There is one argument for the historicity of Jesus that Paul puts forward which Lataster did not adequately deal with. Paul argues that "if Christ is not risen," if the resurrection is not an actual historical event, "our faith is worthless."[66] The early Christians suffered at a distinct disadvantage in the society and the culture around them. They gave up a number of pleasures and suffered privations and persecutions to live their faith. Their reward would be in the resurrection, the assurance of which was Jesus's resurrection. If they did not have that, why were they suffering through what they did? Paul appeals to the literal historical resurrection because otherwise the whole faith was a waste of time. The mythic Christ that Lataster promotes was neither comfort nor salvation to the early Christians. The earliest Christians were clear on this point.

This is why Paul points out the number of witnesses to the historical reality of Jesus of Nazareth and his resurrection who were still alive when Paul wrote.[67] Paul had personally delivered this message to his audience and thus did not repeat it in a letter. Ancient letters generally presume a great deal of knowledge in common between the sender and the recipient and deal only with essential matters. The letters preserved in the New Testament did not need to repeat material everyone already knew, which would include the life of Jesus. Reminders would be included only as relevant.

Paul's argument points to the impotence of theology to deal with Lataster's argument and thus the risks inherent in the discipline of theology. In the past the Church of Jesus Christ has not had much use for what other denominations do when they do theology. More recently, certain individuals in the Church have tried to do theology the way that theologians in other denominations do theology: impose on the

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66. 1 Corinthians 15:17.
67. 1 Corinthians 15:3–8.

Church human reasoning devoid of revelation; theologians usurp the role of prophets and apostles. The discipline of theology goes back to Plato, who saw it as applied to texts that were myths (*mythous*) that were mostly false (*pseudos*).[68] Theology assumes that the texts which it studies are not historical, or at least see whether or not they are historical as being irrelevant. This is the same position held by Lataster, who also sees the gospels and Jesus as myths, devoid of any historical reality. Paul, on the other hand, argues that the acceptance of such a line of thought makes faith in Jesus Christ futile. According to Paul, there is no point in accepting Jesus Christ or being a Christian if Jesus's life and resurrection did not really happen.

Conclusions

Whatever Lataster's failings as a writer, he is at least clear on his assumptions and correctly takes them to their logical conclusions. I agree with Lataster that if one accepts the assumptions of most scholars of the New Testament, it is difficult to argue that Jesus ever existed. Those assumptions are worth examining, and Latter-day Saints would do well not to take them uncritically. Based on historical evidence, I do not accept his assumptions.

I also agree with Lataster that one cannot argue history on the basis of the content of nonexistent or hypothetical sources.

Members of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints who accept the presuppositions of New Testament scholars such as Bart Ehrman need to be able to articulate how or in what way they can accept those assumptions and still bear any sort of witness of Jesus Christ. If we wish to be "valiant in the testimony of Jesus",[69] we might consider what sort of obligation that entails on us. Whatever his other faults or failings, we can thank Lataster for articulating the assumptions and clearly pointing to their logical conclusions.

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68. Plato, *Republic* 2.377a.
69. D&C 76:79.

the Egyptological Seminar, Enchoria, Ensign, FARMS Review, Göttinger Miszellen, Issues in Religion and Psychotherapy, Journal of Academic Perspecitves, Journal of the American Research Center in Egypt, Journal of Book of Mormon Studies, Journal of Egyptian History, Journal of the Society for the Study of Egyptian Antiquities, Lingua Aegyptia, Review of Books on the Book of Mormon, Studien zur altägyptischen Kultur, *and* Interpreter*, and by such presses as American University of Cairo Press, Archaeopress, Association Égyptologique Reine Élisabeth, E. J. Brill, Carsten Niebuhr Institute of Near Eastern Studies, Czech Institute of Egyptology, Deseret Book, de Gruyter, Harrassowitz, Institut Français d'Archéologie Orientale, Macmillan, Oxford University Press, Peeters, Praeger, Religious Studies Center, and Society of Biblical Literature. He has published three books and has edited eight books and an international multilingual peer-reviewed professional journal. He served twice as a section chair for the Society of Biblical Literature.*

Ancient Temple Imagery in the Sermons of Jacob

David E. Bokovoy

Abstract: *This essay makes a compelling argument for Jacob, the brother of Nephi, having deep knowledge of ancient Israelite temple ritual, concepts, and imagery, based on two of Jacob's sermons in 2 Nephi 9 and Jacob 1-3. For instance, he discusses the duty of the priest to expiate sin and make atonement before the Lord and of entering God's presence. Jacob quotes temple-related verses from the Old Testament, like Psalm 95. The allusions to the temple are not forced, but very subtle. Of course, Jacob's central topic, the atonement, is a temple topic itself, and its opposite, impurity, is also expressed by Jacob in terms familiar and central to an ancient temple priest. The temple is also shown as a gate to heaven.*

Despite its deep spiritual significance for Latter-day Saints, the Book of Mormon contains very few explicit references to temple worship.

Toward the beginning of Nephi's record, the Book of Mormon prophet informs his readers that he built a temple for his community "after the manner of the temple of Solomon" (2 Nephi 5:16). Years later, the righteous King Benjamin gathered his people at the temple to hear the words of his highly influential sermon (see Mosiah 2:6); similarly, when the resurrected Christ visited the Nephites, the Book of Mormon makes note that the long-awaited theophany occurred specifically at the temple precinct in Bountiful (see 3 Nephi 11:1). Hence, even though we do not have much explicit detail, clearly the temple itself fulfilled a decisive role in Nephite religious conceptions.

Since the Book of Mormon presents the Nephites as a forgotten familial branch of ancient Israel, the profound religious role that the temple appears to have held in Nephite society really comes as no surprise. For both biblical and ancient Israel, the temple served as the very focal point of religious devotion.[1] In its most basic, fundamental sense, the temple provided a literal dwelling place for Deity.[2] The temple precinct was therefore considered "holy," and entry into Israelite temple space not only imbued the worshiper with a degree of that holiness, but also conceptually placed the individual in the presence of divinity.

Even though its depiction of actualized temple rituals is admittedly somewhat slight, when Book of Mormon prophetic discourse is read through the lens of ancient temple worship, many of these sermons can be shown to reflect imagery and ritual performances directly associated with biblical concepts.[3] This observation proves especially true in the teachings of the Book of Mormon prophet Jacob. Thus, through an analysis of two of Jacob's sermons (2 Nephi 9 and Jacob 1–3), Book of Mormon prophetic discourse can be shown to draw on a variety of ancient temple themes.

As the second Nephite scribal voice, Jacob, the brother of Nephi, fulfills a central role as priestly author in what the Book of Mormon itself identifies as the more spiritually focused writings of the small plates. Nephi specifically refers to Jacob as a "consecrated" priest "over the land" of Nephi's people (2 Nephi 5:26). According to his own writings, Jacob's priestly responsibility dictated that he take upon his "head" the sins of the people if he failed to teach them the word of God (see Jacob 1:18).

Reading Jacob's description of his obligation in connection with biblical temple ritual creates a type of reversal in Jacob's statement from the traditional role fulfilled by an Israelite high priest. According to Exodus 28:38, when officiating in temple worship, the high priest would wear the sacred priestly "cap" or "miter" inscribed with the Hebrew

phrase "holiness to Yahweh/the Lord," signifying that as priest, he was able to effectively expiate or absorb sin:

> [Holiness to the Lord] shall be upon Aaron's forehead, that Aaron may bear the iniquity of the holy things, which the children of Israel shall hallow in all their holy gifts; and it shall be always upon his forehead, that they may be accepted before the LORD. (Exodus 28:38)

This biblical text indicates that part of the priestly duty consisted in removing sin, and that wearing a "cap" upon his head, the biblical high priest was able to win acceptance for Israel before the Lord.

In a related notion, Leviticus 10:17 indicates that biblical priests carried the responsibility to "bear the iniquity of the congregation" and to "make atonement for them before the LORD." This biblical concept of priestly responsibility to absorb sin, therefore, parallels Jacob's description of his own assignment:

> And we did magnify our office unto the Lord, taking upon us the responsibility, answering the sins of the people upon our own heads if we did not teach them the word of God with all diligence; wherefore, by laboring with our might their blood might not come upon our garments; otherwise their blood would come upon our garments, and we would not be found spotless at the last day. (Jacob 1:19)

When read through the lens of ancient Israelite temple worship, Jacob's comments bring to mind the thought of the biblical priest, whose robes were no doubt stained with the blood that had effectively absorbed the iniquity of his people during sacrificial slaughter. Yet Jacob's role was also that of teacher, and like the biblical priest who could "bear iniquities of the congregation," as symbolized through the sacred phrase inscribed upon the cap worn directly upon his head, Jacob recognized that he would take "the sins of the people upon [his] own head" if he failed to fulfill his consecrated commission.

According to the Book of Mormon, in serving as a priest, Jacob would have performed Mosaic temple ordinances in the Nephite temple constructed by his brother as a parallel to Solomon's holy shrine. Alma 25:15 states that the Nephites participated in the "outward performances" of the law of Moses. In terms of biblical tradition, some of these "outward performances" appear directly linked with temple worship and ritual. It is perhaps therefore significant that the same literary unit in the Book

of Mormon that describes Nephi building a temple also identifies Nephi consecrating Jacob to serve as priest (see 2 Nephi 5:16, 26).

In his own writings, Jacob identifies himself as a priest who taught his people the word of God in the temple:

> Wherefore I, Jacob, gave unto them these words as I taught them in the temple, having first obtained mine errand from the Lord. For I, Jacob, and my brother Joseph had been consecrated priests and teachers of this people, by the hand of Nephi. (Jacob 1:17–18)

Significantly, Jacob's priestly sermons, including the one he delivers specifically at the temple, suggest a profound familiarity on the part of the author with the rituals and concepts connected with ancient Israelite temple worship. Jacob goes so far as to specifically identify his sermon in Jacob 2–3:12 as a temple discourse in his opening remarks:

> Now, my beloved brethren, I, Jacob, according to the responsibility which I am under to God, to magnify mine office with soberness, and that I might rid my garments of your sins, I come up into the temple this day that I might declare unto you the word of God. (Jacob 2:2)

With this introduction, Jacob, the priest, identifies the temple as the *Sitz im Leben* or "setting in life" for his teachings. References to the temple as the *Sitz im Leben* for Jacob's sermon appear both in the narrative introduction to the speech and directly in Jacob's opening remarks. Through this repetition, and therefore emphasis, the author clearly sets up Jacob 2–3:12 as a priestly sermon to be interpreted in the context of temple ideology.

In the narrative introduction to his discourse, Jacob informs his readers that both he and his fellow priesthood holders "labored diligently" to convince their people to "come unto Christ and partake of the goodness of God, that they might enter into his rest" (Jacob 1:7). Jacob's language presents a literary allusion to Psalms 95:11, a text where, concerning the wilderness generation of Israel, Yahweh declared, "I swore in my wrath that they should not enter my rest." The Hebrew word translated in the King James Version as "rest" means more precisely "resting place," and refers contextually to the "promised land" where, from a biblical perspective, the presence of Yahweh literally resided.[4]

In the context of Jacob's temple sermon, Jacob's allusion to Psalm 95 more closely parallels the text's Christological reinterpretation in

Hebrews 3–4 where the place of rest referred to in Psalm 95 denotes God's holy presence as signified by his throne:

> Let us labour therefore to enter into that rest, lest any man fall after the same example of unbelief … Let us therefore come boldly unto the throne of grace, that we may obtain mercy, and find grace to help in time of need. (Hebrews 4: 11, 16)

When read as a thematic introduction to his temple sermon, Jacob's use of Psalm 95 and the notion of entering into God's rest matches one of the paramount conceptions associated with ancient temple worship, that of physically entering the presence of divinity.

Within the Bible, this motif appears reflected through the biblical expression translated as "before the Lord/Yahweh." In Hebrew, the prepositional term that means literally "to the face of" or "at the front of" carries the semantic nuance, "in the presence of" — or as rendered in King James Bible English, simply "before."[5] Studies have shown that any ritual activity in which a biblical author uses the formula "before the Lord" can be considered an indication of either a temple experience or site, since as Moshe Haran illustrated, "this expression stems from the basic conception of the temple as a divine dwelling-place and actually belongs to the temple's terminology."[6] Hence, as an introduction to his speech, Jacob's statement regarding the process of entering into the Lord's "rest" serves as an important thematic segue to his temple sermon, as does his allusion to the "provocation" of God "in the days of temptation while the children of Israel were in the wilderness" (Jacob 1:7).

Jacob's statement in 1:7 draws upon Psalms 95:8, an ancient temple-related text that encourages Israel to "harden not your heart as in the day of provocation and as in the day of temptation in the wilderness." In his highly influential work on form criticism in the psalms, Hermann Gunkel identified Psalm 95 as a temple hymn performed at the time of "entry into the sanctuary."[7] On sacred occasions in the Hebrew Bible connected with festivals, Israelites would come together to worship Deity at the temple. In the words of Gunkel, the people would gather together at the temple "in their best clothes and in the happiest mood."[8] Subsequent studies following Gunkel's lead have shown that temple hymns, including specifically Psalm 95, would perhaps have been sung by ancient Israelites as they entered the house of the Lord.[9] Summarizing these observations, Marvin Tate writes:

> In v 1 worshippers approaching the place of worship for some festival occasion encourage each other, or are encouraged by

a speaker such as a priest, to move on to the sanctuary with shouting and singing. A second call to move toward Yahweh is given in v 2, envisioning worshipers about to enter the inner areas of the sanctuary (perhaps into the inner court of the temple). A third exhortation is found in v 6, calling on the worshipers to enter farther into the inner place of worship and to bow down before Yahweh. A choir or chorus is assumed to have chanted vv 3–5 and 7ab, or else the worshipers would have done so themselves.[10]

The opening lines of the Old Testament temple hymn Jacob quoted describe the feelings temple worshipers should have when entering the Lord's presence:

> O come, let us sing unto the Lord:
> let us make a joyful noise
> to the rock of our salvation.
> Let us come before his presence
> with thanksgiving,
> And make a joyful noise unto him
> with psalms.

After citing this hymn in his narrative introduction, Jacob, however, appears to specifically reverse the sentiment expressed in these lines, telling his people that even though he had come up into the temple (see Jacob 2:2), he felt the exact opposite emotion of joy and thanksgiving in the Lord's presence:

> Yea, it grieveth my soul and causeth me to shrink with shame before the presence of my Maker, that I must testify unto you concerning the wickedness of your hearts. (Jacob 2:6)

When read in connection with Jacob's citation of Psalm 95:8, this statement appears to present an intentional reversal of the hymn's opening lines. In addition to the reference of appearing "before God's presence," Jacob's allusion to "wicked hearts" parallels the imagery in Psalms 95:8, where the hymn instructs temple worshipers to specifically "harden not your heart" on this sacred occasion. Jacob was also clearly touched by the metaphor "rock of our salvation" that appears in Psalms 95:1. He adopted this divine metaphor in two of his Book of Mormon sermons (see 2 Nephi 9:45 and Jacob 7:25).

Other literary allusions to ancient temple worship appear throughout Jacob's sermon, including in his subsequent reference to prayer:

> Look unto God with firmness of mind and pray unto him with
> exceeding faith, and he will console you in your afflictions,
> and he will plead your cause, and send down justice upon
> those who seek your destruction. (Jacob 3:1)

The concept of praying to the Lord for consolation during afflictions
and of petitioning God to impart justice upon a person's enemies reflects
motifs frequently attested in biblical psalms of individual lament.[11]
Studies have shown that many of these prayers were performed by
ancient Israelites in the context of temple worship (see, for example, 1
Samuel 1:6–7; 2:1–10).[12] "Have mercy upon me, O Lord, for I am weak,"
professes one such text, "O Lord, heal me; for my bones are vexed"
(Psalms 6:1–2).

As is typical for these ancient temple prayers, the petition for divine
assistance with afflictions appears accompanied with a reference to
one's enemies who seek the afflicted person's destruction: "Depart
from me, all ye workers of iniquity, for the Lord hath heard the voice
of my weeping …. Let all mine enemies be ashamed and sore vexed"
(Psalms 6:8, 10). This type of imagery illustrates that in the context of his
temple-based sermon, Jacob appears to have made an allusion to themes
frequently connected with temple prayer in ancient Israel. Though brief,
this analysis illustrates the way in which a Book of Mormon sermon
such as Jacob 2–3:12, which took place physically at the temple, can be
read to reflect Israelite temple-centered concepts, including the notion of
entering God's presence with joy, and there seeking His divine favor to
overcome one's enemies and afflictions.

These allusions to Israelite temple motifs in Jacob 2:1–3:12 are clearly
very subtle in nature. They suggest a detailed understanding on the part
of the Book of Mormon priest and his intended audience regarding the
connection between Jacob's words and the sacred location where he in
fact delivered his sermon. And yet Jacob's discourse in Jacob 2:1–3:12
is not the only occasion on which the Nephite priest appears to have
intentionally invoked subtle Israelite temple themes into the context of
his teaching. The Israelite concept of holiness and temple also serves as
the conceptual background for Jacob's great discourse on the Atonement
of Christ in 2 Nephi 9.

Throughout his Atonement discourse, Jacob goes so far as to adopt
the term "holy" as a biblical-like *leitwort* or "theme word," intentionally
repeated for both didactic as well as poetic purposes.[13] Examples include:

> The mouth of his holy prophets (v. 2)

The Holy One of Israel (vv. 11, 12, 15, 18, 19, 23, 24, 25, 26, 39, 40, 41)

The holy judgment of God (v. 15)

The saints of the Holy One of Israel (v. 18, 19, 43)

The holiness of our God (v. 20)

Holy, holy are thy judgments (v. 46)

If ye were holy I would speak unto you of holiness; but ye are not holy (v. 48)

The holy name of my God (v. 49)

As suggested via this repetition, the notion of holiness appears as a central theme throughout Jacob's address.

Anciently, temple priests such as Jacob dealt regularly with the concept of holiness in terms of their ritual performances. In the Hebrew Bible, *holiness* refers to "a state of being in places, objects, persons, and time that corresponds with the presence of God."[14] From a biblical perspective, only Deity Himself was considered intrinsically holy. Therefore, the closer an individual — or even an object — gets to God's presence in the temple, the more holy he or it becomes.

As a divine attribute, God wanted to share His holiness with His covenant people: "ye shall therefore be holy, for I am holy," He commanded (Leviticus 11:45). Since the temple served as God's house, it appears inseparably linked with the quality of holiness in biblical views. For example, "I will come into thy house in the multitude of thy mercy," declared the Psalmist, "and in thy fear will I worship toward thy holy temple" (Psalms 5:7). Many of the sacrificial rituals performed under the law of Moses served as sacred acts designed to retain the temple's quality of holiness (see Leviticus 10:3).[15] This effort was based on the notion that Israel needed to keep separate the holy from the unholy, and the clean from the unclean, especially in terms of temple worship (see Leviticus 10:10).

Jacob Milgrom has shown that as the opposite of holiness, impurity could attack areas and/or people made holy by the sanctifying presence of God, including the temple.[16] In priestly temple-based rituals, impurity was removed by means of sacrificial blood, which functioned as a type of ritual detergent, effectively absorbing impurity from the temple and its sacred vessels:

Then shall [the Priest] kill the goat of the sin offering … and bring his blood within the vail … and sprinkle it upon

> the mercy seat, and before the mercy seat. And [the Priest] shall make an atonement for the holy place, because of the uncleanness of the children of Israel, and because of their transgressions in all their sins: and so shall he do for the tabernacle of the congregation, that remaineth among them in the midst of their uncleanness. (Leviticus 16:15–16)

According to this system, sacrificial blood was holy and could therefore absorb impurity (the opposite of holiness) and restore the temple to its pristine holy condition imparted by its connection with the presence of God. In the biblical priestly system, human beings could transmit impurity, contaminating other individuals and/or objects, and thus destroy the state of holiness in the temple. In this sense, humans could spread impurity in one of three ways: as a leper, as a corpse (see Numbers 5:1–4), or by means of sexual emissions (see Leviticus 12; 15:16–24).[17]

This ancient priestly view of bodily impurifications may at first seem arbitrary in nature. The impurities focus on four phenomena: death, semen, skin disease, and blood. However, as Milgrom has explained, their "common denominator" is, in fact, death:

> Blood and semen represent the forces of life; their loss, therefore, signifies death. In the case of scaly disease (so-called leprosy), this symbolism is made explicit: Aaron prays for his stricken sister: 'Let her not be as one dead' (Numbers 12:12). Furthermore, such disease is powerful enough to contaminate someone who is under the same roof, and it is no accident that it shares this feature with the corpse (Numbers 19:14). The wasting of the body, the common characteristic of all biblically impure skin diseases, symbolizes the death process as much as does the loss of blood and semen.[18]

Hence, according to priestly perceptions, death is impurity — and since impurity and holiness constitute polar opposites, "the identification of impurity with death must mean that holiness stands for life."[19] God is intrinsically "holy," since He Himself possesses life eternal.

This technical view of Israelite temple concepts and ritual regarding "holiness" explains why as a type of ritual detergent, sacrificial blood successfully absorbed impurity. In the Hebrew Bible, blood appears specifically defined as the "life-force;" it was therefore far too holy for humans to consume (see Genesis 9:3–4). Instead, temple priests made use of blood to rid both the temple and human beings from impurity.

"For the life of the flesh is in the blood," states Yahweh in Leviticus 17:11, "and I have given it to you upon the altar to make an atonement for your souls: for it is the blood that maketh an atonement for the soul." Therefore, according to priestly views, holiness was life, and its opposite, impurity, constituted death, a state that could be ritually absorbed by means of sacrificial blood (a holy "life-giving" substance).

As a priest working in the Nephite temple and presumably performing ancient Mosaic ordinances, Jacob relied on these specific themes in his Atonement sermon (see 2 Nephi 9). A careful reading of Jacob's discourse suggests a highly technical understanding on the author's part of these basic priestly concerns. In the course of his sermon — which, as mentioned, relies heavily on the theme word *holy* — Jacob specifically states that all flesh is subject unto "death," and that even the "great Creator" would die for all men (2 Nephi 9:5–6). Through this atoning sacrifice, Jacob taught that the "Holy One of Israel" prepared a way for humanity to escape both the "death of the body, and also the death of the spirit" (2 Nephi 9:10).

Jacob then continued this theme, testifying of the power of the "Holy One of Israel" to overcome "death," stating that this Atonement will transpire as "assuredly as the Lord *liveth*" (2 Nephi 9:16). Moreover, Jacob's praise directed toward the Holy One of Israel in the course of his speech specifically includes the statement, "O the greatness of the mercy of our God, the Holy One of Israel! For he delivereth his saints [i.e. "holy ones"] from … death and hell" (2 Nephi 9:19). Finally, as priest, Jacob warned his people against transgressing against their "Holy God," encouraging them to remember that "to be carnally minded is death, and to be spiritually minded is life eternal" (2 Nephi 9:39). These repeated references to death and life in the context of a "holiness"-centered sermon by a Book of Mormon priest suggest that the author possessed a profound understanding of ancient Israelite temple motifs.

Though Jacob's sermon can certainly be read and appreciated without a technical awareness of ancient temple concepts, Jacob's Atonement discourse makes greater sense in light of biblical priestly concerns regarding holiness (life) and impurity (death). Jesus is the "Holy One of Israel," who shed His blood in order to help rid His people of their impurity — overcoming, in the process, both spiritual and temporal death. In the context of his repeated emphasis on "holiness," Jacob employs the image of blood, specifically stating that, as priest, he had rid himself of his people's blood by delivering the Atonement sermon (2 Nephi 9:44).

Although subtle in nature, Jacob's temple-based imagery on holiness concludes with an allusion to "righteous paths" and the Holy One of Israel as the "keeper of the gate":

> O then, my beloved brethren, come unto the Lord, the Holy One. Remember that his paths are righteous. Behold, the way for man is narrow, but it lieth in a straight course before him, and the keeper of the gate is the Holy One of Israel; and he employeth no servant there; and there is none other way save it be by the gate; for he cannot be deceived, for the Lord God is his name. (2 Nephi 9:41)

In ancient thought, temples as holy shrines appear directly associated with gate imagery.[20] The biblical Jacob, for example, referred to the sacred space Bethel as the "house of God" and the "gate of heaven" (Genesis 28:17). The concept of a "gate keeper" that the Book of Mormon Jacob refers to reflects exchanges between priests and ancient Israelites seeking to enter into the temple — in other words, the "gates of righteousness." Othmar Keel refers to this ritual exchange in his classic study on Near Eastern iconography in the Psalms:

> The pilgrim addressed the priest (or priests) sitting at the temple gates (cf. 1 Samuel 1:9), asking who might set foot on the mountain of Yahweh (cf. Psalms 15:1; 24:3). The gates of the Jerusalem temple, as 'Gates of Righteousness,' were open only to the 'righteous.' (Psalms 118:19–20)[21]

This observation provides an important link to Jacob's sermon. "Open to me the gates of righteousness: I will go into them," states the Israelite worshiper, in one such exchange, "this gate of the Lord, into which the righteous shall enter" (Psalms 118:19–20). In the context of his Atonement sermon featuring a constant reliance on holiness and impurity imagery, Jacob's allusion to "righteous paths" and the Holy One of Israel serving as the "keeper of the gate" appears to echo this technical aspect of Israelite temple worship. In these sense, Jacob's sermon in 2 Nephi 9 shares the same thematic concept that appears in his temple discourse in Jacob 2–3:12 of the righteous entering into the Lord's holy presence with joy and thanksgiving.

As witnessed in this study, Book of Mormon sermons such as those delivered by Jacob, the priest, can be shown to reflect religious cognition and ritual performances tied to ancient Israelite temple motifs. Even though the Book of Mormon itself provides very few details regarding actual Nephite temple worship, discourses like those delivered by Jacob

in 2 Nephi 9 and Jacob 2–3:12 often feature impressive thematic ties with ancient Israelite temple concepts. Through the Atonement of Christ, the holy one of Israel, Jacob taught his people on these two separate occasions that they had been given an opportunity to overcome death and enter into the Lord's presence with everlasting joy and eternal thanksgiving.

Notes

1. Hamblin and Seely note, "the Temple was the center of Israelite religion, where worship was carried out by a hereditary priesthood from the tribe of Levi, with the descendants of Aaron as elite priests" (William J. Hamblin and David Rolph Seely, *Solomon's Temple Myth and History* [London: Thames and Hudson, 2007], 27). Although it is common for contemporary readers of scriptural texts to project onto the ancient temple modern concepts regarding sacred space, Israelite temples served a somewhat different religious role than contemporary churches or synagogues as the focus of Israelite religious devotion. In the words of Carol Meyers, "the temple building itself was not a place of public gathering and prayer, although its courtyards were the scene of such activity. Rather, the Temple in conception was a dwelling place on earth for the deity of ancient Israel and in this way, too, was fundamentally different from the religious buildings (synagogue, church, mosque) of post-biblical times" (Carol Meyers, "Temple, Jerusalem," in *The Anchor Bible Dictionary*, ed. David Noel Freedman, et al. [New York: Doubleday, 1992], 6: 351).

2. The notion of temple as divine dwelling space appears reflected in biblical thought via statements regarding the tabernacle, such as Israel's portable temple in the wilderness. In Ex. 25:8, for example, the Lord states, "let them make me a sanctuary that I may dwell among them." Regarding the temple as "dwelling place" for Deity in Israelite concepts, Saul Olyan has explained, "The primary locus of worship in ancient Israel was the sanctuary, a sacred space set apart for the deity's service and often, where a temple stood, for his dwelling (open-air sanctuaries without dwelling places for a deity are known mainly from textual descriptions)" (Saul M. Olyan, "Sacred Times and Spaces: Israel," *Religions of the Ancient World: A Guide*, ed. Sarah Iles Johnston, et al. [Cambridge, MA: The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2004], 258). Note that John Lundquist states that "the idea of the temple as the house of God, a specific place in which the divine spirit resides, is common to all religions" (John M. Lundquist, *The Temple: Meeting Place of Heaven and Earth*

[London: Thames and Hudson, 1993], 36).

3. The classic exploration of temple imagery in a Book of Mormon sermon remains John Welch's study of Jesus' sermon in 3 Ne.; see John W. Welch, *Illuminating the Sermon at the Temple & Sermon on the Mount: An Approach to 3 Nephi 11–18 and Matthew 5–7* (Provo, UT: FARMS, 1998). For an analysis of King Benjamin's sermon in the context of temple themes, see M. Catherine Thomas, "Benjamin and the Mysteries of God," *King Benjamin's Speech: "That Ye May Learn Wisdom,"* eds. John W. Welch and Stephen D. Ricks (Provo, UT: FARMS, 1998), 277–294. For temple imagery in the holy order of the Son of God patterned after the Savior's life depicted in Alma 8–14, see Thomas R. Valletta, "Conflicting Orders: Alma and Amulek in Ammoniah," *The Temple in Time and Eternity,* eds. Donald W. Parry and Stephen D. Ricks (Provo, UT: FARMS, 1992), 183–231. In addition, see LeGrand L. Baker and Stephen D. Ricks, "*Who Shall Ascend into the Hill of the Lord?" The Psalms in Israel's Temple Worship in the Old Testament and in the Book of Mormon* (Salt Lake City: Eborn Books, 2009).

4. Ludwig Koehler and Walter Baumgartner, *The Hebrew and Aramaic Lexicon of the Old Testament*, Study Edition (Leiden: Brill, 2001), 1:600.

5. Koehler and Baumgartner, 2: 942.

6. Menahem Haran, *Temples and Temple-Service in Ancient Israel: An Inquiry into the Character of Cult Phenomena and the Historical Setting of the Priestly School* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1978), 26.

7. Hermann Gunkel, *An Introduction to the Psalms: The Genres of the Religious Lyric of Israel*, trans. James D. Nogalski (Macon, GA: Mercer University Press, 1998), 42.

8. Gunkel, *An Introduction to the Psalms*, 41.

9. See especially G. H. Davies, "Psalm 95," *ZAW* 85 (1973):183–198, and the analysis of the psalms cultic function featured in Sigmund Mowinckel, *The Psalms in Israel's Worship* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2004).

10. Marvin E. Tate, *Word Biblical Commentary: Psalms 51–100* (Nashville: Thomas Nelson Publishers, 1990), 498–499.

11. For an introduction to this textual genre via form criticism, see John H. Hayes, "The Songs of Israel," *The Hebrew Bible Today: An Introduction to Critical Issues*, eds. Steven L. McKenzie and M. Patrick Graham (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 1998), 156–161.

12. Gottwald notes the consensus regarding this issue when he writes,

"The speech conventions of these prayers, in their vocabulary and genres, were shaped within the framework of Israel's 'cult,' that is, its formal worship centered on the temple at Jerusalem. The subject of these psalms is overwhelmingly the distress and deliverance of the people of Israel as a whole and of individual Israelites" (Norman K. Gottwald, *The Hebrew Bible: A Socio-Literary Introduction* [Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1985], 525).

13. For an introduction to this important literary technique, see Martin Buber, "Leitwort Style in Pentateuch Narrative," in *Scripture and Translation*, ed. Martin Buber and Franz Rosenzweig, trans. Lawrence Rosenwald and Everett Fox [Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1994], 114–128. As literary scholar Robert Alter notes in his analysis of the convention, "This kind of word-motif, as a good many commentators have recognized, is one of the most common features of the narrative art of the Bible" (Robert Alter, *The Art of Biblical Narrative* [New York: Basic Books, 1981], 92).

14. David P. Wright, "Holiness in Leviticus and Beyond: Differing Perspectives," *Interpretation* 53/4 (1999), 351.

15. The foundational scholarly analysis regarding the retention of holiness and the sacrificial cult remains Jacob Milgrom's three-volume Anchor Bible commentary: Jacob Milgrom, *Leviticus 1–16: A New Translation with Introduction and Commentary* (New York: Doubleday, 1998); Jacob Milgrom, *Leviticus 17–22: A New Translation with Introduction and Commentary* (New York: Doubleday, 2000); and Jacob Milgrom, *Leviticus 23–27: A New Translation with Introduction and Commentary* (New York: Doubleday, 2001).

16. For an introduction to Milgrom's reading of "sanctum contamination," see Jacob Milgrom, *Leviticus: A Continental Commentary* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2004), 141–145.

17. For an identification and analysis of these three ways in which humans may function as "bearers of impurity" within the priestly tradition, see Milgrom, *Leviticus*, 11–13.

18. Jacob Milgrom, *Numbers: JPS Commentary* (Philadelphia: The Jewish Publication Soceity, 1990), 346.

19. Milgrom, *Leviticus*, 12.

20. Throughout the Hebrew Bible, the image of *gate* is that of passage and/or entryway into guarded space and, therefore, appears directly linked with the temple (note, for example, Genesis 28:17). "The position of gatekeeper implies the act of guarding against illegitimate entry, whether into a city (2 Kings 10), a king's court (2 Kings 11:4–9)

or the temple (2 Kings 12:9; 2 Chronicles 23:19)" (Leland Ryken, et al., *Dictionary of Biblical Imagery* (Downers Grove, IL: Intervasity Press, 1998), 321. For an analysis of gate and gatekeeper imagery in the context of ancient Near Eastern temple conceptions, see John Gee, "The Keeper of the Gate," *The Temple in Time and Eternity*, eds. Donald W. Parry and Stephen D. Ricks (Provo, UT: FARMS, 1999), 233–274.

21. Othmar Keel, *The Symbolism of the Biblical World: Ancient Near Eastern Iconography and the Book of Psalms*, trans. Hallett (Winona Lake, IN: Eisenbrauns, 1997), 126.

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"If Ye Believe on His Name": Wordplay on the Name Samuel in Helaman 14:2, 12–13 and 3 Nephi 23:9 and the Doctrine of Christ in Samuel's Speech

Matthew L. Bowen

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Abstract: *The Semitic/Hebrew name Samuel (šĕmûʾēl) most likely means "his name is El" — i.e., "his name [the name that he calls upon in worship] is El" — although it was also associated with "hearing" (šāmaʿ) God (e.g., 1 Samuel 3:9–11). In the ancient Near East, the parental hope for one thus named is that the son (and "his name") would glorify El (a name later understood in ancient Israel to refer to God); or, like the biblical prophet Samuel, the child would hear El/God ("El is heard"). The name šĕmûʾēl thus constituted an appropriate symbol of the mission of the Son of God who "glorified the name of the Father" (Ether 12:8), was perfectly obedient to the Father in all things, and was the Prophet like Moses par excellence, whom Israel was to "hear" or "hearken" in all things (Deuteronomy 18:15; 1 Nephi 22:20; 3 Nephi 20:32). Jesus may have referred to this in a wordplay on the name Samuel when he said: "I commanded my servant Samuel, the Lamanite, that he should testify unto this people, that at the day that the Father should glorify his name in me that there were many saints who should arise from the dead" (3 Nephi 23:9). Samuel the Lamanite had particularly emphasized "believ[ing] on the name" of God's Son in the second part of his speech (see Helaman 14:2, 12–13) in advance of the latter's coming. Samuel thus seems to use a recurrent or thematic rhetorical wordplay on his own name as an entry point to calling the Nephites to repent and return to living the doctrine of Christ, which activates the blessings of the atonement of Jesus Christ. Mormon took great care to show that all of the signs and prophecies that Samuel gave the Nephites of Zarahemla were fulfilled at the time of Jesus's birth, death, and resurrection as Jesus glorified the Father's name in*

every particular, and found further fulfillment in some particulars during Mormon's own life and times.

Mormon had an exceptional regard for Samuel the Lamanite as a prophet. He demonstrates as much by his lengthy inclusion of parts of Samuel's prophecy to the reprobate Nephites of Zarahemla (Helaman 13–15) and also by the care he took to show how the signs and prophecies that Samuel gave his hearers came to complete fulfillment.[1]

Nevertheless, no greater commendation of Samuel — the man and his message — exists than the one given by Jesus Christ himself. Mormon records that Jesus mildly chided the Nephite record-keepers, including Nephi$_3$ himself, for failing to include Samuel's prophecy regarding the resurrection of the dead and numerous post-resurrection appearances of the righteous dead (see 3 Nephi 23:6–13). This censure included the following statement:

> Verily I say unto you: I commanded my servant *Samuel* [*šĕmûʾēl*] the Lamanite that he should testify unto this people that at the day that *the Father* should glorify *his name* [Hebrew *šĕmô*] in me that there were many saints who should arise from the dead and should appear unto many and should minister unto them. And he said unto them: Were it not so? (3 Nephi 23:9; emphasis in all scriptural citations is mine.)[2]

In this declaration, Jesus plays on the Semitic/Hebrew name *šĕmûʾēl* — "his name is El" — in terms of its onomastic components: *šĕmô* ("his name") + *ʾēl*, ("El" or God). In other words, Jesus invokes *šĕmûʾēl*, "a name which glorifies God,"[3] in close conjunction with his own stated mission as Son of God: the Father "glorify[ing] his name in [him]." This, of course, was Jesus's humble way of confirming that he had "glorified the name of the Father."[4]

In this article, I endeavor to show that Samuel's speech, as preserved by Mormon, includes language that plays on his own name in terms of its Semitic/Hebrew meaning, "his name is El." Moreover, I attempt to show that Samuel the Lamanite's repeated use of the collocation "believe on *his name* [*šĕmô*]" in Helaman 14:2, 12–13 constitutes a deliberate

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1. See, e.g., 3 Nephi 1:5–25; 8:3–25; Mormon 1:19; 2:10.

2. Book of Mormon citations will generally follow Royal Skousen, ed., *The Book of Mormon: The Earliest Text* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2009).

3. Peter R. Ackroyd, *The Book of First Samuel* (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 1971), 26.

4. Ether 12:8.

rhetorical wordplay on his own name. He uses this wordplay as an entry point to calling the Nephites to return to the doctrine of Christ.

Samuel: "His Name Is El" or "The Name is God"

The Hebrew Bible attests Samuel as the name of one of ancient Israel's most important prophets. The biblical text etiologizes the name Samuel in terms of the verb *šāʾal*, "ask," "request," "demand," "loan (on request)" (1 Samuel 1:20, 27–28; 2:20; cf. 1:17) but also creates numerous instances of interpretive paronomasia on the name Samuel in terms of the verbs *šāmaʿ*, "hear," "hearken," "obey." For example, Samuel's birth narrative describes Hannah praying to God: "Now Hannah, she spake in her heart; only her lips moved, but her voice was *not heard* [*lōʾ yiššāmēaʿ*]": therefore Eli thought she had been drunken" (1 Samuel 1:13). The point here, of course, is that God *did* hear Hannah's prayer, though Eli could not. In the subsequent birth of a son named Samuel (*šĕmûʾēl*), the ancient Israelite audience can hear the aural echo of *šāmûaʿ + ʾēl*, "heard of God." The narrative of Samuel's prophetic call in 1 Samuel 3 has a slightly different emphasis. The narrative records how Samuel uniquely "heard" the voice of God: "Therefore Eli said unto *Samuel* [*šĕmûʾēl*]. Go, lie down: and it shall be, if he call thee, that thou shalt say, Speak, Lord; for thy servant *heareth* [*šōmēaʿ*]. So *Samuel* [*šĕmûʾēl*] went and lay down in his place. And the Lord came, and stood, and called as at other times, *Samuel, Samuel* [*šĕmûʾēl, šĕmûʾēl*]. Then *Samuel* [*šĕmûʾēl*] answered, Speak; for thy servant *heareth* [*šōmēaʿ*]. And the Lord said to *Samuel* [*šĕmûʾēl*], Behold, I will do a thing in Israel, at which both the ears of *every one that heareth it* [*kol-šōmʿô*] shall tingle" (1 Samuel 3:9–11). The wordplay on "Samuel" in terms of "hearing" the voice of God and God's doing a "thing [word]" that will be "heard" suggests the meaning "El is heard" or "God is heard," similar to the well-attested Hebrew name Shammua (*šammûaʿ*),[5] "the one who is heard."[6] Additional passages throughout the Samuel-Saul cycle link play on the name Samuel in terms of *šāmaʿ*, to "hear."[7]

    A point on which virtually every modern exegete agrees is that Hannah's explanation for naming her son Samuel in 1 Samuel 1:20 is not etymological: "Wherefore it came to pass, when the time was come

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5. Numbers 13:4; 2 Samuel 5:14/1 Chronicles 14:4; Nehemiah 11:17; 12:18.

6. Ludwig Koehler and Walter Baumgartner, *The Hebrew and Aramaic Lexicon of the Old Testament* (Leiden, NDL: Brill, 2001), 1555. Hereafter cited as *HALOT*.

7. See further 1 Samuel 8:7, 9, 18–19, 21–22; 12:1; 15:1, 14, 20, 22, 24; 16:2; 28:18, 21–23.

about after Hannah had conceived, that she bare a son, and called his name [*šĕmô*] Samuel [*šĕmûʾēl*], saying, Because *I have asked him of the Lord* [*mēyhwh šĕʾiltîw*]." The notion that *šĕmûʾēl* derives from *šāʾûl-mē-ēl* underlies this explanation.[8] However, as many commentators have noted, this paronomastic explanation of the name Samuel in terms of the verb *šāʾal* ("ask") clearly fits the name of "Saul" (*šāʾûl*, "asked") rather than "Samuel" in etymological terms. Since the biblical narrative already has the imminent advent of Saul in 1 Samuel 8–12 in view,[9] the narrator's primary concern in including this etiology is not to offer a precise etymology for *šĕmûʾēl* but to establish an inextricable onomastic link between the names and persons Samuel and Saul, whose destinies are intertwined. For these reasons, seeking a more precise "scientific" etymological explanation for Samuel becomes necessary.

As noted above, the call narrative of the biblical prophet Samuel — for whom Samuel the Lamanite was likely named — thoroughly ties the name Samuel to the verb *šāmaʿ* (see 1 Samuel 3:9–12) through a play on similar sounds (paronomasia). The homophony between the name Samuel (*šĕmûʾēl*) and the verb *šāmaʿ* creates another midrashic or interpretative meaning for the name Samuel, suggesting the idea "God is heard," "hearer of God," or as Garsiel puts it, "one who hears the word of God."[10] We note the prominent juxtaposition and repetition of the name Samuel with the verb "hear" throughout the Samuel cycle.[11]

Nevertheless, the more likely etymology for the name Samuel (*šĕmûʾēl*), at least in terms of its Hebrew spelling, appears to be "his name is El" (*šmw*, "name" + the possessive suffix *w* ["his"]); or, "his name [the name on which he cultically calls] is El" from an earlier Semitic **šimuhū + ʾil.*[12] As Koehler and Baumgartner aver, Samuel constitutes "a personal name which has many precedents: in Amorite [Western Semitic] and Ugaritic, which corresponds to Hebrew [*šĕmû*] is *sumu/*

8. P. Kyle McCarter Jr., *I Samuel: A New Translation with Introduction and Commentary* (New York: Doubleday, 1984), 62.

9. Matthew L. Bowen *"According to All That You Demanded" (Deuteronomy 18:16): The Literary Use of Names and Leitworte as Antimonarchic Polemic in the Deuteronomistic History* (Doctoral Dissertation, Catholic University of America, Washington, DC, 2014), 59–89.

10. Moshe Garsiel, "Word Play and Puns as a Rhetorical Device in the Book of Samuel," in *Puns and Pundits: Wordplay in the Hebrew Bible and Ancient Near Eastern Literature.*, ed. Scott B. Noegel (Bethesda, MD: CDL, 2000), 186.

11. See note 7.

12. See, e.g., McCarter, *I Samuel*, 62.

samu/šumu"[13] — i.e., "name." Peter Ackroyd has noted that *šĕmûʾēl* "means, 'the (his) name is El', i.e. his nature, his person is El."[14] To which he adds, "It is a name which glorifies God."[15] The presence of the theophoric element "El," understood later to refer to "God," is beyond dispute. since it constitutes one of the commonest onomastic elements in biblical Hebrew. West Semitic names like *Sumu-AN*,[16] i.e., *Sumu-el*, "the name of one of the kings of Larsa"[17] support this etymology.

Others have suggested that this element is a form of *šmh/šmy* "to be high,"[18] thus, "El is exalted." Although the name *šĕmûʾēl* much more plausibly represents *šĕmô + ʾēl* than *šmh/šmy*, a paronomastic association along the lines of the wordplay involving *šēm* ("name") and *šāmayim* ("heaven") in the story of the tower of Babel in Genesis 11:4 would have been natural, if not inevitable: "And they said, Go to, let us build us a city and a tower, whose top may reach unto *heaven* [*šāmayim*]; and let us make us *a name* [*šēm*, i.e., a reputation or even a monument or a memorial] lest we be scattered abroad upon the face of the whole earth" (see further below).

"At the Day That the Father Should Glorify His Name in Me"

As noted at the outset, the supreme commendation of Samuel the Lamanite as prophet comes from Jesus Christ himself. After quoting Isaiah 54 to the Lamanites and Nephites assembled at the temple in Bountiful on the second day of his ministry there, the Lord declared: "And whosoever *will hearken* [*yišmaʿ*] unto my words and repenteth and is baptized, the same shall be saved. Search the prophets, for many there be that testify of these things" (3 Nephi 23:5). The Savior, quoting or paraphrasing the prophecy of Deuteronomy 18:15–19, had just previously declared: "Behold, I am he of whom Moses spake, saying: A prophet shall the Lord your God raise up unto you of your brethren, like unto me; *him shall ye hear* [*ʾēlāw tišmāʿûn*] in all things whatsoever he shall say unto you. And it shall come to pass that every soul who *will*

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13. *HALOT*, 1554–55.

14. Ackroyd, *First Book of Samuel*, 26.

15. Ibid.

16. Theodor Bauer, *Die Ostkanaanäer: Eine philologisch-historische Untersuchung über die Wanderschicht der sogenannten "Amoriter" in Babylonien* (Leipzig, DEU Verlag der Asia Major, 1926), 39. For a broader list of SUMU — names, see pp. 38–40.

17. *HALOT*, 1555.

18. Arabic *smʾ* "be high, exalted"; see *HALOT*, 1554–55. Cf. Book of Abraham Facsimile 1:12.

not hear [*lōʾ-yišmaʿ*] that prophet shall be cut off from among the people. Verily I say unto you, yea, and all the prophets from *Samuel* [*šĕmûʾēl*, the biblical prophet] and those that follow after, as many as have spoken, have testified of me" (3 Nephi 20:23–24).

It is in the context of the foregoing that Jesus then commanded the Nephite prophetic records be brought forward for examination, for they too were among the raised-up prophets "like unto" Moses, who typified and testified of Jesus Christ. Samuel the Lamanite, like his namesake, was one of those prophets. In examining the records, Jesus soon recognized that one of Samuel's most important prophecies was missing from the collection. Gently reproving Nephi and the Nephite record-keepers for their failure to record this prophecy, he mentions the name Samuel in close connection with his own mission to glorify the Father's "name," of which Samuel had prophesied:

> Verily I say unto you: I commanded my servant <u>Samuel</u> [*šĕmûʾēl*] the Lamanite that he should testify unto this people that *at the day that the Father should glorify <u>his name</u>* [*šĕmô*] *in me* that there were many saints who should arise from the dead and should appear unto many, and should minister unto them. And he said unto them: Were it not so? (3 Nephi 23:9)

This juxtaposition of the name Samuel with the phrase "glorify his name" creates a lucid wordplay strikingly consistent with the etymology and function of that name, "his name is El [God]" or "the Name is God" — i.e., "a name which glorifies God."[19] In other words, Samuel's name constitutes a sign of what the Father did, "glorified his name in [Jesus]," and what Jesus did, "glorified the name of the Father" (Ether 12:8; see also 3 Nephi 11:11 below).

Since the theophoric *-ʾēl* element in *šĕmûʾēl* sometimes denoted "God" in the most general sense, one can variously understand its precise referent depending on the literary or historical context. For example, the literary etymology of 1 Samuel 1:20 ("I asked him from the Lord") interprets *ʾēl* as referring to Yahweh. In earlier times, however, *ʾēl* had reference to El, the father of the Canaanite pantheon (see, e.g., 4QDeutj and 4QDeutq Deuteronomy 32:8; cf. Ugaritic *ʾil* ["El"] and the *bn ʾil*, which can be rendered "sons of El" or "the family of El").[20]

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19. Ackroyd, *First Book of Samuel*, 26.

20. Cf. Gregorio Del Olmo Lete and Joaquín Sanmartín, *A Dictionary of the Ugaritic Language in the Alphabetic Tradition,* 3rd rev. ed. (Leiden, NDL: Brill, 2015), 224. Cf. also *dr bn ʾil* (these can be rendered "the family circle of El" or "the

Moreover, Jesus's use of *šěmû̂ʾēl/šěmô* polyptoton recalls Samuel's emphasis in his speech to the Nephites of Zarahemla "believ[ing] in *his name* [*šěmô*]" (Helaman 14:2, 12–13, see below). And it is even possible that when Jesus states, "I commanded my servant *Samuel* [*šěmû̂ʾēl*], the Lamanite that he should testify unto this people that *at the day that the Father should glorify his name* [*šěmô*] in me …" (3 Nephi 23:9), he includes a part of the prophecy that Mormon elided from his presentation of Samuel's speech. A prophecy of "the day" when "the Father" would "glorify his name" in the Son fits Samuel's thematic emphasis on the divine "name" in the second part of that speech, where Mormon places the resurrection prophecy.

Jesus's *šěmû̂ʾēl/šěmô* polyptoton, then, also recalls two seminal moments earlier in Mormon's abridged 3 Nephi account of the complete fulfillment of Samuel the Lamanite's prophecies. Indeed, he evokes at least two divine pronouncements from the aftermath of the fulfillment of Samuel the Lamanite's prophecies concerning the death of Jesus Christ and the destruction that ensued. First, he harks back to his declaration: "Behold, I am Jesus Christ the *Son of God* [*ʾēl/ʾĕlôhîm*]. I created the *heavens* [*šāmayim*] and the earth and all things that in them are. I was with the Father from the beginning. I am in the Father and the Father in me; and *in me hath the Father glorified his name* [*šěmô*]" (3 Nephi 9:15).

Second, Jesus's words recall and restate God the Father's testimony of him, as Mormon records and preserves it in 3 Nephi 11. The voice of the Father from heaven introduces Jesus thus: "Behold my Beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased, *in whom I have glorified my name* [*šěmô*]. Hear ye [*šimʿû*] him!" (3 Nephi 11:7). The Father's command recalls Moses's charge regarding the raised-up Prophet in "unto him ye shall hearken [*tišmāʿûn*]" (Deuteronomy 18:15) or "him shall ye hear" (1 Nephi 22:20). God the Father's testimony of his Son also appears to somewhat reflect the structure of Isaiah 49:3 (1 Nephi 21:3): "*Thou art my servant*, O Israel, in whom *I will be glorified* [*ʾetpāʾār*]." However, the idiom "glorified my name" may rather reflect the liturgical language of Psalm 86: "I will praise thee, O Lord my God, with all my heart: *and I will glorify thy name* [*waʾăkabbědâ šimkā*] for evermore" (Psalm 86:12; see also v. 9). Jesus — the worshipper of God par excellence — subsequently describes how he glorified the Father and his name: "I have drank out of that bitter cup which the Father hath given me and *have glorified the Father* in taking upon me the sins of the world, in the which I have suffered the

circle of the sons of El"), and *mpẖrt bn ʾil* ("the family assembly of El" or "assembly of the sons of El"). I have slightly adjusted their translations.

will of the Father in all things from the beginning" (3 Nephi 11:11; cf. Psalm 40:7–8).

"O Ye People of the Land, That Ye Would Hear My Words"

Samuel the Lamanite was a prophet's prophet. He demonstrates a thorough knowledge of earlier Nephite prophecy. Likely named after the ancient biblical prophet, Samuel's use of prophetic speech forms also suggests a broader knowledge of ancient Israelite prophecy. Donald W. Parry identifies six "revelatory speech forms or formulaic expressions [that] are unique to prophetic writings," all of which Samuel employs within his speech.[21]

Thus, in perhaps the most Israelite fashion imaginable, Samuel calls on the Nephites of Zarahemla to "hearken" or "hear" the words of the Lord as he delivered those words to them: "Behold, ye the people of this great city, and *hearken unto my words. Yea, hearken unto the words which the Lord saith*. For behold, he saith that ye are cursed because of your riches, and also are your riches cursed because ye have set your hearts upon them, *and have not hearkened* unto the words of him who gave them unto you" (Helaman 13:21). Parry cites Samuel's command "hearken unto my words" as a classic example of the use of the prophetic "proclamation formula"[22] and "an emphatic summons to hear the word of the Lord."[23] He chides the Nephites precisely because they have not hearkened unto him or the prophets before him (e.g., Helaman's sons, Nephi and Lehi) who had been calling them to repentance.

The first part of Samuel's speech (comprising Helaman 13) closes with yet another plea to Samuel's Nephite audience that they will "hear" him: "O ye people of the land, *that ye would hear* [cf. Hebrew *tišmāʿû*] *my words*! And I pray that the anger of the Lord be turned away from you and that ye would repent and be saved" (Helaman 13:39). Samuel's prophetic plea that the people would "hear" has a double echo: his own name and the figure of the raised up prophet as described in Deuteronomy 18:15–17. His additional wish that they would "repent and be saved" begins a focus on the doctrine of Christ[24] that is strongly interwoven wordplay

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21. Donald W. Parry, "Thus Saith the Lord: Prophetic Language in Samuel," *Journal of Book of Mormon Studies* 1, no. 1 (1992): 181.

22. Ibid., 181–82.

23. Ibid., 182.

24. Noel B. Reynolds, "Biblical Merismus in Book of Mormon Gospel References" *Journal of Book of Mormon Studies* 26 (2017): 128.

on the name Samuel in terms of the phrase "believe on his name" in the next part of his speech.

"Then Cometh the Son of God
to Redeem All Those Who Shall Believe on His Name"

After Samuel's prophetic plea that the Nephites "would hear [his] words," Mormon abridges Samuel's speech. He then resumes it thus:

> And now it came to pass that *Samuel* [*šĕmû'ēl*] the Lamanite did prophesy a great many more things which cannot be written. And behold, he saith unto them: Behold, I give unto you a sign. For five years more cometh, and behold, then cometh the *Son of God* [Hebrew *'ēl/'ĕlōhîm*] to redeem all those who shall *believe on his name* [Hebrew *šĕmô*]. (Helaman 14:1–2)

The point at which Mormon chooses to resume Samuel's direct speech is significant for at least two reasons. First, in resuming the speech with a juxtaposition of the name *šĕmû'ēl* with the giving of a "sign" that would mark the "com[ing]" of "the son of God to redeem all those who shall believe on his name [*šĕmô*]," Mormon draws out the lexical link between *šĕmû'ēl* and its onomastic components, "his name" (*šĕmô*) and "God" (*'ēl/'ĕlōhîm*). This wordplay leads us to see that *šĕmû'ēl* itself constitutes a fitting "sign" of the Son of God's mission to glorify the Father and the Father's "name" in addition to the other remarkable "signs" pertaining to Christ that Samuel gives. Hebrew *šēm* (or "name") in some contexts took on the meaning "posterity" (see, e.g., Deuteronomy 25:7; Ruth 4:5, 10; Isaiah 14:22), adding an important new sense in which Jesus "glorified the name of the Father" (see again Ether 12:8; cf. Moses 1:39).

Second, Mormon resumes his record of Samuel's speech where the previous part left off (Helaman 13:39) — i.e., with a meristic reference to what Nephi described as "the doctrine of Christ" in 2 Nephi 31 or the "very points of doctrine, that they may know how to come unto him and be saved" (1 Nephi 15:14).[25] As Noel B. Reynolds has shown at length, Nephi and his successors often invoke the doctrine of

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25. On Nephi's systematic presentation of the gospel and the doctrine of Jesus Christ by Nephi and his successors, see Noel B. Reynolds, "The Gospel of Jesus Christ as Taught by the Nephite Prophets," *BYU Studies* 31 (Summer 1991): 31–50; Reynolds, "The True Points of My Doctrine," *Journal of Book of Mormon Studies* 5, no. 2 (1996): 26–56; see also Reynolds, "How to Come unto Christ," *Ensign* 22 (September 1992): 7–13; Reynolds, "The Gospel According to Mormon," *Scottish Journal of Theology* 68, no. 2 (May 2015): 218–34; Reynolds, "The Gospel

Christ in meristic form (or as a *merismus*).[26] At least three examples of this kind of merismus (Helaman 13:39; 14:8, 29)[27] — and arguably four (Helaman 14:2)[28] — occur in Samuel the Lamanite's speech, and three of these in direct connection with wordplay on Samuel's name (Helaman 13:39; 14:2, 8).

At least two prominent texts from the Hebrew Bible widely cited over the last few centuries in discussions of salvation can be read or understood as meristic summations of the doctrine of Christ. Paul at least twice quotes Habakkuk's statement "the just *shall live* [*yiḥyeh*] by his faith" (Habakkuk 2:4).[29] On one level, Hebrew ʾĕmûnâ — as faith — constitutes the first principle of the gospel. On another, ʾĕmûnâ — as covenant "faithfulness" or constancy — constitutes the fifth principle of the gospel, "endur[ing] to the end." "Live" (*yiḥyeh*), in the sense of eternal life (cf. *ḥay lĕʿōlām*, Genesis 3:22) represents the last principle.

Applying Nephi's perspective to Joel's prophecy in Joel 2:28–32 [MT 3:1–5] yields similar interpretative results. Joel concludes his prophecy of the latter-day ("afterward") outpouring of the Lord's spirit

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According to Nephi: An Essay on 2 Nephi 31," *Religious Educator* 16, no. 2 (2015): 51–75.

26. Reynolds, "Biblical Merismus in Book of Mormon Gospel References," 106–34.

27. Ibid., 128.

28. To Reynolds's list, I would add Helaman 14:2 on the basis of the verb "redeem," which is sometimes used synonymously with the verb "save." See, e.g., Helaman 5:10: "And remember also the words which Amulek spake unto Zeezrom in the city of Ammonihah, for he said unto him that the Lord surely should come to *redeem* his people, but that he should not come to *redeem* them in their sins, but to *redeem* them from their sins." Here Helaman cites the same event and conversation recorded in Alma 11:34–37: "And Zeezrom saith again: Shall he *save* his people in their sins? And Amulek answered and said unto him: I say unto you he shall not — for it is impossible for him to deny his word. Now Zeezrom saith unto the people: See that ye remember these things, for he saith there is but one God, yet he saith that the Son of God shall come but he shall not save his people, as though he had authority to command God. Now Amulek said again unto him: Behold thou hast lied; for thou sayest that I speak as though I had authority to command God because I said he shall not *save* his people in their sins. And I say unto you again that he cannot *save* them in their sins, for I cannot deny his word. And he hath said that no unclean thing can inherit the kingdom of heaven. Therefore, how can ye be *saved* except ye inherit the kingdom of heaven? Therefore ye cannot be *saved* in your sins."

29. See Romans 1:17 ("For therein is the righteousness of God revealed from faith to faith: as it is written, The just shall live by faith"); Galatians 3:11 ("But that no man is justified by the law in the sight of God, it is evident: for, The just shall live by faith"). The author of Hebrews also quotes Habakkuk in Hebrews 10:38: "Now the just shall live by faith: but if any man draw back, my soul shall have no pleasure in him."

and the signs in the heavens that would precede "the great and terrible day of the Lord," with the promise that "whosoever shall call [*yiqrāʾ*] on the name [*šēm*] of the Lord shall be delivered [*yimmālēṭ*]" (Joel 2:32; cf. Acts 2:10; Romans 10:13). "Call[ing] on the name of the Lord" represents having "faith" in the Lord, the first principle of the doctrine of Christ while "deliver[ance]" (*pĕlēṭâ*) represents the last — i.e., salvation or eternal life.

Samuel the Lamanite's subsequent prophecy of signs in the heavens that would herald the "coming" of the Son of God appears to follow the structure or at least the trajectory of Joel's prophecy of signs in the heavens before the "coming" of the day of the Lord, including a meristic promise of deliverance or salvation through the doctrine of Christ:

> And behold, this will I give unto you for a sign at the time of his coming. For behold, there shall be great lights in <u>heaven</u> [Hebrew *šāmayim*], insomuch that in the night before he cometh there shall be no darkness, insomuch that it shall appear unto man as if it was day. Therefore there shall be one day and a night and a day, as if it were one day and there were no night. And this shall be unto you for a sign, for ye shall know of the rising of *the sun* [*šemeš*] and also of its setting. Therefore they shall know of a surety that there shall be two days and a night; nevertheless the night shall not be darkened. And it shall be the night before he is born. And behold, there shall be a new star arise, such an one as ye never have beheld; and this also shall be a sign unto you. And behold this is not all. There shall be many *signs and wonders in <u>heaven</u>* [*šāmayim*]. And it shall come to pass that ye shall all be amazed and wonder, insomuch that ye shall fall to the earth. And it shall come to pass *that whosoever shall believe on the Son of <u>God</u>, the same shall have everlasting life.* (Helaman 14:3–8)

Samuel augments the previous wordplay on his own name ("those who shall believe on *his name* [*šĕmô*]" with his use of the terms "heaven" [Hebrew *šāmayim*] (twice) and "the sun" *šemeš*, paronomasia that functions similarly to the one in Genesis 11:4: "let us build us a city and a tower, whose top may reach unto heaven [*šāmayim*]; and let us make us a name [*šēm*, or reputation, monument, or memorial]." Samuel prophesies that everyone who sees these "signs and wonders in heaven"

would "fall to the earth."[30] Those who would affirmatively respond in faith ("whosoever shall believe on the Son") would activate the doctrine of Christ unto "everlasting life" in the same way that "the just [or justified one] shall live by his faith [or, faithfulness]" (Habakkuk 2:4) and that "whosoever shall call on the name of the Lord shall be delivered" (Joel 2:32 [MT 3:5]).

If Samuel's use of the phrase "believe on his name" constitutes a play on his own name — whether in the context of the speech or on the literary level of Mormon's editorial work — his repetitious use of the word "believe" may also constitute a play on or reference to his ethnic status as a "Lamanite." As I have argued elsewhere, the names Laman and Lamanites came to have pejorative associations with "unbelief," "unfaithfulness," or "no faith" among the Nephites, clearly on the basis of Nephi's words in 1 Nephi 12:22–23 and probably earlier texts like Deuteronomy 32:20, which described Israelites who were delinquent from the covenant as "children in whom is no faith [*lōʾ-ʾēmun*]" — i.e., they have dwindled in "unbelief."[31] As we will see, Samuel's repeated exhortative uses of the verb "believe" — Hebrew *ʾmn* — causes his immediate Nephite audience and Mormon's latter-day audience to face a stark irony: the Lamanites, as exemplified by Samuel himself as a prophet of the Lord, came to embody unshakable faithfulness when they came to "believe" and walked the covenant path (Alma 23:5–6; 27:26–30). Samuel himself will belabor this point with an extended wordplay on "Lamanites" in terms of the Hebrew concept *ʾmn* (faith/believe/belief/steadfast/true/truth/firm/firmness/etc.) and "unbelief" (*lōʾ-ʾēmun*) later in his speech (see Helaman 15:5–17). [32] The Nephites, contrary to their

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30. On ritual prostrations or "proskynesis" in the Book of Mormon, see Matthew L. Bowen, "'They Came Forth and Fell Down and Partook of the Fruit of the Tree': Proskynesis in 3 Nephi 11:12–19 and 17:9–10 and Its Significance" in *Third Nephi: New Perspectives on an Incomparable Scripture*, eds. Gaye Strathearn, Andrew Skinner (Provo, UT: Neal A. Maxwell Institute, 2011), 107–29; Bowen, "'And Behold, They Had Fallen to the Earth': An Examination of Proskynesis in the Book of Mormon," *Studia Antiqua* 4, no. 1 (2005): 91–110.

31. Matthew L. Bowen, "Not Partaking of the Fruit: Its Generational Consequences and Its Remedy," in *The Things Which My Father Saw: Approaches to Lehi's Dream and Nephi's Vision: The 40th Annual Brigham Young University Sidney B. Sperry Symposium*, eds. Daniel L. Belnap, Gaye Strathearn, and Stanley A. Johnson (Provo, UT: RSC, 2011), 240–63; Matthew L. Bowen, "The Faithfulness of Ammon," *Religious Educator* 15, no. 2 (2014): 64–89.

32. See Helaman 15:7–15. Samuel plays on and reverses the Nephites' traditional epithetic Laman/Lamanite/"unbelief" rhetoric in these verses, and then turns that

own self-perceptions, had dwindled in unbelief and become delinquent from the covenant.[33]

Samuel's threefold use of the expression "believe on his name" in Helaman 4:2, 12–13 taps into the Nephites' long prophetic tradition of using this expression in reference to activating the doctrine of Christ (see, e.g., 2 Nephi 25:13–14; Alma 5:48; 11:40; 12:15; 26:35; 32:22; 34:15; cf. 2 Nephi 9:24).[34] But it also recalls Lamoni's report of the vision that culminated in the conversion of his whole household and eventually much of his kingdom and the broader Lamanite population — people of whom Samuel appears to have been a descendant: "For as sure as thou livest, behold, I have seen my Redeemer, and he shall come forth and be born of a woman, and he shall redeem all mankind who believe on *his name* [Hebrew *šĕmô*]" (Alma 19:13; cf. Alma 19:26; 22:13). All of the foregoing uses of "believe on his name" have some reference to activating and living the doctrine of Christ, which Samuel insists the Nephites need to do. It was none other than Nephi the son of Lehi, the great Nephite patriarch, who had declared as part of the "doctrine of Christ" that "there is none other way nor *name* [Hebrew *šēm*] given under *heaven* [*šāmayim*] whereby man can be saved in the kingdom of God" (2 Nephi 31:21; cf. 2 Nephi 31:11–13).

Of all the Book of Mormon writers, editors, or speakers who use forms of the phrase "believe on his name," Samuel gives us its most concentrated use in his speech to the recalcitrant Nephites of Zarahemla, suggesting his emphatic and conscious use of this phrase as a rhetorical strategy. Samuel, whose own name bore witness to the sanctity and power of the divine name, was perhaps the perfect messenger to draw on this earlier Nephite prophetic language to call them back to the doctrine of Christ.

"To the Intent That Ye Might Believe on His Name"

The next part of Samuel's speech brings the doctrine of Christ even nearer into the foreground. Samuel asserts a divine commission to

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rhetoric fully on its head in the last recorded words in his speech in Helaman 15:17. A fuller study on this subject is forthcoming.

33. For an excellent discussion of this repeated cycle, see Book of Mormon Central, "How Does Chiasmus Teach Us to Reverse the Pride Cycle? (Alma 62:48–49)," *KnoWhy* #468, Sept 18, 2018, https://knowhy.bookofmormoncentral.org/knowhy/how-does-chiasmus-teach-us-to-reverse-the-pride-cycle.

34. In 2 Nephi 9:24, this phrase is rendered "believe in his name." Jacob states, "And if they will not repent and *believe in his name* and be baptized *in his name* and endure to the end, they must be damned, for the Lord God, the Holy One of Israel, has spoken it."

preach repentance to the Nephites of Zarahemla as part of a broader commandment that they "prepare the way of the Lord": "And behold, thus hath the Lord commanded me by his angel that I should come and tell this thing unto you. Yea, he hath commanded that I should prophesy these things unto you; yea, he hath said unto me: Cry unto this people: *repent and prepare the way of the Lord*" (Helaman 14:9).

Reynolds additionally notes that Nephi uses the expression "the way" (Hebrew *derek*) to describe the doctrine of Christ.[35] Indeed, Alma the Younger,[36] Samuel the Lamanite,[37] and Moroni[38] use the collocation "prepare the way" (Hebrew *pinnâ derek*, literally "clear the way") as a metonymic description for living the doctrine of Christ or walking the covenant path.

Samuel the Lamanite's rejection by the Nephites had a strong socio-ethnic or racial component to it as he declares in Helaman 14:10 ("And now because I am a Lamanite and hath spoken the words which the Lord hath commanded me … ye are angry with me and do seek to destroy me"). The Nephites saw themselves, not least in their times of general moral degeneracy and covenant delinquency, as "the good" or "fair ones."[39] They ever saw themselves thus vis-à-vis the Lamanites, whom they saw as the "unfaithful" or those who had dwindled in "unbelief."[40] Samuel the Lamanite devotes much of the final stage of his speech (Helaman 15) to this very issue, as noted above.

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35. Noel B. Reynolds, "This is the Way," *Religious Educator* 14, no. 3 (2013): 79–91; Reynolds, "The Ancient Doctrine of the Two Ways and the Book of Mormon," *BYU Studies* 56, no. 3 (2017): 49–78.

36. Alma 7:9: "But behold, the Spirit hath said this much unto me, saying: Cry unto this people, saying: Repent ye, repent ye, and prepare the way of the Lord and walk in his paths, which are straight; for behold, the kingdom of heaven is at hand, and the Son of God cometh upon the face of the earth."

37. Helaman 14:9.

38. Ether 9:28: "And there came prophets in the land again, crying *repentance* unto them, that they must *prepare the way of the Lord* or there should come a curse upon the face of the land; yea, even there should be a great famine, in which they should be destroyed if they did not repent."

39. Matthew L. Bowen, "'O Ye Fair Ones': An Additional Note on the Meaning of the Name Nephi," *Insights* 23, no. 6 (2003): 2–3; Bowen, "'O Ye Fair Ones' – Revisited," *Interpreter: A Journal of Mormon Scripture* 20 (2016): 315–44.

40. Bowen, "*Not* Partaking of the Fruit," 240–63; Bowen, "The Faithfulness of Ammon," 64–89; cf. Jo Ann Hackett's suggestion that Ammonihah meant "Yahwe is (my) faithfulness," with a *qatol*-form of the Hebrew root See Jo Ann Hackett and John W. Welch, "Possible Linguistic Roots of Book of Mormon Names," FARMS Preliminary Report CAR-81 (Provo, UT: FARMS, 1982); *HALOT*, 62–65.

Samuel then uses language that again recalls his prophetic use of "hear" (Hebrew *šāmaʿ*, Egyptian *śḏm*) and exploits the phonological similarity between *šĕmûʾēl* and that verb: "And *ye shall hear my words*, for for this intent I have come up upon the walls of this city, *that ye might hear and know of the judgments of God* which do await you because of your iniquities, and also that ye might know the conditions of *repentance*" (Helaman 14:11). Samuel presents himself as one of the raised-up prophets "like unto" Moses and typifying of Christ, whom his Nephite-Israelite brethren must "hear" (Deuteronomy 18:15–19; cf. 1 Nephi 22:20; 3 Nephi 20:23).

Although "ye shall hear" might be understood with the deontic modality of "ye must hear," the force of Samuel's evident use of *šāmaʿ* in the first instance comes across even stronger than an imperative: the Nephites of Zarahemla are going to "hear" Samuel, regardless of whether they desire to do so. In the second instance, "hear" as used in the purpose clause, emphasizes that Nephites' hearing the imminent and longer-term judgments of God and knowing how to avert them ("the conditions of repentance")[41] is requisite with his justice (cf., e.g., Amos 3:7).

All of this sets the stage for additional purpose clauses, two of which, like Helaman 14:2, include the onomastic elements in *šĕmûʾēl*: "and also that ye might know of the coming of Jesus Christ *the Son of God, the Father of heaven* [*šāmayim*] *and of earth, the Creator of all things from the beginning*, and that ye might know of the signs of his coming, *to the intent that ye might believe on his name* [*šĕmô*]" (Helaman 14:12).[42] The noun *šāmayim* ("heaven") adds paronomastic flavor to the wordplay on *šĕmûʾēl* similar to the paronomasia of Genesis 11:4: "let us build a city,

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41. In addition to Samuel's use of it in Helaman 14:11, the collocation "conditions of repentance" occurs in the Book of Mormon in Alma 17:15 (used by Mormon); 42:13 (used by Alma the Younger), and in Helaman 5:11 (used by Helaman, the son of Helaman). See also two instances in the Doctrine and Covenants: D&C 18:12; 138:19.

42. Interestingly, the formula "Father of heaven and of earth, the Creator of all things from the beginning" evokes the biblical titular formula *ʾēl ʿelyôn qōnê šāmayim wāʾāreṣ* "the Most High God, possessor of heaven and earth:" (Genesis 14:19, 22; cf. Acts 4:24). The divine name Elk=kener/Elkenah constitutes a shortened form of a similar name-title. See Kevin Barney, "On Elkenah as Canaanite El," *Journal of Book of Mormon Studies* 19, no. 1 (2010): 22–35. The Hebrew personal name Elkanah (Hebrew, *ʾelqānâ*; Exodus 6:24, 1 Samuel 1:1, 4) represents a similar hypocoristicon and is the name of father of the biblical prophet Samuel. The Book of Mormon onomasticon entry for Elkenah notes that "the Egyptian equivalent would have been *qmꜣ wnnt* 'Creator of that which is.'" *The Book of Mormon Onomasticon*, s.v. "Elkenah," https://onoma.lib.byu.edu/index.php/ELKENAH.

and a tower, with its top in heaven [*šāmayim*], and let us make us a name [*šēm*, reputation, monument, memorial]."

Since, as he had stated previously, the Son of God was specifically coming to "redeem all those who believe on *his name*," Samuel knew it was necessary to persuade these Nephites to activate the blessings of Christ's atonement through faith "on his name" and living in obedience to the doctrine of Christ. The name *šĕmûˀēl* — "His name is El" or the name he calls upon or invokes in worship[43] — implied saving faith or belief resident in the one so named. In other words, the meaning of the name Samuel itself encapsulates the doctrine of Christ, from faith in Jesus Christ to salvation in the kingdom of God. Thus, Samuel and his name — a name declared at the outset of his sermon — stood before the Nephites as an example and a symbol. The Nephites collectively had failed to glorify God and his "name" and thus embody the "good" they believed to be implied in the name Nephites, the "good" that their ancestor Nephi described as the doctrine of Christ (see 2 Nephi 31–33).

"And If Ye Will Believe On His Name …"

A conditional clause follows immediately on the heels of Samuel's purpose clause, the language again playing on his name: "*And if ye believe on <u>his name</u>* [*šĕmô*], ye will repent of all your sins, that thereby ye may have a remission of them through his merits" (Helaman 14:13). This conditional clause constitutes a meristic reference to the doctrine of Christ[44] and alludes directly to Nephi's original exposition of that doctrine. For example, the "remission" of sins through "repent[ing] of all your sins" that Samuel mentions has reference to Nephi's description of repentance and baptism as the "gate" of "the way" of life and salvation: "For the gate by which ye should enter is repentance and baptism by water, and then cometh a remission of your sins by fire and by the Holy Ghost. And then are ye in this straight [or strait] and narrow path which leads to eternal life, yea, ye have entered in by the gate. Ye have done according to the commandments of the Father and the Son" (2 Nephi 31:17–18).[45]

Nephi had included "the commandments of the Father and the Son" when he quoted them previously in his text, commandments which emphasize the importance of the "name" (*šēm*) of the Son: "And the Father saith: Repent ye, repent ye, and be baptized in the *name* of my

43. Cf. McCarter, *I Samuel*, 62.

44. Reynolds, "Biblical Merismus in Book of Mormon Gospel References," 128.

45. Previous to 2 Nephi 31:17, Nephi first uses the term translated "remission" in 2 Nephi 25:26.

Beloved Son. And also, the voice of the Son came unto me, saying: He that is baptized *in my name*, to him will the Father give the Holy Ghost like unto me" (2 Nephi 31:11–12). Nephi describes baptism as the means of taking upon oneself the "name" ("ye are willing to take upon you *the name* of Christ by baptism," 2 Nephi 31:13) and concludes regarding "the doctrine of Christ" and the "name" that "this is the way. And there is none other way nor *name* given under *heaven* whereby man can be saved in the kingdom of God" (2 Nephi 31:21; see also above).[46]

Additionally, Samuel's use of the phrase "through his merits" alludes to 2 Nephi 31:19: "ye have not come thus far save it were by the word of Christ with unshaken faith in him, relying wholly upon *the merits* of him who is mighty to save."[47] In terms of Lamanite conversion history, the phrase "through his merits" had another important intertextual reference: the royal speech of Anti-Nephi-Lehi (Alma 24:7–16). Samuel was very likely the descendant of Lamanites who heard this speech and perhaps a descendant of king Anti-Nephi-Lehi himself. Anti-Nephi-Lehi exclaimed:

> And I also thank my God, yea, my great God, that he hath granted unto us that we might repent of these things, and also that he hath forgiven us of these our many sins and murders which we have committed and took away the guilt from our hearts *through the merits of his Son*. And now behold, my brethren, since it has been *all that we could do*, as we were the most lost of all mankind, to repent of all our sins and the many murders which we have committed and to get God to take them away from our hearts — for it was *all we could do* to repent sufficiently before God that he would take away our stains. (Alma 24:10–11)

This again takes us back to Nephi's statements on the doctrine of Christ: "For we labor diligently to write, to persuade our children and also our brethren to believe in Christ and to be reconciled to God, for we know that it is by grace that we are saved after all we can do" (2 Nephi 25:23). As Robert L. Millet has noted, Alma 24:10–11 sheds light

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46. For useful study of "name"-theology, see Truman G. Madsen, "'Putting on the Names': A Jewish-Christian Legacy," in *By Study and Also By Faith: Essays in Honor of Hugh W. Nibley on the Occasion of His Eightieth Birthday*, eds. John M. Lundquist and Stephen D. Ricks (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 1990), 1:458–81.

47. The noun "merits" occurs first in Lehi's parenesis to his son Jacob (2 Nephi 2:8). Nephi uses it first in direct connection to the doctrine of Christ in 2 Nephi 31:19.

on what Nephi's use of the much debated phrase "all we can do" means.[48] Namely, in one sense "all we can do" is "repent sufficiently before God." Against the backdrop of 2 Nephi 23:25, Alma 24:10–11, and 2 Nephi 31, Samuel's subsequent statement takes even more striking significance: "Therefore repent ye, repent ye, lest by knowing these things and *not doing them*, ye shall suffer yourselves to come under condemnation and ye are brought down unto this second death" (Helaman 14:19).

The second part of Samuel's prophecy concludes with an additional meristic allusion to the doctrine of Christ.[49] This conclusion looks forward to the signs that would signify the Son of God glorifying the name of the Father and the climactic events of 3 Nephi 11–27, in which Jesus further glorified the name of the Father. In Helaman 14:25, Mormon preserves Samuel's prophecy regarding the post-resurrection appearance of many of the righteous dead, the same prophecy that Jesus had chided his Nephite disciples for failing to record. Samuel then, according to Mormon's record, predicts the signs that would attend the Messiah's death (vv. 26–27). Samuel also makes a laconic reference to Jesus's post-mortal ministry among the Lamanites and Nephites beginning at the temple in Bountiful:

> And the angel said unto me that many shall see greater things than these, to the intent that they might *believe* — that these signs and these wonders should come to pass upon all the face of this land, to the intent that there should be *no cause for unbelief* among the children of men — and this *to the intent that whosoever will believe might be saved and that whosoever will not believe, a righteous judgment might come upon them*; and also if they are condemned, they bring upon themselves their own condemnation. (Helaman 14:28–29)

In addition to echoing the earlier purpose clause in v. 13 ("to the intent that ye may believe on his name"), the purpose clause "to the intent that whosoever will believe might be saved" constitutes yet another meristic description of the doctrine of Christ,[50] which encapsulates that doctrine as Jesus teaches it in 3 Nephi 11–27, especially in 3 Nephi 11:11–40 and 27:2–22.

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48. Robert L. Millet, *After All We Can Do … Grace Works* (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 2003), 131–32. For more on exegetical issues pertaining to 2 Nephi 25:23, see Joseph M. Spencer, "What Can We Do? Reflections on 2 Nephi 25:23," *Religious Educator* 15, no. 2 (2014): 25–39.

49. Reynolds, "Biblical Merismus in Book of Mormon Gospel References," 128.

50. Ibid.

Samuel's apparent repeated use of forms of the verbal root ʾmn in the phrases "that they might believe," "no cause for unbelief," "whosoever will believe," and "whosoever will not believe" unavoidably returns the historical Nephite pejorative association of the Lamanites with "unbelief" to the forefront of his speech. His Nephite audience could not have failed to appreciate the high irony of a Lamanite prophet warning Nephites — "the goodly" or "fair ones" who had been "chosen on account of their faith" — against "unbelief" and the "righteous judgment" that would come upon "whosoever will not believe." As noted previously, the major point — maybe the entire point — of the last part of Samuel's speech (Helaman 15) is that the converted Lamanites had come to embody faith and faithfulness in spite of past unbelief (vv. 11, 15), while the Nephites had become those who had dwindled in "unbelief" (see especially v. 17).

Almost certainly, Samuel had been born to "faithful" Lamanite parents whose grandparents or great-grandparents had been among those Lamanites who had believed in the preaching of Ammon, Aaron, et al. (see Alma 17–28). These parents consciously bestowed the name of an ancient Israelite prophet — one of the greatest — on their son, who would become a prophet. It is also not unlikely that they knew what this name meant in their scriptural tradition. Again, worth noting is that the kerygmatic phrase "believe on his name," attested first in Nephi's writings on the small plates (2 Nephi 25:13–14), is attested frequently in and in connection with the Lamanite conversions (see Alma 19:13, 36; 22:13; 26:35). Samuel's name — šĕmûʾēl — thus appropriately echoes the events surrounding his ancestors' conversion as well as constituting a key part of his preaching (see again Helaman 14:2, 12–13). His ancestors had responded to the preaching of Nephite missionaries and had activated the blessings of Christ's atonement and the promises of the Abrahamic Covenant by living the doctrine of Christ, beginning with "believ[ing] on his name." Samuel now returned as a descendant of these Lamanite converts to call the Nephites back to doing the same.

"There Were Many Who Heard the Words of Samuel": Activating the Doctrine of Christ and the Atonement of Christ

At the conclusion of his presentation of Samuel's speech (Helaman 13–15), Mormon devotes substantial attention to describing the reaction the speech engendered. Mormon first describes those who immediately respond in faith to Samuel's message as well as those who initially disbelieve but subsequently believe. Significantly, the response of faith consisted of obedience to the doctrine of Christ:

> And now it came to pass that *there were many which <u>heard</u> the words of <u>Samuel</u> the Lamanite* which he spake upon the walls of the city. And as many as *believed on his words* went forth and sought for Nephi. And when they had came forth and found him, they *confessed unto him their sins* [i.e., repented] and denied not, *desiring that they might be baptized unto the Lord*. But as many as there were which *did not believe in the words of <u>Samuel</u>* were angry with him. And they cast stones at him upon the wall, and also many shot arrows at him as he stood upon the wall. But *the Spirit of the Lord was with him*, insomuch that they could not hit him with their stones neither with their arrows. Now when they saw this, that they could not hit him, *there were many more which did believe on his words*, insomuch that they went away unto Nephi to be *baptized*. For behold, Nephi was *baptizing* and a prophesying and preaching, crying *repentance* unto the people, shewing signs and wonders, working miracles among the people, that they might know that the Christ must shortly come, telling them of things which must shortly come, that they might know and remember at the time of their coming that they had been made known unto them beforehand, *to the intent that they might believe. Therefore as many as believed on the words of <u>Samuel</u>* went forth unto him to be baptized, for they came repenting and confessing their sins. (Helaman 16:1–8)

In this passage, Mormon's use of the phrase "believed on the words of Samuel [*šĕmûʾēl*]" echoes Samuel's refrain "believe on *his name* [*šĕmô*]." Mormon's initial mention of the "many" who "heard the words of Samuel," again appears to juxtapose the verb *šāmaʿ* with *šĕmûʾēl* as play on the prophet's name in a way that further connects it with earlier uses of *šāmaʿ* as a proclamation formula (see earlier). Those who "believed on the word of Samuel," in so doing, exercised *faith* in Jesus Christ, thus activating the doctrine of Christ and the blessings of his atonement. Their repentance consisted of seeking out Nephi and "confess[ing] unto him their sins." A key point here is that the faith and repentance of these people led straightway to their baptism at the hands of a prophetic-priestly authority. Although Samuel had invoked the doctrine of Christ only in meristic fashion, "hearing" (i.e., obedient) Nephites seem to have known that doctrine so well as to understand Samuel's words as an invitation and summons to baptism.

Moreover, in stating that "the Spirit of the Lord was with him," Mormon characterizes Samuel the Lamanite as a prophet "legitimated"[51] by the Lord. The biblical prophet Samuel's legitimation in 1 Samuel 3:19 finds expression in nearly identical terms: "and the Lord was with him." This legitimation stands in stark contrast to the de-legitimation of the Nephites, whose covenant delinquency has progressed to the point that they seek the life a true prophet.[52]

Nephi the son of Helaman, for his part, did many of the same things Samuel did. He declared the doctrine of Christ, prophesied of the coming of Christ, and showed signs and wonders to the Nephites in advance of that event. Both had been "prepar[ing] the way of the Lord" among the Nephites in the most meaningful sense of that expression — like John the Baptist had done in his sphere[53] — all this "to the intent that they [the Nephites] might believe" and activate the blessings of the atonement of Jesus Christ through obedience to his doctrine.

A final literary echo of the name Samuel in the Book of Helaman accompanies Samuel the Lamanite's departure from Mormon's narrative:

> But *the more part of them did not believe in the words of* *Samuel*. Therefore when they saw that they could not hit him with their stones and their arrows, they cried unto their captains, saying: Take this fellow and bind him. For behold, he hath a devil; and because of the power of the devil which is in him, we cannot hit him with our stones and our arrows. Therefore take him and bind him and away with him. And as they went forth to lay their hands on him, behold, he did cast himself down from the wall, and did flee out of their lands,

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51. David Wagner, *Geist und Tora: Studien zur göttlichen Legitimation und Delegitimation von Herrschaft im Alten Testament anhand der Erzählungen über König Saul* (Leipzig, DEU Evangelische Verlagsanstalt, 2005), 189–216.

52. Cf., e.g., Israel's covenant delinquency as described by Elijah in 1 Kings 19:10, 14: "And he said, I have been very jealous for the Lord God of hosts: for *the children of Israel have forsaken thy covenant*, thrown down thine altars, and slain thy prophets with the sword; and I, even I only, am left; and *they seek my life, to take it away*." Cf. the inhabitants of Jerusalem at the time Lehi was called to be a prophet (see 1 Nephi 1:20; 2:1, 13; 7:14; 17:44) and Laman and Lemuel et al.'s negative progression in 1 Nephi 2:13; 7:16; 17:44; 2 Nephi 1:24; 5:2–4. King Noah and his people similarly sought the prophet Abinadi's life and manifest similar covenant delinquency (see Mosiah 11:26). The JST Genesis account describes the people to whom Noah the patriarch preached in similar terms (Moses 8:18, 26).

53. See Isaiah 40:3, quoted by all three "synoptic" evangelists (Mark 1:3; Matthew 3:3; Luke 4:3).

> yea, even unto his own country, and began to preach and to
> prophesy among his own people. And behold, *he was never
> heard of more* among the Nephites. And thus were the affairs
> of the people. (Helaman 16:6–8)

"Not believ[ing] in the words of Samuel" was tantamount to "not
believing in [the] name [*šĕmô*]" of the Son of God. The "more part" of the
Nephites have become the embodiment of everything for which they had
traditionally criticized and loathed the Lamanites: the Nephites were
now the unfaithful or those who had "dwindled in unbelief." Samuel
responds to the persistent Nephite effort to dispose of (or kill) him by
fleeing home "unto his own country." Mormon's assertion that "he
[Samuel] was "never heard of more" echoes the name Samuel in terms of
the similar-sounding verb *šāma'*, "hear."

"I Will Fulfill All That Which I Have Caused to Be Spoken by the Mouth of My Holy Prophets": The Fulfillment of Samuel's Word and the Doctrine of Christ

Mormon makes a major point of demonstrating that Samuel the
Lamanite's prophecies regarding the birth of the Messiah and the signs
attending this event came to complete fulfillment. The questions among
the Nephites five years after Samuel's prophecy, as Mormon presents
it, were whether Samuel's words could still be fulfilled and, more than
implicitly, was he a true prophet?

> But there were some who began to say that the time was past
> for the words to be fulfilled, which were *spoken by Samuel,
> the Lamanite*. And they began to rejoice over their brethren,
> saying: Behold the time is past, and the words of *Samuel* are
> not fulfilled; therefore, your joy and your *faith* concerning
> this thing hath been vain. And it came to pass that they did
> make a great uproar throughout the land; and the people who
> *believed* began to be very sorrowful, lest by any means those
> things which had been spoken might not come to pass. But
> behold, *they did watch steadfastly* for that day and that night
> and that day which should be as one day as if there were no
> night, that they might know that their *faith* had not been
> vain. Now it came to pass that there was a day set apart by
> *the unbelievers*, that *all those who believed* in those traditions
> should be put to death except the sign should come to pass,
> which had been given by *Samuel the prophet*. (3 Nephi 1:6–9)

Mormon's use of the terms *Lamanite*, *faith*, *believed*, and *steadfastly* keep his audience immersed in issues of the traditional Nephite polemic against the Lamanites as *lōʾ-ʾēmun* as described above. Now a Lamanite prophet, rather than one in the Nephite tradition, has authoritatively laid down the terms on which true faith and belief will emerge. The old ethnic distinctions are breaking down (as becomes clear in 3 Nephi 2:14–16). Here, the "believers" or the "faithful" are those who "believed" in the "words" of Samuel" and the traditions regarding the Messiah's coming. Those who believe in Samuel's prophecies, believe on the one who sent him — and thus "believe on his name" (Helaman 14:2, 12–13). These are the ones practicing the doctrine of Christ.

In the microcosm of this pericope which culminates in the fulfillment of Samuel's prophecies, the faithful who "watch steadfastly" for the signs of the Messiah's birth, in so doing apply the fifth principle of the gospel: to "endure to the end" (cf. "ye must press forward with a steadfastness in Christ … and endure to the end," 2 Nephi 31:20). Their faith and faithfulness to the "end" find marvelous vindication when "that day and that night and that day" finally come to pass and the word comes to Nephi:

> Lift up your head and be of good cheer. For behold, the time is at hand, and on this night shall the sign be given. And on the morrow come I into the world, *to show unto the world that I will fulfil all that which I have caused to be spoken by the mouth of my holy prophets*. Behold, *I come unto my own to fulfil all things which I have made known unto the children of men from the foundation of the world*, and to do the will of the Father and of the Son — of the Father because of me, and of the Son because of my flesh. And behold, the time is at hand, and this night shall the sign be given. (3 Nephi 1:13–14)

Afterward, what is said of Samuel the prophet in the biblical book of Samuel becomes applicable to Samuel the Lamanite prophet: " … and *the Lord was with him*, and did *let none of his words fall to the ground*" (1 Samuel 3:19). What the biblical writer says of the earlier Samuel takes on special poignancy when applied to Samuel the Lamanite in the context of pejorative Nephite views of the Lamanites: "Samuel *was established* [*neʾĕmān*, confirmed, verified, proven (faithful) < *ʾmn*] to be a prophet of the Lord" (1 Samuel 3:20). Samuel the Lamanite's words were proven "faithful" or "true" vis-à-vis the words of his Nephite critics "who had not believed the words of the prophets" (3 Nephi 1:16) and had dwindled in "unbelief" (Helaman 15:17).

"They Were Heard to Cry and Mourn"

Mormon brings Samuel the Lamanite to the forefront of his narrative again in 3 Nephi 8 as he chronicles the imminent fulfillment of Samuel the Lamanite's prophecy concerning the death of Jesus Christ. It had been thirty-three years from the time of the sign of the birth of the Son of God (see 3 Nephi 8:2).[54] Here Mormon states that "the people began to look with great earnestness for the sign which had been given by *the prophet Samuel* the Lamanite, yea, for the time that there should be darkness for the space of three days over the face of the land" (3 Nephi 8:3). Mormon demonstrates that not only did the signs come to pass, but also that the people cried out with the very words that Samuel said they would cry:

> And it came to pass that it did last for the space of three days that there was no light seen. And there was great mourning and *howling and weeping* among all the people continually; yea, great were the groanings of the people because of the darkness and the great destruction which had come upon them. And *in one place they were heard to cry*, saying: *O that we had repented before this great and terrible day*, and then would our brethren have been spared and they would not have been burned in that great city Zarahemla. And in another place *they were heard to cry and mourn*, saying: *O that we had repented before this great and terrible day and had not killed and stoned the prophets and cast them out*, then would our mothers and our fair daughters and our children have been spared, and not have been buried up in that great city Moronihah. And thus were the *howlings* of the people great and terrible. (3 Nephi 8:23–25)

"Howling and weeping" fulfilled Samuel's prophecy in Helaman 13:32: "then shall ye weep and howl in that day, saith the Lord of Hosts." The phrases "they were heard to cry" and "they were heard to cry and mourn" ("and … they were heard" — cf. Hebrew *wayyiššāmʿû*)[55] recalls the name of the giver of these signs and prophecies which were, at that hour, being fulfilled — the name of the prophet whom they had refused to "hear" (*šāmaʿ*), Samuel. Moreover, Mormon's imputation of the words "O that we had repented before this great and terrible day and had not killed the prophets and cast them out" to the people constitutes

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54. 3 Nephi 8:2: "And now it came to pass, if there was no mistake made by this man in the reckoning of our time, the thirty and third year had passed away."

55. See, e.g., 1 Samuel 17:31.

an almost verbatim replication of the words that Samuel had predicted would be on the mouths of the Nephites:

> *O that I had repented and had not killed the prophets and stoned them and cast them out.* Yea, in that day ye shall say: O that we had remembered the Lord our God in the day that he gave us our riches, and then they would not have become slippery, that we should lose them. For behold, our riches are gone from us. Behold, we layeth a tool here, and on the morrow it is gone. And behold, our swords are taken from us in the day we have sought them for battle. Yea, we have hid up our treasures, and *they have slipped away from us* because of the curse of the land. *O that we had repented in the day that the word of the Lord came unto us. For behold, the land is cursed; and all things are become slippery and we cannot hold them.* Behold, we are surrounded by demons; yea, *we are encircled about by the angels of him who hath sought to destroy our souls. Behold, our iniquities are great.* O Lord, canst thou not turn away thine anger from us? And this shall be your language in them days. But behold, your days of probation is past. Ye have procrastinated the day of your salvation until it is everlastingly too late and your destruction is made sure. Yea, for *ye have sought all the days of your lives for that which ye could not obtain. And ye have sought for happiness in doing iniquity*, which thing is contrary to the nature of that righteousness which is in our great and eternal Head. O ye people of the land, *that ye would hear my words*! And I pray that the anger of the Lord be turned away from you and that ye would repent and be saved. (Helaman 13:33–39)

The Nephites had been "encircled about by the angels of him who hath sought to destroy [their] souls" and "[their] iniquities [had been] great"; or, as the voice of Christ later described the fulfillment of Samuel's words thus: "the devil laugheth, and his angels rejoice, because of the slain of the fair[56] sons and daughters of my people; and it is because of their iniquity and abominations that they are fallen!" (3 Nephi 9:2). The Nephites of Mormon's time replicate the failure of the majority of the Nephites to "hear" Samuel during his time. Thus they could not activate the blessings of the doctrine of Christ and "be saved."

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56. Bowen, "O Ye Fair Ones," 2–3; Bowen, "O Ye Fair Ones – Revisited," 332, 334–35.

Mormon records the fulfillment of Samuel the Lamanite's prophecies again during his own time. The Nephites again were surrounded by evil and "the power of the evil one":

> And these Gaddianton robbers, which were among the Lamanites, did infest the land, insomuch that the *inhabitants thereof began to hide up their treasures in the earth; and they became slippery because the Lord had cursed the land, that they could not hold them nor retain them again.* And it came to pass that there were sorceries and witchcrafts and magics; and the power of the evil one was wrought upon all the face of the land, *even unto the fulfilling of all the words of Abinadi and also <u>Samuel</u> the Lamanite.* (Mormon 1:18–19)

Not only did the possessions of the Nephites become "slippery," The Nephites mourned and lamented again as they had at the time of the death of Christ:

> And it came to pass that the Nephites began to repent of their iniquity and *began to cry, even as had been prophesied by <u>Samuel</u> the prophet. For behold, no man could keep that which was his own* for the thieves and the robber, and the murderers and the magic art and the witchcraft which was in the land. Thus *there began to be a mourning and a lamentation in all the land because of these things, and more especially among the people of Nephi.* And it came to pass that when I Mormon saw their lamentation and their mourning and their sorrow before the Lord, my heart did begin to rejoice within me, knowing the mercies and the long-suffering of the Lord, therefore supposing that he would be merciful unto them, that they would again become a righteous people. But behold, this my joy was vain; for *their sorrowing was not unto repentance because of the goodness of God, but it was rather the sorrowing of the damned because the Lord would not always suffer them to take happiness in sin.* (Mormon 2:10–13)

The Nephites' abortive repentance at this closing stage in their history meant they would not be "saved' collectively, neither — for the most part — individually. Mormon directly alludes to Samuel's speech to the Nephites who "sought for happiness in doing iniquity" (Helaman 13:18) when he asserted that the Nephites did not want to complete their repentance "because the Lord would not always suffer them to take happiness in sin" (Mormon 10:13). In other words,

the inverse of Alma's corollary "wickedness never was happiness"[57] — i.e., the idea that one can "eat, drink, and be merry; [but] nevertheless fear God"[58] — constitutes a doctrine incompatible with the doctrine of Christ and "the nature of that righteousness which is in our great and eternal Head" (Helaman 13:38). The Nephites not only ceased to "fear God," but also "they did curse God and wish to die. Nevertheless they would struggle with the sword for their lives" (Mormon 2:14).

Conclusion

The wordplay on Samuel in Helaman 14:2, 12–13 and 3 Nephi 23:9 approaches more nearly the actual etymology of the name Samuel (*šĕmûʾēl*) than most of the literary wordplay on Samuel that occurs in the Samuel-Saul cycle in the Hebrew Bible. The meaning and symbolism of *šĕmûʾēl* ("his-name-is-El," i.e., a *šēm* which glorifies *ʾēl*), Samuel's rhetorical wordplay on his own name, and Jesus's wordplay on his name all converge in Moroni's meristic description of the doctrine of Christ: "but because of the *faith* of men he has shewn himself unto the world and *glorified the name* [*šēm*] of the Father and prepared a way that thereby others might be partakers of the heavenly gift, that they might hope for those things which they have not seen" (Ether 12:8).

Samuel's prophecies emphasized "believ[ing] on the name" of the Son of God (Helaman 14:2, 12–13) and the signs that would mark the latter's coming in mortality when the Son would "glorify the name of the Father" and the Father would "glorify his name" in his son Jesus Christ (3 Nephi 23:9). Jesus had testified regarding the prophets in ancient Israelite tradition, "Verily I say unto you: Yea, *and all the prophets from Samuel and those that follow after, as many as have spoken, have testified of me*" (3 Nephi 20:24). One of those prophets "that follow[ed] after" was Samuel the Lamanite. In the case of Samuel, truly *nomen est omen* — the name is the sign. Samuel's name constitutes a most appropriate sign — a sign that not only would Jesus fulfill all the words of the prophets concerning him (3 Nephi 1:14), but also a sign that he himself would "glorify the name of the Father" in all things (Ether 12:8; cf. 3:21; 3 Nephi 11:11), and a sign that the Father would fully "glorify his name" in him (3 Nephi 9:15; 11:7; 23:9).

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57. Both Samuel and Mormon owe their statements to Alma the Younger, who explained to his son Corianton: Alma 41:10: "Do not suppose, because it has been spoken concerning restoration, that ye shall be restored from sin to happiness. Behold, I say unto you, wickedness never was happiness."

58. 2 Nephi 28:8.

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Early Christian Temples and Baptism for the Dead: Defining Sacred Space in the Late Antique Near East

David Calabro

Abstract: *This paper addresses the early Christian transition from temple-based Judaism to the Constantinian basilica of the fourth century. David argues that some Christians of the second and early third centuries may have had places of worship that, while not monumental in scale, qualify typologically as temples and were understood as such. These sacred structures may have been used for the performance of baptisms for the dead, as suggested by Doctrine and Covenants 124. In support of this thesis, he takes as case studies the Christian places of worship at ancient Edessa and Dura Europos, based on a combination of textual sources and archaeological remains. David then briefly applies these findings to a question posed years ago in studies by Hugh Nibley and John Lundquist, "What Is a Temple?"*

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information at https://interpreterfoundation.org/books/the-temple-past-present-and-future/.]

Introduction

The scriptures of the Restoration have a way of pushing us beyond prevailing scholarly paradigms, sometimes even requiring us to return to the primary sources and rebuild from the ground up. This is a healthy process—part of learning "by study and also by faith" (Doctrine and Covenants 88:118).

The present study began with a passage from the Doctrine and Covenants section 124. In verses 25–27, in a passage closely analogous to the Lord's commandment to build a tabernacle in Exodus 25:1–9, the Lord commands the Saints to bring products for the construction of a house for the Lord to dwell in. Then, in verses 29–33, the Lord gives as a fundamental purpose of this commandment the fact that the ordinance of baptism for the dead "belongeth to [his] house." He goes on to say that there is a "sufficient time" appointed, after which the baptisms would no longer be acceptable. For the Saints in our dispensation, this "sufficient time" lasted until the dedication of the baptismal font of the Nauvoo Temple in November 1841, about one year after the doctrine of baptism for the dead was revealed.[1]

Verse 33 mentions that this localization of the ordinance was "instituted from before the foundation of the world," which statement implies that the temple was the preferred place for this ordinance in prior dispensations as well. Yet our doctrine also maintains that baptism for the dead began to be practiced in the dispensation of the meridian of time, after Jesus organized the preaching of the Gospel to the spirits in prison (Doctrine and Covenants 138:29–35). Paul gives us the first and only biblical reference to this ordinance:

> Else what shall they do which are baptized for the dead, if the dead rise not at all? why are they then baptized for the dead?
> (1 Corinthians 15:29)

Early Christian literature also provides some information about the practice of baptism for the dead. From a couple references in the writings of Tertullian, we see that the practice was already poorly understood among Christians living around Carthage (North Africa) in the early third century. Tertullian's knowledge of the practice may be based solely on 1 Corinthians 15:29; he concludes that the practice has no validity

but that it shows correct faith in a bodily resurrection.[2] But as late as the second half of the fourth century, Epiphanius of Salamis reports having heard of Christians in the provinces of Asia and Galatia (in modern-day Turkey) who observed a traditional practice of being baptized on behalf of those who had died without baptism, and this practice was said to be the one to which Paul referred in 1 Corinthians 15:29. Epiphanius, however, regards the practice as misguided.[3] During the same period, John Chrysostom and Didymus the Blind mention that the Marcionite sect practiced a form of baptism of the living on behalf of the dead, although they disagree on whether this was done for catechumens of the sect or for unbelievers.[4] These sources do not allow us to establish how widespread the practice of baptism for the dead was in the first two centuries.[5] The manner in which it was performed also remains uncertain. Nevertheless, it seems clear that at least some early Christians practiced baptism for the dead as early as the first century (when Paul wrote his epistles to the Corinthians) and as late as the fourth century.[6]

Where, then, did early Christians perform their baptisms for the dead? Just as the Latter-day Saints in Nauvoo were commanded to build a temple in which to perform this ordinance, did early Christians build temples with baptismal fonts? In what follows, I will argue that at least some did.

Most scholars who have studied the development of sacred space in early Christianity have maintained that early Christians did not build temples.[7] The specifics of this development are subject to different theories, but most agree that the Church replaced the Jewish temple only rhetorically, not with a new physical temple.

Nibley makes a sharp distinction between the "primitive church," which continued the tradition of temple rites, and "the later church," which was "by all accounts a totally different thing," and which tried to continue the temple rites but "failed, attempting for a time to establish its own substitutes for the temple."[8] According to Nibley, the primitive church was centered on the temple in Jerusalem, and the destruction of the temple in AD 70 was a devastating blow from which the church never recovered. The church continued to preserve the rites in secret, but these were eventually corrupted and diffused. The later church was dependent on the Jewish synagogue for its rites, which accords with the contemporary theory that early Christian churches were based architecturally on the synagogue.[9] The endpoint of Nibley's paradigm is the reforms of Constantine in the fourth century, when the Church of

the Holy Sepulcher in Jerusalem was revived as the replacement of the ancient temple.[10]

More recently, L. Michael White, on the basis of a careful survey of archaeological and textual evidence across the early Christian world, proposed a four-stage development of Christian religious buildings from meeting in members' homes to the adoption of the basilica under Constantine. In this development, the buildings became progressively larger and took on more and more monumental characteristics, all driven by the need of Christian communities for larger places of assembly. The four stages, with their associated dates, are as follows:

> 1. House church (first to second century)
>
> 2. Domus ecclesiae (early third century)
>
> 3. Aula ecclesiae (late third to early fourth century)
>
> 4. Basilica church (fourth century)[11]

White's model is strictly linear, from smaller to larger spaces, and assumes that Christian buildings were essentially places of assembly for preaching and for the rite of the Eucharist. The temple has no place in this model.

Can the current scholarly models be reconciled with the practice of baptism for the dead? One might assume that early Christians, like the Latter-day Saints in Nauvoo, resorted to natural bodies of water to perform their proxy baptisms — an option that the Lord permits according to Doctrine and Covenants 124, though only for an appointed time that is "sufficient . . . to build a house unto [him]" (Doctrine and Covenants 124: 31). It is also possible that those to whom Paul refers in 1 Corinthians 15:29 were practicing a corrupt form of Christianity as some commentators have assumed, though the fact that Joseph Smith quotes this passage approvingly (Doctrine and Covenants 128:16) makes this interpretation less viable for Latter-day Saints.[12]

My own investigation, however, suggests the need for a more nuanced paradigm. I will argue that there is evidence to believe that some early Christians worshiped in places best classified as temples. This argument will be based on two sites in the Near East: Edessa and Dura Europos. I would emphasize at the outset that the data I am discussing are not new; indeed, White discusses both of these sites, and and one of them features prominently in his model. What is new here is my approach to the data, which is prompted by Doctrine and Covenants 124. This brings up questions that do not feature in previous studies, questions that lead in turn to some new findings. I will conclude with some reflections on

Figure 1. Balikli Göl (Abraham's Pool) at the site of ancient Edessa, now Urfa, Turkey. Now located inside a mosque, this is said to be the site of a miracle in which God delivered Abraham from burning by turning the flames into water.

the lessons learned in this study and how they might inform future Latter-day Saint studies of ancient temples.

Edessa

The ancient city of Edessa, modern Urfa, is located on the Daisan river in southeastern Turkey. The city is said in local tradition to be the site of the biblical Ur of the Chaldees—the birthplace of Abraham—a notion with which some scholars agree.[13] Only six miles from the city is Göbekli Tepe, recently hailed as the site of the world's oldest temple.[14] In the early centuries of the common era, Edessa became a center of Christian worship and the starting place for the spread of Syriac Christianity throughout the Middle East. Among the vast corpus of Syriac historical writings is a brief chronicle known as the *Chronicle of Edessa*. This work was composed in the sixth century but was certainly based on older records found in the "archives of Edessa," which are mentioned within the text itself. These same archives are independently mentioned by Eusebius and are extolled for their reliability by several other ancient sources.[15] This chronicle preserves for us the earliest surviving reference to a building devoted to Christian worship. The context of this reference

is an account of a flood that occurred in AD 201, which destroyed the city's palace and several other buildings:

> And in that same hour, the waters broke through the western wall of the city and entered inside the city. They broke down the great and beautiful palace of our lord the king, and they carried away everything that was found before them, the pleasant and beautiful buildings of the city, everything that was near the river to the south and north of it. And they also damaged the temple of the church of the Christians. And more than two thousand people were killed by this occurrence.[16]

Note that the Christian building, the very first attested in any ancient source, is specifically referred to as a temple (in Syriac, *hayklā*). While this fact has been known for some time, it is generally dismissed by scholars. After all, later Christian writers commonly referred to Christian churches as temples, in line with Christian rhetoric setting up the Church as the successor of the temple in Jerusalem.[17] Yet a close reading of the *Chronicle of Edessa* suggests that the term as used here is not merely figurative, nor is it connected to the later Christian usage.

The chronicle contains many further references to churches the bishops of Edessa constructed. These further references conform to a distinct pattern of terminology. Yet the reference to the flooded temple of AD 201 seems to belong to a separate category. The references to religious buildings in the *Chronicle* are tabulated in table 1.

Table 1. Religious buildings in the *Chronicle of Edessa*

Entry	Year AD	Syriac	English
1	201	*hayklā d-ʿidtā da-kristyāne*	temple of the church of the Christians
12	313	*ʿidtā d-ʾūrhāy*	church of Edessa
14	324	*ʿidtā*	church
16	328	*ʿidtā d-ʾūrhāy*	church of Edessa
18	346	*bēt mawdyāne*	house of the Confessors
29	370	*bēt maʿmūdītā rabbtā d-ʾūrhāy*	great house of baptism of Edessa
33	377	*ʿidtā d-ʾūrhāy*	church of Edessa
34	377	*bēt mār dānīʾēl*	house of Mar Daniel

34	377	*bēt mār dēmeṭ*	house of Mar Demet
38	394	*hayklā rabbtā d-mār tāwmā šlīḥā*	great temple of Mar Thomas the Apostle
48	409	*bēt mār barlāhā*	house of Mar Barlaha
51	412	*bēt mār sṭepānos*	house of Mar Stephanus
59	435	*ʿidtā ḥdattā hāy d-yawmānā bēt šlīḥe metqaryā*	new church, which is now called the house of the apostles
60	438	*ʿidtā ʿattīqtā d-ʾūrhāy*	old church of Edessa
64	448	*ʿidtā*	church
68	457	*bēt mār yoḥannān maʿmdānā*	house of Mar Yohannon the Baptist
68	457	*bēt-sāhde l-mār qozmā w-mār damyānā*	martyrion of Mar Cosma and Mar Damian
76	499	*hayklā*	temple
81	503	*bēt mār sargīs*	house of Mar Sergius
81	503	*basilīqi garbyāytā d-bēt mawdyāne*	northern basilica of the house of the Confessors
88	519	*bēt maʿmūdītā*	house of baptism

The terms used for the religious buildings in this text sort into six types, as shown in table 2.

Table 2. Terms for religious buildings in the *Chronicle of Edessa*

Syriac term	English translation	Paragraphs in the *Chronicle*
hayklā d-RELIGION	temple of RELIGION	8
ʿidtā (d-CITY)	church (of CITY)	12, 14, 16, 33, 59, 60, 64
bēt SAINT	house of SAINT	18, 34 (bis), 48, 51, 59, 68, 81
bēt maʿmūdītā d-CITY	baptistry of CITY	29, 88
bēt sāhde l-SAINT[18]	martyrion of SAINT	68

Figure 2. Map showing the locations of ancient Edessa and Dura Europos.

hayklā (*d*-SAINT)	temple (of SAINT)	38, 76

There seems to be a fundamental shift in word usage between the first entry, dated AD 201, and subsequent entries that mention buildings, which start in the time of Constantine over a century later. Not once in the later entries is it necessary to qualify the term *hayklā* by the name of a specific religion. The AD 201 entry is from a period in which there were many temples of various religions in Edessa, making it necessary to specify which religion the temple belonged to. We know from other evidence that there were, indeed, many temples in the region.[19] The use of the term in this early context implies that the building was similar in physical appearance and purpose to the temples of other religions. If this were a mere domestic dwelling, as White's paradigm would assume, it is doubtful that the term "temple" would have been used, or even that the building would have been mentioned in the chronicle at all. Therefore, we have at least one solid reference to a specifically Christian building, known to the record-keeper as a temple, in Edessa in 201. On the assumption that the building was constructed somewhat earlier, we can tentatively place its construction in the latter half of the second century.

Later, from AD 313 to 503, we see the shift in word usage. A group of terms, including *ʿidtā*, *baytā*, and *hayklā*, seem to be synonymous and to refer to typical Byzantine-style churches.[20] A poem composed around the sixth century, which poem eulogizes the domed cathedral in Edessa in terms that embody temple themes, demonstrates the application of

temple ideology to the Byzantine basilica during this later period. The poem begins as follows:

> Self-existent one who dwells in the holy temple,
>   For whom praise flows naturally from it,
> Give me the grace of the Holy Spirit,
>   That I might speak of the temple that is in Edessa.
>
> Bezalel fashioned for us a Tabernacle
>   According to the pattern that he learned from Moses,
> And Amidonus, Asaph, and Addai
>   Built for you a glorious temple in Edessa.
>
> Symbols both of your existence and of your plan
>   Are clearly portrayed therein.
> The one who looks closely
>   Will at last be filled with wonder
>
> For truly it is a wonder.
>   That its smallness seems expansive as the world—
> Not in measurement, but symbolically;
>   And waters surround it like the sea.[21]

The poem goes on to describe the features of the building and how they represent parts of the cosmos. The word *hayklā*, "temple," is used to refer to the building throughout the poem. With an understanding of the earlier existence of a temple at Edessa, it seems likely that the ideology we find in this poem had been carried over from that earlier period.

Dura Europos

The textual evidence from Edessa can be further illuminated by bringing it into comparison with archaeological evidence from another city, Dura Europos, which was situated on the Euphrates river about two hundred miles southeast of Edessa (see figure 2). The two cities, like many in the Syrian cultural area in late antiquity, are broadly comparable in terms of their religious demographics: both cities had several large pagan temples, a single, more modest Christian establishment, and a single Jewish synagogue. The two cities were also linguistically similar, with Greek and Syriac being used.

The Christian building at Dura Europos began as a domestic house, perhaps used for gatherings by a growing Christian community. In circa AD 232, this house underwent renovations to convert it into a place of

worship (see figure 3). On the south side of the building, a wall was torn down to form an elongated assembly room. The level of this room's floor was raised, thereby eliminating a bench that originally lined the walls and making movement from the adjoining rooms an ascending passage. Instead of the bench, a single dais (that is, a platform for a throne) was placed at the east end of the room. The plaster floor of the open courtyard in the center of the house was covered with tiles. In the room at the northwest corner of the building, which the excavators called Room 6, a beautiful, arched baptismal font was installed, and the walls were painted with religious scenes. The excavator, Carl Kraeling, states that the changes in Room 6 "were more extensive than in any other part of the premises, the new installations more monumental and the decor applied to the walls sumptuous by local standards." Among the several rooms of the house, this one "became the most elegant and, as a room devoted to ceremonial use, in all probability the most sacred."[22] Finally, an "Upper Room," something that was "not common at Dura," was added directly above the baptistry of Room 6.[23]

This building is one of the examples White adduces in his category of the *domus ecclesiae*, which refers to a domestic space that has been adapted "to make it more suitable for the specialized religious and social functions of Christian assembly."[24] The Greek equivalent of this term, *oikos ekklesias*, was used for religious buildings in Mediterranean cities, including Antioch, in the third century.[25] White's identification of the Dura building as a *domus ecclesiae* follows Kraeling.[26] However, the term is not attested at Dura Europos, and there is no direct evidence that it was applied to the Christian building there in antiquity. Further, the typological characterization that this term carries with it (namely, the characterization as a stage in the development of the basilica church) is a scholarly construct developed by White himself. Thus, the way in which this building was characterized by the Christian community at Dura remains an open question.

Does the notion of a temple — defined here in Latter-day Saint terms as a sacred place for priesthood ordinances, including redemptive work for the dead — fit with the Christian building at Dura Europos? There are four reasons why I would suggest that this is a possibility.

First, the care and decoration given to the baptistry, in proportion to the rest of the building, recalls the importance of baptism for the dead in Doctrine and Covenants 124. There is no way to know whether the font in Room 6 was used for the living only, the living on behalf of the dead, or both. However, according to the early church handbook known
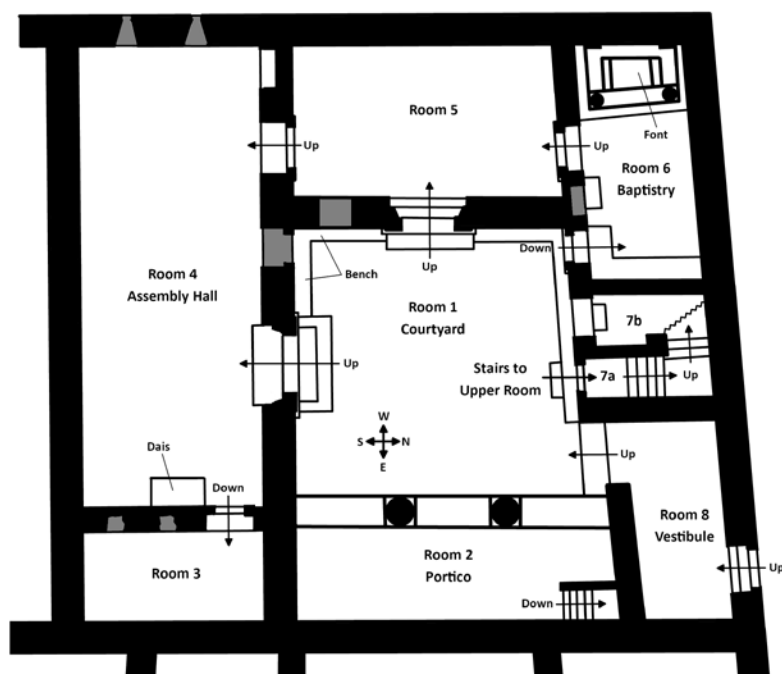
Figure 3. Floor plan of the Christian building at Dura Europos after renovation.

as the Didache, baptisms for the living were supposed to be performed in "living water" if possible—that is, probably, in the flowing water of a river.[27] With the Euphrates river close at hand, the presence of a baptismal font at this early date could contradict the Didache, unless it was for the special purpose of baptisms for the dead, which should be performed in a temple according to Doctrine and Covenants 124.

The features of the font are compatible with a use that may have included baptisms for the dead. The font, large enough for total immersion, is also deep enough that its floor is below that of the surrounding rooms.[28] This recalls the principle that the font, as a similitude of the grave, "was commanded to be in a place underneath where the living are wont to assemble" (Doctrine and Covenants 128:13).

The decorative scheme of the font and of the baptistry as a whole is also compatible with the possibility that baptisms for the dead were performed there. The most prominent of the wall paintings, immediately visible to anyone entering the room, is the procession of women on the north and east walls (see figure 4). Many suggest it represents the women approaching Christ's tomb on the morning of the resurrection.[29]

Figure 4. The Procession of Women and the font in the baptistry
of the Christian building at Dura Europos.

However, there are no clear indications of Christ or of the Easter narrative in the composition, so it can also be understood as a generic funeral procession. The women advance toward the font, the procession ending at a peaked structure, thought to represent a tomb, immediately to the right of the font. This would certainly suggest a connection between baptism and the dead who are to emerge from the grave.[30]

Underneath the arch immediately behind the font is a representation of Adam and Eve flanking the tree of knowledge of good and evil and touching its fruit, a reminder of how death entered the world. Above this is a representation of Christ as the Good Shepherd standing among a group of sheep and carrying a ram on his shoulders.

Other paintings in the room show Christ lifting Peter from the depths to walk on the water and healing the paralytic. In both cases, Christ stretches out his hand, and in the scene of walking on the water, this culminates in a grip with Peter's hand. Both of these scenes are suggestive of Christ's power to redeem and to raise the dead.

Interestingly, several features of the font are comparable to the Torah niche at the nearby synagogue in Dura Europos, making it likely that the font was designed in purposeful dialogue with the Torah niche (see figure

5). Both are located in the center of the western wall of their respective rooms. They show similar construction, including an arch supported by columns that are painted to resemble marble. The details of the paintings underneath the arch of the baptismal font are comparable to those on the arch of the Torah niche: where the Torah niche shows a menorah with a fruit (the *etrog*) and branch (the *lulav*), the baptismal font shows the tree of knowledge of good and evil with the fruit that Adam and Eve grasp. Where the Torah niche shows the binding of Isaac, with a ram (Genesis 22:13) and human figure in the foreground, the baptismal font shows the Good Shepherd carrying a ram and standing among sheep. Both the Torah niche and the baptismal font are the focal points of larger narrative schemes in the respective rooms' wall paintings.[31] Finally, both embody the concept of a gate. For the Torah niche, this is evident in the visual similarity between the niche itself and the painting of the temple façade, including a gate, at the center of the arch above the niche.[32] In the case of the font, the columned arch recalls the description in 2 Nephi 31:17–18 of baptism as the gate by which one enters the path leading to eternal life. The font's collocation of the concepts of the gate, the sheep, and the fruit may be connected in some way to Matthew 7:7–20, near the end of the Sermon on the Mount, in which Jesus teaches about wolves in sheep's clothing, knowing prophets by their fruits, and entering in at the strait gate. There may also be an implicit statement that repentance and baptism, rather than the law of Moses (the focal point of the Torah niche), is the gate to salvation, as taught in the Joseph Smith Translation of Matthew 7:9, 13–14:

> And then said his disciples unto him, They will say unto us, We ourselves are righteous, and need not that any man should teach us. ... We have the law for our salvation, and that is sufficient for us. Then Jesus answered and said unto his disciples, Thus shall ye say unto them, What man among you, having a son, and he shall be standing out, and shall say, Father, open thy house that I may come in and sup with thee, will not say, Come in, my son; for mine is thine, and thine is mine? ... Repent, therefore, and enter ye in at the strait gate: for wide is the gate, and broad is the way, that leadeth to destruction, and many there be who go in thereat: Because strait is the gate, and narrow is the way, that leadeth unto life, and few there be that find it.

This passage is strongly evocative of the temple, especially the reference to the father's house.[33]

Figure 5. *a*. Baptismal font on the western wall of the baptistry in the Christian building at Dura Europos.

b. Torah niche on the western wall of the synagogue at Dura Europos

Second, the existence of an upper room directly above the baptistry allows for the possibility of an ascending sequence of ordinances from baptism to other rites and covenants. The stairs leading to the upper room are just east of the baptistry. Unfortunately, there are no remains to indicate what purpose this upper room served. The idea of an upper room is suggestive of the upper room in which Christ administered the Last Supper, washed the feet of the Apostles, and administered sacred teachings (Matthew 26:20–30; Mark 14:17–26; Luke 22:14–38; John 13:1–14:31). According to the apocryphal Acts of John, the events in that upper room included a prayer circle: Jesus commanded the Apostles to form a circle and grasp one another's hands. Jesus then stood in the center of the circle and prayed, and the Apostles repeated the word *amen* after each verse of the prayer.[34] Thus one possibility is that the upper room at Dura was used for rites such as a ritual meal, a washing ceremony, and a prayer circle, these being analogous to the ceremonies administered on the ground floor but perhaps restricted to a select group. The room may also have been used for sacred instruction.

Third, the building is broadly similar in both size and manner of development to the pagan temples and the Jewish synagogue at Dura. The interior of the Christian building, with its high ceilings and columned doorways, would have presented a majestic appearance.[35] Kraeling remarks on the unusual size of the building compared to the average house at Dura:

> As dwellings go at Dura, the Private House is a structure of no mean size. There were a few much larger establishments, for instance the so-called House of the Large Atrium in Block D1, but the great majority was decidedly smaller. Actually, the building was comparable in the size of the lot it occupied to that used for the earlier of the two successive synagogues by the Jewish community of Dura.[36]

Further, White shows that many of the pagan temples at Dura developed, as the Christian building did, from domestic buildings into monumental sacred structures through a series of renovations and expansions. The Jewish synagogue at Dura also developed in the same way.[37] Marie-Henriette Gates also emphasizes the continuity between the various religious buildings at Dura, all of them having what she calls a "basic 'oriental' character." Components of this include a basic layout that resembles domestic architecture, "little variety in exterior decoration," and interior embellishment with "programs of painted decoration." According to Gates,

> This so-called oriental, or Syro-Mesopotamian quality, is in fact precisely the essence of Durene culture. One cannot correctly interpret the religious structures, whether pagan, Jewish, or Christian, from any perspective other than within the context of a typical, provincial Syro-Mesopotamian community that is part of a long conservative history of religious and secular building.[38]

This runs counter to the assumption that converting a house into a place of worship was a specifically Christian practice, which partially lies behind the choice of the term *domus ecclesiae*. Conversely, it shows that the development of the building at Dura fits with the cross-religious pattern of temple-building in that region.

Fourth, some scholars connect the features of the assembly hall in the Dura building with a contemporary textual source describing the order of the Eucharist, which was known as *Didascalia Apostolorum*.[39] This text, originally composed in Greek somewhere in Syria around AD 230, survives in Greek only in a single fragment but is fully preserved in Syriac. The twelfth chapter of *Didascalia Apostolorum* gives instructions for the positions and behavior of the bishop, elders, deacons, and members during the Eucharist, recalling the order of the priesthood for the temple in Kirtland as described in Doctrine and Covenants 88:119–141. It also mentions a throne for the Bishop, which is likely what the dais at the east end of the assembly hall at Dura is. But most important for our purposes is the exhortation to bishops at the beginning of the chapter: "Do not profane the house of the Lord nor scatter his people."[40] The phrase "the house of the Lord," I would argue, refers to the physical setting of the Eucharist and shows that this space was conceptualized as a temple.

Initially, one might suspect that this statement adopts usage similar to that of New Testament passages referring to the church community as the "temple" or the "house of God."[41] However, the Syriac term used here for "the house of the Lord," *bayteh d-māryā*, is the same term used in reference to the temple of Solomon and other temple structures in the Old Testament Peshitta; the phrase as used in the Peshitta translates the Hebrew term *bēt YHWH*.[42] None of the New Testament passages referring to the church community use this precise phrase; indeed, the phrase is absent from the New Testament (both from the Greek and from the New Testament Peshitta). Thus, the use of this phrase clearly evokes Old Testament usage referring to a physical temple structure. In the immediate context of the twelfth chapter of *Didascalia Apostolorum*,

the term *baytā*, "the house," appears several times in reference to the physical building where the Eucharist takes place—for instance in the instruction, "Let a place be set apart for the priests at the eastern end of the house, and let the bishop's throne be set up in their midst, and the priests shall sit with him."[43] It would seem, therefore, that *bayteh d-māryā* at the beginning of the passage, as well as the shorter form *baytā* used subsequently, refers to the place where the people of God assemble.

The combined evidence of the archaeology of the Christian building at Dura Europos, the *Chronicle of Edessa*, and the *Didascalia Apostolorum* is strongly suggestive of how the building at Dura Europos was conceptualized among those who actually used it. This evidence runs counter to the notion that the building was merely conceptualized as a "house of the church." To be sure, the word *ʿidtā*, "church," which occurs in the post-Constantinian entries of the *Chronicle of Edessa* in reference to church buildings, occurs in the *Didascalia Apostolorum*. But in the *Didascalia Apostolorum*, the term never refers to an actual building, having instead its original sense of "church assembly, congregation"; and it never occurs in combination with the word for "house."[44] Instead, based on the *Didascalia Apostolorum* and the *Chronicle of Edessa*, we have two terms for a Christian building in the Syrian milieu during this period. The term used in a Christian context would be *bayteh d-māryā*, "house of the Lord," and the term used in a more general context would be *hayklā d-ʿidtā da-kristyāne*, "temple of the church of the Christians."[45]

Conclusion

Scholarship so far has developed paradigms that exclude the temple from Christian sacred architecture during the period between AD 70 and the rise of Christianity to the status of an official religion of the Roman empire in the fourth century. According to current paradigms, we should not have anything that could be called a temple as early as the flood of Edessa in AD 201, and having a fine indoor baptismal font such as we find at Dura Europos, with the Euphrates river just down the hill, is unexpected.

But the evidence from the region of Syria discussed in this study, interpreted in its own context, offers us a picture of early Christianity that could fit comfortably with Doctrine and Covenants 124. It seems to me more than coincidence that of the two earliest known buildings devoted to Christian worship, one was specifically called a temple, and the other had a baptismal font as its most prominent feature.

This study also raises some larger questions that might impact Latter-day Saint studies of ancient temples. For instance, how do we know a temple when we see one? And of the myriad temples we can identify in ancient records and excavations, which qualify from a Latter-day Saint standpoint as true temples akin to our own — that is, sacred places whose ordinances focus on bringing people to the Messiah, binding people to God through covenants, and uniting families for eternity?

Several studies in the past have attempted to answer questions like these using a typological approach, one being John Lundquist's typology of ancient Near Eastern temples.[46] But this study shows that it is very difficult to know how a given ritual space was conceptualized by the people who used it unless we have written texts to help fill out the picture. The archaeological evidence uncovered at Dura Europos definitely allows us to identify Christian ritual space there. It even allows us to determine that baptisms were performed there. But it doesn't tell us how early Christians characterized that space. For this, the Syriac textual evidence from the *Chronicle of Edessa* and *Didascalia Apostolorum* is crucial.

With these observations in mind, I would suggest that we need to develop a new approach in our studies of ancient temples. The two legs of this approach would be (1) a typological approach to archaeological evidence, paying particular attention to the relationship between ritual spaces and other types such as domestic spaces; and (2) a cultural-historical approach to textual evidence in its original languages, paying particular attention to the variety of ways in which different textual genres may inform us about the ideology attached to ritual space. I hope to develop each of these points in future studies. With this new approach, we will be able to move beyond suggestive comparisons and achieve greater accuracy in identifying temple space, including temples that are most relevant to our heritage as Latter-day Saints.

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Notes for Figures

Figure 1. Balikli Göl (Abraham's Pool), Şanlıurfa, Turkey, Wikipedia. https://pl.wikipedia.org/wiki/Plik:Balikli_Göl_03.jpg (accessed March 9, 2021). Used here under a Creative Commons license.

Figure 2. Map drawn by author.

Figure 3. Drawn by author based on Carl H. Kraeling, *The Christian Building* (New Haven: Dura Europos Publications, 1967), plan 5.

Figure 4. From Kraeling, *The Christian Building*, Plate 24. Used with permission.

Figure 5. a. From Kraeling, *The Christian Building*, Plate 23; *b.* From Carl H. Kraeling, C. C. Torrey, C. B. Welles, and B. Geiger. *The Synagogue. The Excavations at Dura-Europos Conducted by Yale University and the French Academy of Inscriptions and Letters:* Final Report VIII, Part I. New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1956, plate 24. Both images used with permission.

Notes

1 *Teachings of Presidents of the Church: Joseph Smith* (Salt Lake City: The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, 2007), 22; James E. Talmage, *The House of the Lord: A Study of Holy Sanctuaries Ancient and Modern* (Salt Lake City: The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, 1912), 130–31.

2 Tertullian, *De resurrectione carnis*, 48; Tertullian, *Adversus Marcionem*, 5.10.

3 Epiphanius, *Panarion*, 1.28.6; for an English translation of this passage, see Frank Williams, *The Panarion of Epiphanius of Salamis*, revised and expanded second edition (Leiden: Brill, 2009), 1:120–21.

4 See David L. Paulsen and Brock M. Mason, "Baptism for the Dead in Early Christianity," *Journal of Book of Mormon Studies*, vol. 19 no. 2 (2010), 22–49, especially pages 40–41.

5 Many interpreters assume that Paul in 1 Corinthians 15:29 refers to a practice observed at Corinth. See, for instance, Michael F. Hull, *Baptism on Account of the Dead (1 Cor 15:29): An Act of Faith in the Resurrection* (Atlanta: Society of Biblical Literature, 2005), 12–20; Joseph A. Fitzmyer, *First Corinthians: A New Translation with Introduction and Commentary* (New Haven: Yale University

Press, 2008), 578. However, Paul's third-person reference ("they . . . which are baptized for the dead") is ambiguous; it may just as easily refer to believers elsewhere known to Paul and the Corinthians or even to a widespread practice. The complaint that "this is the only attested instance of such a practice in NT times" (Fitzmyer, *First Corinthians*, 578) holds little weight in view of the paucity of sources from this early period.

6 For more in-depth studies of the early Christian sources on baptism for the dead, see Hugh Nibley, "Baptism for the Dead in Ancient Times," in *Mormonism and Early Christianity* (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 1987), 100–167; N. H. Taylor, "Baptism for the Dead (1 Cor 15:29)?" in *Neotestamentica*, vol. 36 (2002), 111–120; Hull, *Baptism on Account of the Dead*, 40–43; Paulsen and Mason, "Baptism for the Dead in Early Christianity."

7 For a statement of the general view, see Peter G. Cobb, "The Architectural Setting of the Liturgy," in *The Study of Liturgy*, revised edition, ed. Cheslyn Jones, Geoffrey Wainwright, Edward Yarnold, and Paul Bradshaw (New York: Oxford University Press, 1992), 529.

8 Hugh Nibley, "What Is a Temple?" in *Mormonism and Early Christianity*, (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 1987), 356.

9 See Louis Bouyer, *Liturgy and Architecture* (Notre Dame, Indiana: University of Notre Dame Press, 1967), 24–39.

10 Nibley, "What Is a Temple?" 355–56; Hugh Nibley, "Christian Envy of the Temple,"in *The Jewish Quarterly Review*, vol. 50, no. 2 (1959) 404, 406. In Nibley's essay "Baptism for the Dead in Early Christianity," there is no discussion of the locus for the practice.

11 L. Michael White, *The Social Origins of Christian Architecture, Volume 1: Building God's House in the Roman World: Architectural Adaptation among Pagans, Jews, and Christians* (Valley Forge: Trinity Press International, 1990), 102–39.

12 Hull, *Baptism on Account of the Dead*, 12–20, discusses interpretations of the rite that describe it as "aberrant," "anomalous," or evidence of syncretism with pagan beliefs. However, it should be noted that many interpreters, including some mentioned by Hull, take a more positive approach. For another example, see Taylor, "Baptism for the Dead." For an extensive overview of interpretations of this passage with discussion from a Latter-day

Saint perspective, see Kevin L. Barney, "Baptized for the Dead," in *Interpreter*, vol. 39 (2020), 103–150.

13 Foremost among the relevant studies is Cyrus Gordon, "Abraham and the Merchants of Ura," in *Journal of Near Eastern Studies*, vol. 17, no. 1 (1958), 28–31. For a recent summary of the *status quaestionis* with special reference to the Book of Abraham, see Stephen O. Smoot, "'In the Land of the Chaldeans': The Search for Abraham's Homeland Revisited," in *BYU Studies Quarterly*, vol. 56, no. 3 (2017), 6–37.

14 Sandra Scham, "The World's First Temple," in *Archaeology* vol. 61, no. 6 (2008), 22–27; Andrew Curry, "The World's First Temple?" in *Smithsonian* vol. 39, no. 8 (2008), 54–60; Andrew Curry, "Seeking the Roots of Ritual," in *Science*, vol. 319 (2008), 278–280; Charles C. Mann, "The Birth of Religion," in *National Geographic* vol. 219, no. 6 (2011), 34–59. For an opposing interpretation of the buildings at Göbekli Tepe as domestic structures, see E. B. Banning, "So Fair a House: Göbekli Tepe and the Identification of Temples in the Pre-Pottery Neolithic of the Near East," in *Current Anthropology* vol. 52, no. 5 (2011), 619–660.

15 Eusebius, *Historia ecclesiastica*, 1.13.5; J. B. Segal, *Edessa: The Blessed City*, (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1970), 20–21; Benjamin Harris Cowper, "Selections from the Syriac. No. 1: The Chronicle of Edessa," in *Journal of Sacred Literature and Biblical Record*, vol. 5, no. 9 (1864), 28, 31.

16 Syriac text in I. Guidi, *Chronica Minora*, vol. 1 (Louvain, 1960), 1–2. All translations from Syriac and Greek herein are my own.

17 See Michael L. White, *Building God's House in the Roman World: Architectural Adaptation Among Pagans, Jews, and Christians*, (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1990), 118; Nibley, "What Is a Temple?," 355–357.

18 Compare the contracted form *besāhde* in a fifth century mosaic from a village northeast of Aleppo as described by Francoise Briquel Chatonnet and Alain Desreumaux, "Oldest Syriac Christian Inscription Discovered in North-Syria," in Hugoye, vol. 14, no. 1 (2011), 45–61.

19 For example, the Byzantine emperor Theodosius decreed that a major pagan temple at Edessa remain open in AD 382. See Code of Theodosius, 16.10.7–8.

20 The church (*ʿidtā*) in paragraph sixty is said to contain a communion table, and the one mentioned in paragraph sixty-four is said to contain a sacristy. The "house" (*bēt*) of Mar Stephanus in paragraph fifty-one was converted from a synagogue, and the "house of the Confessors" in paragraph eighty-one includes on its grounds a basilica. In paragraph fifty-nine, there is an explicit identification of a church (*ʿidtā*) as a "house" (*bēt*), in this case the House of the Apostles. The use of the term "temple" (*hayklā*) in conjunction with a saint's name in paragraph thirty-eight suggests that this term, like the term "house" (*bēt*) used in the same context, refers to a church.

21 Kathleen McVey, "The Domed Church as Microcosm: Literary Roots of an Architectural Symbol," in *Dumbarton Oaks Papers*, vol. 37 (1983), 91–121.

22 Carl H. Kraeling, *The Christian Building* (New Haven: Dura Europos Publications, 1967), 24.

23 Kraeling, *Christian Building*, 24–25.

24 White, *Building God's House*, 111.

25 Kraeling, *Christian Building*, 128.

26 Kraeling, *Christian Building*, 127–139. Note that the evidence Kraeling mentions for the use of equivalent terms in Syriac sources on page 138 is very weak. The sources he cites in note 2 are post-Constantinian and therefore of limited value in this discussion.

27 *Didache* 7.1. For the Greek text along with an English translation, see Michael W. Holmes, *The Apostolic Fathers: Greek Texts and English Translations*, third edition (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2007), 354–355.

28 The bottom of the font is about twenty-three centimeters lower than the floor of the baptistry and about twenty centimeters lower than the floor of the courtyard, these being the two lowest rooms in the building. For the elevations, see Kraeling, *Christian Building*, plates 33 and plans 5, 7, and 8 (at the end of the book, following the plates).

29 See Kraeling, *Christian Building*, 190–197.

30 Michael Peppard has recently argued at length that the scene depicts a procession of virgins to a wedding feast like that described in the parable of the ten virgins (Matthew 25:1–13).

See Michael Peppard, *The World's Oldest Church: Bible, Art, and Ritual at Dura-Europos, Syria* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2016), 111–154. However, he also discusses ways in which the concepts of marriage, death, and birth were intertwined in late antique culture, stating that a "polysemic stance" combining these concepts in the painting "would not have been foreign to the late ancient viewer" (Peppard, *The World's Oldest Church*, 151).

31 See Kära L. Schenk, "Temple, Community, and Sacred Narrative in the Dura-Europos Synagogue," in *AJS Review* vol. 34, no. 2 (2010), 195–229.

32 In later times, the *parokhet*, or curtain covering the Torah chest, was often embroidered with the verse, "This is the gate of the LORD, through which the righteous enter" (Psalm 118:20).

33 Compare John 2:16; 14:2–6.

34 *Acts of John* 94–95; See J. K. Elliott, *The Apocryphal New Testament* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1993), 318.

35 See Kraeling, *Christian Building*, plans 6–7.

36 Kraeling, *Christian Building*, 10.

37 White, *Building God's House*, 40–44.

38 Marie-Henriette Gates, "Dura-Europos: A Fortress of Syro-Mesopotamian Art," in *The Biblical Archaeologist*, vol. 47, no. 3 (1984), 166–181.

39 White, *Building God's House*, 138.

40 *Didascalia Apostolorum* 12.1. Alistair Stewart-Sykes, *The Didascalia apostolorum: An English Version with Introduction and Annotation*, 174, translates the exhortation, "Do not disperse the Lord's household, nor scatter his people," but this translation is likely incorrect, as I explain below.

41 1 Corinthians 3:16–17, for instance, refers to destroying the community, which is characterized as a temple, and 1 Timothy 3:15 gives an exhortation to the bishop Timothy to righteous conduct in "the house of God, which is the church of the living God." See also Ephesians 2:19–22; 1 Peter 2:5.

42 In traditional Jewish reading practice, the divine name *YHWH* is replaced by the word *ʾadonāy*, "Lord," thus yielding the reading *bēt ʾadonāy*, "the house of the Lord." For a small sampling of the many

cases of the term *bayteh d-māryā* referring to the physical temple structure in the Old Testament Peshitta, see 1 Samuel 1:7, 1 Kings 6:37, Isaiah 2:2.

43   *Didascalia Apostolorum* 12.3–4. Two similar references to "the house" immediately follow, along with a statement that one deacon should stand by the Eucharist while another stands at "the door" to observe those who enter (*Didascalia Apostolorum* 12.4–6).

44   For meanings of the word ʿidtā, see Payne Smith, *Compendious Syriac Dictionary*, 402.

45   This conclusion is anticipated by Kraeling in *The Christian Building*, 138, though only in passing.

46   John Lundquist, "What Is a Temple? A Preliminary Typology," in *Temples of the Ancient World: Ritual and Symbolism*, ed. Donald W. Parry (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 1994), 83–117.

Glad Tidings from Cumorah: Interpreting the Book of Mormon through the Eyes of Someone in Hell

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Steve Fotheringham

Abstract: *This article offers evidence that at least some Book of Mormon authors may have understood the potential for post-mortal preaching of the gospel. Indeed, they may have recognized that the future Book of Mormon would be a tool to spread the gospel not only among the living but also among those in the spirit world. Prophecies about the message of the Book of Mormon and the restored gospel being for all mankind may have broader scope than previously recognized, with application on both sides of the veil.*

One of the most distinctive doctrines in The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints is that of the redemption of the dead, including the concepts of Christ preaching the gospel to those in the spirit world during the three days His body was in the tomb, baptism for the dead, and temple ordinances for the dead. Though such doctrines and practices have been widely criticized by other Christian groups, there is now substantial evidence that some early Christians also believed that post-mortal evangelization was possible.[1] Likewise, there is significant support for vicarious baptism for the dead in at least part of

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1. David L. Paulsen, Roger D. Cook, and Kendel J. Christensen, "The Harrowing of Hell: Salvation for the Dead in Early Christianity," *Journal of the Book of Mormon and Other Restoration Scripture* 19/1 (2010): 56–77, https://scholarsarchive.byu.edu/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=1466&context=jbms. Also see David L. Paulsen, Kendel J. Christensen, and Martin Pulido, "Redeeming the Dead: Tender Mercies, Turning of Hearts, and Restoration of Authority," *Journal of the Book of Mormon and Other Restoration Scripture* 20/1 (2011): 28–51, https://scholarsarchive.byu.edu/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=1471&context=jbms.

early Christianity.[2] Latter-day Saints generally see these doctrines and practices as an indication of God's mercy and fairness, and cherish these elements as a beautiful and vital part of the Restoration.

One frequently encountered conundrum, though, is why the key volume of scripture of the Restoration, the Book of Mormon, is silent on the possibility of evangelization among the dead. Its teachings seem to many to teach nothing but heaven or hell, with those who die in a state of wickedness doomed to suffer in hell. This puzzle has been addressed in various ways, such as suggesting that these grand doctrines of the Restoration were not yet known to Book of Mormon prophets. But if known to at least some early Christians, why would the Nephites not also learn of the Lord's tender mercies toward all men?

On the other hand, in the complex Book of Mormon is clear evidence that the various authors are truly different people with difference voices and differing levels of knowledge of or interest in various topics.[3] For example, A. Keith Thompson suggests that King Benjamin may not yet have had the time or the ability to read the small plates of Nephi that he had inherited from Amaleki while serving as king. Thus, in King Benjamin's beautiful sermon in Mosiah 2–4, he does not seem to be aware of information that Nephi and Jacob had revealed regarding the resurrection of all mankind and the name of the Messiah. In fact, tracing the doctrine of the resurrection in the Book of Mormon reveals a "subtle doctrinal sub-plot" with remarkable plausibility and consistency, a sub-plot that it is difficult to imagine could have been crafted by Joseph Smith in a fictional work.[4]

The possibilities for the dead may involve yet another "subtle sub-plot" in the text for us to consider, one we may have been overlooking all these years. There may be evidence in the language of the Book of Mormon that there was some degree of awareness that the gospel could in fact be preached to the dead. In fact, there is evidence that at least some

2. David L. Paulsen and Brock M. Mason, "Baptism for the Dead in Early Christianity," *Journal of the Book of Mormon and Other Restoration Scripture*, 19/2 (2010): 22–49, https://scholarsarchive.byu.edu/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=1478&context=jbms.

3. Grant Hardy, *Understanding the Book of Mormon* (Oxford University Press, 2010), especially 11–25, 62–65, 84. See also Daniel C. Peterson "An Apologetically Important Nonapologetic Book," *Journal of Book of Mormon Studies,* 25/1 (2016): 58–61, https://scholarsarchive.byu.edu/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=1590&context=jbms.

4. A. Keith Thompson, "The Doctrine of Resurrection in the Book of Mormon," *Interpreter: A Journal of Mormon Scripture* 16 (2015): 115–19; 128, https://journal.interpreterfoundation.org/the-doctrine-of-resurrection-in-the-book-of-mormon/.

Book of Mormon writers were aware that the future Book of Mormon would be a tool for teaching the gospel not only among the living, but also in the spirit world, to both the Gentiles as well as the House of Israel, including the deceased Nephite and Lamanite peoples. This possibility can lead us to look at the Restoration and the ongoing work of the Church in a new light.

While Joseph Smith would not receive revelation about the concept of preaching the gospel to the dead, and vicarious ordinance work for them, until well after completing the translation of the Book of Mormon, events early in the Restoration hinted at what was to come. As A. Keith Thompson shows, examination of the words spoken to Joseph in the First Vision and their implications, of Moroni's repeated message to Joseph Smith regarding the Book of Mormon and the Restoration, and the words of John the Baptist in restoring the Aaronic Priesthood suggest that preparing for the work of the temple and bringing the blessings of the gospel to the post-mortal world was a divine priority.[5]

While the words from Malachi 4:5–6, quoted by Moroni many times to Joseph about sending Elijah to "turn the heart of the fathers to the children, and the heart of the children to their fathers," were cited by Christ in the Book of Mormon (3 Nephi 25:5–6), the detailed implications are not spelled out. But the Book of Mormon does offer a hint in a speech from Abinadi about the mercy of God toward those who lived in ignorance of the gospel, mercy that must relate to the work for the dead:

> And there cometh a resurrection, even a first resurrection; yea, even a resurrection of those that have been, and who are, and who shall be, even until the resurrection of Christ — for so shall he be called.

> And now, the resurrection of all the prophets, and all those that have believed in their words, or all those that have kept the commandments of God, shall come forth in the first resurrection; therefore, they are the first resurrection.

> They are raised to dwell with God who has redeemed them; thus they have eternal life through Christ, who has broken the bands of death.

> And these are those who have part in the first resurrection; and these are they that have died before Christ came, in their

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5. A. Keith Thompson, "Joseph Smith and the Doctrine of Sealing," *Interpreter: A Journal of Mormon Scripture* 21 (2016): 1–21, https://journal.interpreterfoundation.org/joseph-smith-and-the-doctrine-of-sealing/.

ignorance, not having salvation declared unto them. And thus the Lord bringeth about the restoration of these; and they have a part in the first resurrection, or have eternal life, being redeemed by the Lord.

And little children also have eternal life. (Mosiah 15:21–25)

Speaking of v. 22 above, in light of v. 24, Thompson raises an intriguing point:

> Abinadi's use of the word *or*, between those who believed the prophets and those who kept the commandments in his list of those who would have part in the first resurrection, raises a question. It suggests that while he knew there would be a resurrection of people who died in ignorance, he was not sure how they qualified for resurrection [i.e., the *first* resurrection] if they did not know the gospel so as to live it. Surely participation in the first resurrection was not the simple product of ignorance of the gospel and principles of righteousness. If the generally wicked and rebellious were excluded from resurrection at the time of Christ, then surely those who were ignorant and wicked would not be resurrected.[6]

Abinadi may not have known the details that made this possible, but knowing that faith in Christ, repentance, and baptism were essential for salvation, he surely recognized that there must be some means for the those in the post-mortal world to be counted among "those that have kept the commandments of God." This inference, speculative as it may seem, should be considered in light of additional passages that may help reveal what may be an important but subtle sub-plot in the Book of Mormon that resonates with key priorities revealed in the earliest acts of the Restoration.

A Book for All Mankind

> The more clearly we see eternity, the more obvious it becomes that the Lord's work in which we are engaged is one vast and grand work with striking similarities on each side of the veil.
> — President Spencer W. Kimball[7]

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6. Thompson, "Resurrection," 123.

7. Spencer W. Kimball, "The Things of Eternity — Stand We in Jeopardy?," *Ensign*, January 1977, 3, https://www.churchofjesuschrist.org/study/ensign/1977/01/the-things-of-eternity-stand-we-in-jeopardy.

> When we speak of the *gathering*, we are simply saying this
> fundamental truth: every one of our Heavenly Father's children,
> on both sides of the veil, deserves to hear the message of the
> restored gospel of Jesus Christ. They decide for themselves if
> they want to know more. — President Russell M. Nelson[8]

We have considerable evidence that when Joseph Smith published
the Book of Mormon, he did not understand the nature of the work of
gathering taking place in the post-mortal world. It would be over ten
years after the Church was organized before he would recognize the role
of the Church in saving the dead.[9] It would, therefore, be fascinating
if the words of Book of Mormon prophets showed awareness of this
concept long before it was revealed to Joseph.

Book of Mormon hints about the merciful opportunities provided
for the dead to hear and accept the gospel can be found in multiple
references about the purpose of the Book of Mormon itself. Consider
these words of Mormon:

> And now I, Mormon, being about to deliver up the record
> which I have been making into the hands of my son Moroni,
> behold I have witnessed almost all the destruction of my

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8.   Russell M. Nelson and Wendy W. Nelson, "Hope of Israel," video, Worldwide
Devotional for Youth, June 3, 2018, https://www.churchofjesuschrist.org/study/
broadcasts/worldwide-devotional-for-young-adults/2018/06/hope-of-israel.

9.   While the mercy of the Lord to those who died without hearing the Gospel
was further revealed in 1836 when Joseph had a vision and saw his decreased
brother Alvin in the celestial kingdom (D&C 137), the earliest indication of baptism
for the dead was given on August 15, 1840, in statements Joseph Smith made at
the funeral of Seymour Brunson. See *Historical Department Journal History of
the Church, 1830–2008*, August 15, 1840, https://catalog.churchofjesuschrist.org/
assets?id=e442a380-ab26-49fc-8fbd-4576729e820f&crate=0&index=170 and *The
Words of Joseph Smith: The Contemporary Accounts of the Nauvoo Discourses
of the Prophet Joseph*, comps. and eds. Andrew F. Ehat and Lyndon W. Cook
(Provo, UT: Religious Studies Center, Brigham Young University, 1980), 49,
https://rsc.byu.edu/words-joseph-smith/15-august-1840-saturday. This was
followed by a revelation citing baptism for the dead in D&C 124:37–39, given
in 1841, and more fully revealed in D&C 128 in 1842. For further details on the
development of the doctrine of work for the dead, see Alexander L. Baugh, "'For
Their Salvation Is Necessary and Essential to Our Salvation': Joseph Smith and the
Practice of Baptism and Confirmation for the Dead," in *An Eye of Faith: Essays
in Honor of Richard O. Cowan*, eds. Kenneth L. Alford and Richard E. Bennett
(Provo, UT / Salt Lake City: Religious Studies Center; Brigham Young
University / Deseret Book, 2015), 113–37, https://rsc.byu.edu/eye-faith/
their-salvation-necessary-essential-our-salvation-joseph-smith-practice-baptism.

> people, the Nephites. And it is many hundred years after the coming of Christ that I deliver these records into the hands of my son; and it supposeth me that he will witness the entire destruction of my people. But may God grant that he may survive them, that he may write somewhat concerning them, and somewhat concerning Christ, *that perhaps some day it may profit* them. (Words of Mormon 1:1–2)

Alma prophesied (and Mormon recorded) that the Nephites would become "extinct" (Alma 45:11). Any Nephites who remained in Moroni's day were numbered among the Lamanites, meaning they were no longer Nephites (see Alma 45:11–14, see also 1 Nephi 15:5 and Moroni 1:1–3). For Moroni to "survive them" means they would be dead (see Mormon 6:11), yet Mormon's words suggest that he believed that the sacred records he was turning over to Moroni might someday "profit them," the destroyed and deceased Nephite people.

We may have previously read this passage as if Mormon were simply thinking about the future descendants of Lehi, both Lamanites and former Nephites who joined them, but in this passage, Mormon does not use the terms that are frequently used to described the future remnants of Lehi's posterity. After speaking of the Nephites about to be slain, he refers to "them;" the most natural reading is that the slain Nephite people are in his thoughts, and he yearns that his record will "profit them" in the future. Could it be that he believed their book could someday help them in the post-mortal world? Is there further evidence to support such a reading?

Out of the Books Which Shall Be Written Shall the World Be Judged

Peter wrote, "For for this cause was the gospel preached also to them that are dead, that they might be judged according to men in the flesh" (1 Peter 4:6). Men in the flesh have the scriptures, the standards for that judgment. The Savior taught that "out of the books which shall be written shall the world be judged" (3 Nephi 27:26). Regarding the judgment, and his book, Mormon wrote:

> And these things doth the Spirit manifest unto me; therefore I write unto you all. And for this cause I write unto you, that ye may know that ye must all stand before the judgment-seat of Christ, yea, every soul who belongs to the whole human family of Adam; and ye must stand to be judged of your works, whether they be good or evil;

> And also that ye may believe the gospel of Jesus Christ, which
> ye shall have among you; and also that the Jews, the covenant
> people of the Lord, shall have other witness besides him whom
> they saw and heard, that Jesus, whom they slew, was the very
> Christ and the very God. (Mormon 3:20–21)

Some may assume he was writing to the Jews in general, not to those who slew their Messiah (see also 2 Nephi 25:17–18). But was not Mormon speaking to them and to "all"? Could not these words also indicate that Mormon was speaking to the entire House of Israel and indicating that the Book of Mormon would serve as a witness to help them believe the gospel of Jesus Christ?

The future role of the Book of Mormon is described several times in such universal terms, as when Moroni taught that the book "shall stand as a testimony against the world at the last day" (Ether 5:4), suggesting that everyone in the world will have access to that book. Could that just be limited to the fortunate few who lived in the last days in those parts of the earth with significant missionary work?

The Savior Himself prophesied about the future role of the Book of Mormon. In 34 AD He told the people at Bountiful how they would know the latter-day gathering had commenced:

> And verily I say unto you, *I give unto you a sign*, that ye may
> know the time when these things shall be about to take place
> –- that I shall gather in, from their long dispersion, my people,
> O house of Israel, and shall establish again among them my
> Zion. (3 Nephi 21:1)

The sign, He explained in the following verses (3 Nephi 21:2–11), would be, or at least include, the coming forth of the Book of Mormon. We know those He was talking to would be long gone when that book came forth. Why would they care about that sign? The Savior told Joseph Smith why, citing what He had taught His disciples in Jerusalem:

> And I will show it plainly as I showed it unto my disciples as
> I stood before them in the flesh, and spake unto them, saying:
> As ye have asked of me concerning the signs of my coming, in
> the day when I shall come in my glory in the clouds of heaven,
> to fulfil the promises that I have made unto your fathers, For
> as ye have looked upon the long absence of your spirits from
> your bodies to be a bondage, I will show unto you how the
> day of redemption shall come, and also the restoration of the
> scattered Israel. (D&C 45:16–17)

They will know when the Book of Mormon comes forth. The Savior, at Bountiful, continued, "Verily, verily, I say unto you, when these things shall be made known unto them [the gentiles] of the Father, and shall come forth of the Father, from them unto *you*" (3 Nephi 21:2–3).

He is not speaking here to corporate Israel, nor latter-day Israel, but to 34 AD Israel. We know this because the Lord then differentiated between them and their seed. Concerning their seed, the Savior continued:

> For it is wisdom in the Father that they should be established in this land, and be set up as a free people by the power of the Father, that these things might come forth from them [the gentiles] unto a remnant of your seed, that the covenant of the Father may be fulfilled which he hath covenanted with his people, O house of Israel;

> Therefore, when these works and the works which shall be wrought among you hereafter shall come forth from the Gentiles, unto your seed which shall dwindle in unbelief because of iniquity; …

> And when these things come to pass that thy seed shall begin to know these things — it shall be a sign unto them, that they may know that the work of the Father hath already commenced unto the fulfilling of the covenant which he hath made unto the people who are of the house of Israel. (3 Nephi 21:4–5, 7)

Nephi, Mormon, and Moroni each said they were writing to "the ends of the earth" (Mormon 9:21; 2 Nephi 29:2; Mormon 3:18; see also 3 Nephi 27:20). They said they were writing to "all." Does that mean all those in the last days only? Perhaps not, for Mormon seems to be saying he was offering another witness to those who saw and heard and slew Jesus. The Savior seems to be saying that those people, long dead, and their seed would see that sign and have access to the Book of Mormon.

What would be the purpose of such access or knowledge? The Book of Mormon can hardly benefit anyone without the atonement of Jesus Christ. Its purpose is to bring souls to Christ, and receiving the full blessings offered by the grace of Christ requires faith, repentance, and baptism. If Mormon knew his book would go to the dead, he may also have known that baptism would be made available to them. Reading a book about Christ in hell, without access to His atonement, would only add coal to the fire. This suggests he recognized that the work for the dead would be underway in our day, a day in which his sacred record would benefit both the living and the dead.

The Book of Mormon Reads Equally Well on Both Sides of the Veil

Joseph Smith taught:

> All things whatsoever God in his infinite wisdom has seen fit and proper to reveal to us, while we are dwelling in mortality, in regard to our mortal bodies, are revealed to us in the abstract, and independent of affinity of this mortal tabernacle, but are revealed to our spirits precisely as though we had no bodies at all.[10]

We can, therefore, expect the Book of Mormon to apply equally to those with or without bodies, on either side of the veil. Imagine reading that book in hell. As Nephi's record begins, we learn that an angel delivered a book to his father:

> And he read, saying: Wo, wo, unto Jerusalem, for I have seen thine abominations! Yea, and many things did my father read concerning Jerusalem —that it should be destroyed, and the inhabitants thereof; many should perish by the sword, and many should be carried away captive into Babylon.
>
> And it came to pass that when my father had read and seen many great and marvelous things, he did exclaim many things unto the Lord; such as: Great and marvelous are thy works, O Lord God Almighty! Thy throne is high in the heavens, and thy power, and goodness, and mercy are over all the inhabitants of the earth; and, because thou art merciful, thou wilt not suffer those who come unto thee that they shall perish! (1 Nephi 1:13–14)

In that passage, Lehi saw the impending destruction of family and friends. If God's goodness and mercy doesn't include them, his rejoicing seems incongruent. On the other hand, if "all" really means all, the passage makes more sense. God's mercy is available whether we are in our bodies or not.

A Marvelous Work for All

When I ask my students, "How many people were baptized into our church last year?" they generally reply, "About 250,000." I then

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10. "The King Follett Sermon," *Ensign*, May 1971, 15, https://www.churchofjesuschrist.org/study/ensign/1971/05/the-king-follett-sermon. See also *Teachings of The Prophet Joseph Smith*, comp. Joseph Fielding Smith, (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 1977), 355.

remind them that the real figure is millions, taking into account the work on the other side of the veil. So which church did Mormon see, the one of Joseph Smith's day which baptized thousands, or the one gathering millions (and striving to ultimately gather all)? When the Book of Mormon authors talked about our church, they almost always used the word "all."

Of that work, the Lord at Bountiful continued:

> For in that day, for my sake shall the Father work a work, which shall be a great and a marvelous work among them …
>
> And they [the gentiles] shall assist my people, the remnant of Jacob, and also as many of the house of Israel as shall come, that they may build a city, which shall be called the New Jerusalem. And then shall they assist my people that they may be gathered in, who are scattered upon all the face of the land, in unto the New Jerusalem.
>
> And then shall the power of heaven come down among them; and I also will be in the midst.
>
> And then shall the work of the Father commence at that day, even when this gospel shall be preached among the remnant of this people. Verily I say unto you, at that day shall the work of the Father commence among *all* the dispersed of my people, yea, even the tribes which have been lost, which the Father hath led away out of Jerusalem.
>
> Yea, the work shall commence among *all* the dispersed of my people, with the Father to prepare the way whereby they may come unto me, that they may call on the Father in my name.
>
> Yea, and then shall the work commence, with the Father among *all* nations in preparing the way whereby his people may be gathered home to the land of their inheritance. (3 Nephi 21: 9, 23, 25–28)

Likewise, Ezekiel was shown that "the whole house of Israel" will be gathered home to the land of their inheritance (see Ezekiel 37:11, 12). Nephi finished his small plates with the following.

> 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. (2 Nephi 33:13–14)

Words that condemn when ignored surely bless when followed. Those words, the words of the Book of Mormon, will be used to bless or judge *all* those who are of the house of Israel, and *all* the ends of the earth. Like Mormon, Nephi was writing not just to the House of Israel, but to the "ends of the earth":

> And now, my beloved brethren, and also Jew, and all ye ends of the earth, hearken unto these words and believe in Christ; and if ye believe not in these words believe in Christ. And if ye shall believe in Christ ye will believe in these words, for they are the words of Christ, and he hath given them unto me; and they teach all men that they should do good. (2 Nephi 33:10)

A Book for Lamanites and Nephites

Mormon and Moroni wrote specifically to the Lamanites of the last days (see the title page and Mormon 7), knowing that the Nephites would be entirely destroyed (Helaman 3:16). In our day the missionaries were called to go amongst the "Lamanites" (see D&C 32:2), not the "Lamanites and Nephites." The once great Nephite civilization was destroyed (D&C 3:18). It is, therefore, interesting that, when Joseph Smith lost the 116 pages, the Lord told him:

> Nevertheless, my work shall go forth, for inasmuch as the knowledge of a Savior has come unto the world, through the testimony of the Jews, even so shall the knowledge of a Savior come unto my people —

> And to the Nephites, and the Jacobites, and the Josephites, and the Zoramites, through the testimony of their fathers. (D&C 3:16–17)

Note that while this passage in D&C 3 speaks of the knowledge of the Savior reaching the Nephites and associated groups through the Book of Mormon, the next verse (v. 18) reminds us that the Lord allowed the Lamanites "to *destroy* their brethren the Nephites, because of their iniquities and abominations." There may not be any surviving group today that identifies as or can be identified as Nephites, Jacobites,

Josephites, etc., but there certainly are in the spirit world, where the words "my work shall go forth" and "even so shall the knowledge of a Savior come unto my people" may be especially appropriate.

Speaking of the last days when God's word will be gathered into one, the Lord prophesied:

> 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 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 29:13–14)

A Book for the Whole House of Israel

We cannot assume God will only remember Abraham's seed living in the last days. Regarding that gathering, and regarding inheriting the lands of their possessions, Ezekiel prophesied:

> Then he said unto me, Son of man, these bones are *the whole house of Israel*: behold, they say, Our bones are dried, and our hope is lost: we are cut off for our parts.
>
> Therefore prophesy and say unto them, Thus saith the Lord God; Behold, O my people, I will open your graves, and cause you to come up out of your graves, and bring you into the land of Israel. (Ezekiel 37:11–12)

A few verses later, the Lord said, "then take another stick, and write upon it, For Joseph, the stick of Ephraim, and for *all* the house of Israel his companions" (Ezekiel 37:16). From the Latter-day Saint perspective, Ezekiel 37 may be consistent with the gathering of Israel both for the living and the dead, with v.16 being understood to refer to the Book of Mormon (D&C 27:5), which is meant to benefit "all the house of Israel."

Mormon and Moroni wrote specifically to the Lamanites. But they also wrote to the "Jews or all the house of Israel" (Mormon 5:14)

and the gentiles — meaning the rest of mankind (see title page and Mormon 3:18-20) — and all the ends of the earth (2 Nephi 29:2; 2 Nephi 33:10–13; 3 Nephi 27:20; Mormon 3:18–22; Moroni 10:24), which, we will see, means the entire human family.

Further, Mormon explained:

> And behold, they [the words of The Book of Mormon] shall go unto the unbelieving of the Jews; and for this intent shall they go — that they may be persuaded that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of the living God; that the Father may bring about, through his most Beloved, his great and eternal purpose, in restoring the Jews, or *all the house of Israel*, to the land of their inheritance, which the Lord their God hath given them, unto the fulfilling of his covenant … (Mormon 5:14).

Mormon seems to be saying the house of Israel will be restored to the land of their inheritance when they accept Jesus Christ through the instrumentality of the Book of Mormon. To accept their Redeemer, they must be baptized. That, we know, requires the priesthood authority found in The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints. It is good to keep in mind the broad scope of its mission.

In considering the importance of words such as "all" and the "ends of the earth," we must note that some absolute terms in the scriptures must be understood with caution, as they may sometimes be used as a figure of speech for emphasis. Eve, after all, was not technically "the mother of all living" (Genesis 3:20) — yes, humans, but not animals or plants, which we now consider living. And we do not assume "all Judaea" literally went out to meet John the Baptist (Matthew 3:5). However, there does not seem to be reason to propose limitations on the intended scope of the Lord's intention to bring the gospel message to all.

A Church for All Mankind

As previously mentioned, when the Book of Mormon authors talked about our church, they often used the word "all." This terminology is echoed in the words of modern-day prophets like President Hinckley, who said our church is for "all" many times. For example, President Hinckley once spoke of the threefold mission of the church and its scope:

> [The Lord] has given us a three-fold mission: first, the teaching of the restored gospel to every nation, kindred, tongue, and people; second, the building of the Saints in their faith and encouraging them in all of their activities to walk in obedience to the

commandments of the Lord; and third, the great work of salvation for the dead. This vast mission contemplates all generations of mankind — those who have gone before, all who live upon the earth, and those who will yet be born. It is larger than any race or nation or generation. It encompasses all mankind.[11]

President Hinckley also said, "Keep before you the big picture, for this cause is as large as all mankind and as broad as all eternity. This is the church and kingdom of God."[12] Further, Joseph F. Smith taught:

> The work in which Joseph Smith was engaged was not confined to this life alone, but it pertains as well to the life to come, and to the life that has been. In other words, it relates to those who have lived upon the earth, to those who are living and to those who shall come after us. It is not something which relates to man only while he tabernacles in the flesh, but to the whole human family from eternity to eternity.[13]

This modern community understands that our church — its teachings and ordinances — is for all people, living and dead. Salvation for the dead is not a new concept for us. But perhaps we tend to think the ancients saw our church as being more for us than them, as we also see latter-day prophecies as being for latter-day saints. We may not consider that the ancients looked upon a future restoration of teachings and truths with anything like self-interest, but they must have had a sense that it would provide not only future salvation, but their own as well.

Commenting on Isaiah's prophecy about our church (see Isaiah 49:22), Nephi taught:

> Nevertheless, after they shall be nursed by the Gentiles, and the Lord has lifted up his hand upon the Gentiles and set them up for a standard, and their children have been carried in their arms, and their daughters have been carried upon

11. Gordon B. Hinckley, "He Slumbers Not, nor Sleeps," *Ensign*, May 1983, 8, https://www.churchofjesuschrist.org.study/general-conference/1983/04/he-slumbers-not-nor-sleeps.

12. Gordon B. Hinckley, "Five Million Members — A Milestone and Not a Summit," *Ensign*, May 1982, 46, https://www.churchofjesuschrist.org/study/general-conference/1982/04/five-million-members-a-milestone-and-not-a-summit.

13. Joseph F. Smith, *Gospel Doctrine*, comp. John Andreas Widtsoe (Salt Lake City: Deseret News, 1919), 608, https://www.google.com/books/edition/Gospel_Doctrine/UnlVAAAAYAAJ.

their shoulders, behold these things of which are spoken are temporal; for thus are the covenants of the Lord with our fathers; and it meaneth us in the days to come, and also all our brethren who are of the house of Israel. (1 Nephi 22:6)

Those "days to come" are the latter days. We know that the standard referred to is associated with the restored church. And yet Nephi was claiming it for his people ("and it meaneth us"), as well as all the house of Israel. Later, Nephi asked his brother Jacob to speak to his brothers about the same prophecy:

And now, behold, I would speak unto you concerning things which are, and which are to come; wherefore, I will read you the words of Isaiah. And they are the words which my brother has desired that I should speak unto you. And *I speak unto you for your sakes*, that ye may learn and glorify the name of your God.

And now, the words which I shall read are they which Isaiah spake *concerning all the house of Israel*; wherefore, they may be likened unto you, for ye are of the house of Israel. And there are many things which have been spoken by Isaiah which may be likened unto you, because ye are of the house of Israel.

And now, these are the words: Thus saith the Lord God: Behold, I will lift up mine hand to the Gentiles, and set up my standard to the people; and they shall bring thy sons in their arms, and thy daughters shall be carried upon their shoulders. (2 Nephi 6:4–6)

Some may interpret this prophecy to mean the latter-day Zion will bless Israel's children living in the last days, which of course is true. But that hardly constitutes "all the house of Israel." What about Israel's children who lived in 1492? Surely, they are also part of "all." If the standard mentioned by Nephi is not for them, then the teachings of Jacob and Nephi would be difficult to understand. On the other hand, if they saw our church the way we do, as really being for all, their words make perfect sense.

The reference to that standard to be raised was central in Nephi's commentary on two chapters of Isaiah (Isaiah 48 and 49 in 1 Nephi 20 and 21). Before reading those chapters to his brothers, he identified Isaiah's intended audience:

Wherefore I spake unto them, saying: Hear ye the words of the prophet, ye who are a remnant of the house of Israel, a branch who have been broken off; hear ye the words of the prophet, which were written unto all the house of Israel, and

> liken them unto yourselves, that ye may have hope as well as your brethren from whom ye have been broken off; for after this manner has the prophet written. (1 Nephi 19:24)

Those "from whom [they had] been broken off" ended up in Babylon. They were taken into bondage because they, like the ten tribes, hardened their hearts against the Holy One of Israel (see 1 Nephi 22:5). The first chapter Nephi quoted from Isaiah (Isaiah 48) is about Israel being chosen in the furnace of affliction and eventually returning to Jerusalem. The furnace-like nightmare of being torn from home and family, scattered, and made to serve in bondage must have refined many of them. Yet most of Israel, even if penitent, would find themselves without the gospel in mortality. We know that those who would have accepted the gospel in this life, if they had had the opportunity, can be heirs of the celestial kingdom of God (D&C 137:7). We know that will require the latter-day church that Nephi spoke so much about.

Perhaps this is related to Nephi's purposes in also quoting the next chapter of Isaiah, Isaiah 49. It speaks of prisoners being freed from what may be spirit prison (1 Nephi 21:9), the Lord assuring Israel that He had not forgotten them (1 Nephi 21:14–16), and the standard to be raised in the last days (1 Nephi 21:22). Commenting on that standard, Nephi spoke of a "marvelous work," with the Lord "bringing about his covenants and his gospel" (see 1 Nephi 22:8–11). In other words, he emphasized the Restoration.

But for whom that Restoration is intended may be his most important teaching. After quoting those Isaiah chapters, he then explains, "And since they [the ten tribes] have been led away, these things have been prophesied *concerning them, and also concerning all those who shall hereafter be scattered and be confounded*" (1 Nephi 22:5). Combining this with his introduction to the Isaiah chapters, it is as if he said, "The latter-day Zion is for those who have been scattered, those who are now being scattered, and those who would hereafter be scattered and confounded. It is for all the house of Israel."

Hope

Nephi said Isaiah's words offered hope to all the house of Israel. "That thou mayest say to the prisoners: Go forth" (1 Nephi 21:9) could give them hope. But can they "go forth" without baptism? Is hope possible without baptism? Nephi didn't think so. He later wrote:

> I also have charity for the Gentiles. But behold, for none of these can I hope except they shall be reconciled unto Christ,

and enter into the narrow gate, and walk in the strait path which leads to life, and continue in the path until the end of the day of probation. (2 Nephi 33:9)

This makes most sense if viewed in light of the work of baptism for the dead. How else could our church offer ancient Israel hope? There is no hope in telling wayward people, "Although you're going to hell, at least your children (or parts of a future corporate Israel) will be saved." Hope is deeply personal. Notwithstanding all our Savior has done for us, without access to his atonement, we are hopeless. His atonement makes salvation possible. Zion makes it available. So, although there is a strong reference to Christ's atonement in the chapters Nephi read (see 1 Nephi 21:14–16), he centered on Zion. Even in that reference, Christ's church is part of the picture:

> Zion hath said: The Lord hath forsaken me, and my Lord hath forgotten me — but he will show that he hath not. … Yea … I have graven thee upon the palms of my hands; thy walls are continually before me. (1 Nephi 21:14–16)

Those walls (as we will see) can be understood as the latter-day Zion. Surely, they are continually before Him because they are His mechanism for saving the world. Zion has everything to do with how we will be saved.

The phrase "but he will show that he hath not," is not found in the King James version of Isaiah. That prophecy was, at least in one way, fulfilled by the drama surrounding King Nebuchadnezzar's dream. The monarch's outlandish demands for the interpretation of that dream would have made it very public, and Daniel's resulting interpretation would serve to remind the people that the Lord had not forgotten them, and that His kingdom yet had a destiny. Isaiah's prophecy, coupled with Nebuchadnezzar's dream, could indeed give the Israelites hope, but only if they realized the walls of Isaiah's prophecy have a gate, and that one day, they could go through it. Isaiah's message could have given exiled Israelites hope, as Nephi said, particularly if we consider the opportunity they could have later in the spirit world to accept the fullness of the gospel.

Can they accept their Redeemer without baptism? Jacob did not seem to think so. He connected all of Israel being gathered to lands of inheritance with them coming into God's true church:

> And now, my beloved brethren, I have read these things that ye might know concerning the covenants of the Lord that he has covenanted with all the house of Israel —

> That he has spoken unto the Jews, by the mouth of his holy prophets, even from the beginning down, from generation to generation, until the time comes that they shall be restored to the true church and fold of God; when they shall be gathered home to the lands of their inheritance, and shall be established in all their lands of promise. (2 Nephi 9:1–2)

When commenting on the prophet Zenos's allegory (which is about the gathering of Israel), Jacob exclaimed, "how merciful is our God unto *us*, for he remembereth the house of Israel, both roots and branches" (Jacob 6:4). We have no problem conceptualizing how the branches will be gathered (grafted in) in the last days. But the word "us" includes the roots. The roots, we know, are ancient Israel. "And, behold, the roots … are yet alive" (Jacob 5:54). Branches need roots and roots need branches. Jacob's statement suggests we are all in this together. We all need The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints (which shows up in the allegory in Jacob 5:61).

When the standard (associated with the latter-day church) is raised, and Israel's seed is nourished, that seed does not comprise all the house of Israel. They are Israel's children living in the last days:

> And after our seed is scattered the Lord God will proceed to do a marvelous work among the Gentiles, which shall be of great worth unto our seed; wherefore, it is likened unto their being nourished by the Gentiles and being carried in their arms and upon their shoulders.
>
> 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 of heaven unto Abraham, saying: In thy seed shall all the kindreds of the earth be blessed. (1 Nephi 22:8–9)

We understand how Abraham's seed will bless all the families of the earth. We understand how our mission encompasses all mankind. Nephi understood the same, evidenced by his subsequent explanation that blessing all the kindreds of the earth necessitated the Lord establishing His church in the last days:

> And I would, my brethren, that ye should know that all the kindreds of the earth cannot be blessed unless he shall make bare his arm in the eyes of the nations.
>
> 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 22:10–11)

Immediately after these verses, Nephi uses the word *wherefore* to show that as a consequence of God "bringing about his covenants and his gospel," He will provide means to save the dead:

> Wherefore, he will bring them again out of captivity, and they shall be gathered together to the lands of their inheritance; and they shall be brought out of obscurity and out of darkness; and they shall know that the Lord is their Savior and their Redeemer, the Mighty One of Israel. (1 Nephi 22:12)

This refers to those (as Nephi said) who hardened their hearts against the Holy One of Israel (see 1 Nephi 22:5). It refers (as Nephi said) to "all the house of Israel." It is indeed (as Nephi and Isaiah called it) a "marvelous work" (1 Nephi 22:8).

Did They Know the Gospel Would Be Preached to The Dead?

King Benjamin described two groups who are considered blameless after death. The first is those who die without the gospel. "For behold, and also his blood atoneth for the sins of those who have fallen by the transgression of Adam, who have died not knowing the will of God concerning them, or who have ignorantly sinned" (Mosiah 3:11). The second are children who die before the age of accountability. "For behold he judgeth, and his judgment is just; and the infant perisheth not that dieth in his infancy" (Mosiah 3:18). Little children and those who sinned in ignorance are blameless, through the Atonement of Christ. Then he spoke of the time when knowledge of the gospel will be available to all:

> And moreover, I say unto you, that the time shall come when the knowledge of a Savior shall spread throughout every nation, kindred, tongue, and people. And behold, when that time cometh, none shall be found blameless before God, except it be little children, only through repentance and faith on the name of the Lord God Omnipotent. (Mosiah 3:20–21)

It seems he went from two blameless groups to only one. If so, that's reasonable, for once the gospel is taken to every people, ignorance will no longer serve as an excuse. Little children will be blameless, but as we now understand, those who are accountable and who die in their ignorance do not remain in their ignorance, receiving instruction and opportunity to make sacred covenants. While it is not clear if King

Benjamin understood that the message of the victory of Christ would also go to those who had died in ignorance, he recognized the hope that was available for them, which, as previously discussed, was more fully expressed by Abinadi (see Mosiah 15:24–30).

Did They Know Spirits in Hell Could Be Redeemed? Or That Hell Can Be Temporary?

Jacob told his brothers that they could "rejoice, and lift up [their] heads forever, because of the blessings which the Lord God shall bestow upon [their] children" (2 Nephi 9:3). Many of their children would perish because of unbelief (see 2 Nephi 10:2). We know, as did Jacob, that those who perish in unbelief end up in spirit prison. That pertained directly to Jacob's point — God prepared a way to get them out. "O how great the goodness of our God, who prepareth a way for our escape from the grasp of this awful monster; yea, that monster, death and hell, which I call the death of the body, and also the death of the spirit" (2 Nephi 9:10). As we will see, to escape is not just keeping people out of hell, it includes getting people out.

Of that deliverance, Jacob continued, "and hell must deliver up its captive spirits, and the grave must deliver up its captive bodies, and the bodies and the spirits of men will be restored one to the other" (2 Nephi 9:12). Jacob then added that those in paradise would also be resurrected and judged. Then he continued:

> And it shall come to pass that when all men shall have passed from this first death unto life, insomuch as they have become immortal, they must appear before the judgment-seat of the Holy One of Israel …

> And assuredly, as the Lord liveth … they who are righteous shall be righteous still, and they who are filthy shall be filthy still; wherefore, they who are filthy are the devil and his angels; and they shall go away into everlasting fire, prepared for them; and their torment is as a lake of fire and brimstone, whose flame ascendeth up forever and ever and has no end. (2 Nephi 9:15–16)

When Jacob taught that those in hell are brought out and judged, he implicitly indicated that there is a possibility for salvation for the dead — unless after that judgment they are all sent back. Enoch saw "And as many of the spirits as were in prison came forth, and stood on the right hand of God; and the remainder were reserved in chains of darkness until the judgment of the great day" (Moses 7:57).

Among that "remainder" will be those who are considered "filthy still." This seems to refer to the sons of perdition (see D&C 76:33–39, 88:35,102). The Lord revealed that He "saves all the works of his hands, except those sons of perdition who deny the Son after the Father has revealed him" (D&C 76:43, cf. vv. 31–32).

At the end of Jacob's record, he described again the torment of those who are "filthy still" in a passage that suggests that those numerous sinners who are thrust into hell face endless torment there, as if their lots were like the sons of perdition:

> For behold, after ye have been nourished by the good word of God all the day long, will ye bring forth evil fruit, that ye must be hewn down and cast into the fire?
>
> Behold, will ye reject these words? Will ye reject the words of the prophets; and will ye reject all the words which have been spoken concerning Christ, after so many have spoken concerning him; and deny the good word of Christ, and the power of God, and the gift of the Holy Ghost, and quench the Holy Spirit, and make a mock of the great plan of redemption, which hath been laid for you?
>
> Know ye not that if ye will do these things, that the power of the redemption and the resurrection, which is in Christ, will bring you to stand with shame and awful guilt before the bar of God?
>
> And according to the power of justice, for justice cannot be denied, ye must go away into that lake of fire and brimstone, whose flames are unquenchable, and whose smoke ascendeth up forever and ever, which lake of fire and brimstone is endless torment.
>
> O then, my beloved brethren, repent ye, and enter in at the strait gate, and continue in the way which is narrow, until ye shall obtain eternal life. (Jacob 6:7–11).

However, through modern revelation, we understand that truly endless punishment in hell is not the common lot of most sinners, and though they may face exposure to the torments of "eternal torment" for a finite time, as explained in D&C 19:4–12 (compare also Alma$_2$'s suffering, "racked with eternal torment" and "tormented with the pains of hell" for a period of three days in Alma 36:12–16). President Spencer W. Kimball noted it would be "manifestly impossible for the

rank and file [members of the Church] to commit such a sin" as the sin against the Holy Ghost and become sons of perdition.[14]

If defecting to perdition is rare, then why does the Book of Mormon often describe hell in such dramatic terms as if it were eternal? Section 19 of the Doctrine and Covenants suggests that the terminology is accurate but ambiguous to stir men up to repentance (eternal punishment is God's punishment since God is eternal, but such "eternal" torment may be temporary). Enos 1:23 also indicates that harsh language about punishment and eternity was necessary to stir the Nephite to repentance.

King Benjamin and Jesus Christ referred to hell "from whence [the wicked] can no more return" (see Mosiah 3:24–27; 3 Nephi 27:16–19). This, too, may be intentionally ambiguous to "work upon the hearts of the children of men" (D&C 19:7). But we need not assume "return" means they never get out of hell. Jeff Lindsay offers a viable explanation:

> The verb *return* requires a frame of reference. Return to where? If I leave Wisconsin by going to China and never return, that doesn't require that I stay in China forever. I may be in China for a week, then go to Europe or New Zealand for years.
>
> The Book of Mormon concept of "from whence" one does not "return" has to be considered in light of the earliest use of this language in Father Lehi's farewell speech:
>
>> Awake! and arise from the dust, and hear the words of a trembling parent, whose limbs ye must soon lay down in the cold and silent grave, from whence no traveler can return; a few more days and I go the way of all the earth. (2 Nephi 1:14)
>
> Lehi is bidding farewell to his family and speaks of going soon to the grave, "from whence no traveler can return." So did Lehi mean that for him there would be no resurrection? That he would be dead forever? If so, why did he then go on to bear witness of Christ and the Resurrection, telling us that Christ would "bring to pass the resurrection of the dead" (2 Nephi 2:8)? But here it is clear what Lehi's frame of reference is: the mortal world. Lehi will die and will never return to be among his family and be part of this mortal life. But he knew

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14. Spencer W. Kimball, *The Miracle of Forgiveness*, (Salt Lake City: Bookcraft, 1969), 123.

that he would rise again and have eternal life. But once he died, he would never return to mortality.[15]

Lindsay also explains that when the Book of Mormon speaks of the wicked never returning after being judged (Mosiah 2:23–27; 3 Nephi 27: 11, 16–17), the frame of reference appears to be the presence of Christ. The unrepentant wicked will never return to dwell in the presence of God and the Son, but that does not mean they dwell in hell forever.[16]

The authors of the Book of Mormon let us know that they also knew hell was not necessarily forever. H. Donl Peterson points out that the Book of Mormon at times describes hell as a temporary place,[17] consistent with this passage:

> Now this is the state of the souls of the wicked, yea, in darkness, and a state of awful, fearful looking for the fiery indignation of the wrath of God upon them; thus *they remain in this state, as well as the righteous in paradise, until the time of their resurrection*. (Alma 40:14)

It seems that at least some Book of Mormon authors may have viewed hell much as we do, as a temporary place for many and a permanent place for a few. Mormon, like Jacob (see Jacob 6:11), described a way out of hell. Imagine reading the following in spirit prison:

> Thus we may see that the Lord is merciful unto all who will, in the sincerity of their hearts, call upon his holy name.
>
> Yea, thus we see that the gate of heaven is open unto all, even to those who will believe on the name of Jesus Christ, who is the Son of God.
>
> Yea, we see that whosoever will may lay hold upon the word of God, which is quick and powerful, which shall divide asunder all the cunning and the snares and the wiles of the devil, and lead the man of Christ in a strait and narrow course across that everlasting gulf of misery which is prepared to engulf the wicked —

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15. Jeff Lindsay, "'From Whence They Can No More Return': What Lehi Teaches Us About the Book of Mormon's Harsh Language on Hell," *Mormanity* (blog), December 5, 2020, https://mormanity.blogspot.com/2020/12/from-when-they-can-no-more-return-what.html.

16. Ibid.

17. H. Donl Peterson, "What is the meaning of the Book of Mormon scriptures on eternal hell for the wicked?" I Have a Question, *Ensign*, April 1986, 36–38, https://www.churchofjesuschrist.org/study/ensign/1986/04/i-have-a-question/what-is-the-meaning-of-the-book-of-mormon-scriptures-on-eternal-hell-for-the-wicked.

> And land their souls, yea, their immortal souls, at the right
> hand of God in the kingdom of heaven, to sit down with
> Abraham, and Isaac, and with Jacob, and with all our holy
> fathers, to go no more out. (Helaman 3:27–30; cf. Moses 7:57)

Considering the other teachings discussed above, this passage from
the Book of Mormon may extend hope not only to those fortunate
enough to read its message in this life, but to many more who may be
reached with this message in the next.

An Equal Opportunity Salvation

There are some verses in the Book of Mormon that can be read two ways.
For example, verses teaching that God will gather Israel to their lands of
inheritance could refer to the living, the dead, or both. We presume the
answer is both. But we don't always know the mind of the author. The
following, however, doesn't seem to leave any question. Nephi taught:

> After my seed and the seed of my brethren shall have dwindled
> in unbelief, and shall have been smitten by the Gentiles … and
> after they shall have been brought down low in the dust, even
> that they are not, yet the words of the righteous shall be written,
> and the prayers of the faithful shall be heard, and *all those who
> have dwindled in unbelief shall not be forgotten.* (2 Nephi 26:15)

After their seed have dwindled in unbelief and perished, they shall not be
forgotten. Indeed "all those who have dwindled in unbelief shall not be forgotten."
But who will remember them, and what does it mean to be remembered?

Obviously, it is God who will remember them (see 1 Nephi 21:14–
16; 2 Nephi 29:2; Jacob 6:4). Remembering implies more than just
mental awareness. It suggests He will do something on their behalf in
consequence of the prayers of the faithful. Isaiah prophesied,

> But, behold, Zion hath said: The Lord hath forsaken me, and
> my Lord hath forgotten me — but he will show that he hath not.
>
> For can a woman forget her sucking child, that she should
> not have compassion on the son of her womb? Yea, they may
> forget, yet will I not forget thee, O house of Israel.
>
> Behold, I have graven thee upon the palms of my hands; thy
> walls are continually before me. (1 Nephi 21:14–16)

Wilford Woodruff, referring to this passage, said, "Any man who
has ever read the book of Isaiah … can see that he, with other prophets,

had his eye upon the latter-day Zion of God."[18] Hence, the Lord connects remembering Israel to His Atonement (palms) and His church (walls). To remember them is to seek to save them.

Long before any of Lehi's seed dwindled in unbelief, God promised Abraham He would remember them. "I covenanted with Abraham that I would remember his seed forever" (2 Nephi 29:14). Indeed, He "remembereth every creature of his creating, he will make himself manifest unto all" (Mosiah 27:30). God does not love some less because of their race or ethnicity, their gender, their age, their social status, etc. Indeed, as David Belnap points out with extensive documentation, the Book of Mormon — contrary to what some may assume or assert — is remarkable in its consistent and abundantly evidenced message of inclusion and anti-discrimination.[19] If, in the words of Nephi, God "denieth none that come unto him, black and white, bond and free, male and female; and he remembereth the heathen; and all are alike unto God, both Jew and Gentile" (2 Nephi 26:33), then obviously God does not favor the living over the dead. The plan of salvation is an equal opportunity plan, and the modern Church plays a critical role in making that opportunity equal for all.

Jacob spoke of many of his people perishing in unbelief, but he knew they would be restored to the knowledge of Christ:

> For behold, the promises which we have obtained are promises unto us according to the flesh; wherefore, as it has been shown unto me that *many of our children shall perish in the flesh because of unbelief, nevertheless, God will be merciful unto many*; and our children shall be restored, that they may come to that which will give them the true knowledge of their Redeemer. (2 Nephi 10:2)

While all will be remembered, not all will accept the offered mercy. But many will.

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18. Wilford Woodruff, in *Journal of Discourses*, 15:7–8, https://contentdm.lib.byu.edu/digital/collection/JournalOfDiscourses3/id/5904.

19. David M. Belnap, "The Inclusive, Anti-Discrimination Message of the Book of Mormon," *Interpreter: A Journal of Latter-day Saint Faith and Scholarship*, 42 (2021): 195–370, https://journal.interpreterfoundation.org/the-inclusive-anti-discrimination-message-of-the-book-of-mormon/.

The Ends of the Earth

The three primary authors of the Book of Mormon said they were writing to "the ends of the earth" (see 2 Nephi 33:10; Mormon 3:18; Moroni 10:24). When Jacob says "all" in the following passage it is clear he means "every living creature, both men, women, and children, who belong to the family of Adam." The last "all men" in this passage is significant:

> And he cometh into the world that he may save all men if they will hearken unto his voice; for behold, he suffereth the pains of all men, yea, the pains of every living creature, both men, women, and children, who belong to the family of Adam.
>
> And he suffereth this that the resurrection might pass upon all men, that all might stand before him at the great and judgment day.
>
> And he commandeth all men that they must repent, and be baptized in his name, having perfect faith in the Holy One of Israel, or they cannot be saved in the kingdom of God. (2 Nephi 9:21–23).

The command for all men to repent was reiterated by the Lord during His ministry to the Nephites, using the phrase "all ye ends of the earth," to describe the scope of this call. After explaining to His twelve disciples that He will draw all men unto Him, He said:

> Now this is the commandment: Repent, all ye ends of the earth, and come unto me and be baptized in my name, that ye may be sanctified by the reception of the Holy Ghost, that ye may stand spotless before me at the last day. (3 Nephi 27:20)

"All ye ends of the earth" seems to be synonymous with "every living creature, both men, women, and children, who belong to the family of Adam." And the standard that will be raised up, the words of the Nephites in the Book of Mormon, shall "hiss forth unto the ends of the earth" (2 Nephi 29:2). It is a merciful gift offered widely but not accepted by all. It is a gift not limited to the fortunate people born in the latter days, but to all. In our day the Lord prophesied:

> For verily the voice of the Lord is unto all men, and there is none to escape; and there is no eye that shall not see, neither ear that shall not hear, neither heart that shall not be penetrated. … Wherefore the voice of the Lord is unto the ends of the earth, that all that will hear may hear. (D&C 1:2, 11)

Many people will not have eyes to see or means to fairly consider and accept the gospel message in mortality. Perhaps the vast majority of

mankind will hear and feel these things after this life. Evangelizing in the spirit world may be a crucial path for carrying the Lord's voice and word to "the ends of the earth."

The Role of the Church in the Plan of Salvation

2 Nephi 12 is about the latter-day temple, gathering of Israel, Christ's second coming, and millennial judgment and peace (see 2 Nephi 12 chapter heading). Before quoting Isaiah in that chapter, Nephi gave this introduction:

> And now I write some of the words of Isaiah, that whoso of my people shall see these words may lift up their hearts and rejoice for all men. Now these are the words, and ye may liken them unto you and unto all men. (2 Nephi 11:8)

If we did not know our church could help save the dead, if we did not know the gathering would take place on both sides of the veil, what would we make of Nephi saying these things are for "all men"? How could someone who died in 1776 liken Isaiah's message unto himself? For us, that is not a hard question.

Peter spoke of the "restitution of all things, which God hath spoken by the mouth of all his holy prophets since the world began." (Acts 3:21). Why would those prophets or their people care? Because their salvation depends upon that Restoration. Christ's Latter-day church, the stone that will fill the earth, has a role that reaches across the centuries, across the veil between the living and the dead. It is, as the Book of Mormon repeatedly claims, for all. We can, therefore, assume its keystone is for all as well.

When Nephi told his brothers about the latter-day church, he said they could "liken" Isaiah's words unto themselves (see 1 Nephi 19:24) because those words applied to them. Isaiah's latter-day prophecies offered them hope.

That constitutes a shift in how we see the plan of salvation, for we traditionally have not included our church in the picture. It constitutes a shift in how we think the ancients saw Christ's latter-day church. They may have seen it at least somewhat how we see it, as being for all mankind, with a role that will bless the living in this era and the dead from all the ends of the earth and across the centuries. Its work, coupled with the evangelization in the spirit world organized by Christ, is intended to bring the power and love of Jesus Christ to all men.

Conclusion

There are multiple teachings in the Book of Mormon that allow a case to be made that some writers understood the possibility of people hearing and accepting the good news of Jesus Christ in the spirit world. They may have understood that the glorious message of the Book of Mormon would serve as a precious testament of Christ, not just to a few lucky people in our day, but as a tool for missionary work to countless more on both sides of the veil.

This may be another example of a subplot to the text. It appears the ancients may even have understood what an important role the Restored Church would play in bringing great blessings to the Nephites, the Lamanites, and their descendants, both in this life and in the spirit world. The work of the Church, the ministry of Jesus Christ, can reach them even there and let them know they are not cast off forever, as they will learn from the Book of Mormon and its message of grace, coupled with the ubiquitous word "all."

Jacob asked, "And now, my beloved, how is it possible that these, after having rejected the sure foundation, can ever build upon it, that it may become the head of their corner?" (Jacob 4:17). Who are "these"? Are they those who rejected Him roughly 2000 years ago or their descendants who are an extension of them? Yes. As to how they — individually or as a people — could ever build on Him, Jacob's answer was the same — Zenos's allegory. He concluded, "And how merciful is our God unto *us* for he remembereth the house of Israel, *both roots and branches*" (Jacob 6:4). Who is this Savior who immediately after His death prepared a way for saving (to some degree) all, including those who had just rejected Him?

Six times in the Doctrine and Covenants He said, "I am the same that came unto mine own, and mine own received me not" (D&C 6:21). How that must have hurt Him! "And they that passed by railed on him, wagging their heads" (Mark 15:29). He could have destroyed them in an instant, but bore their insults, as well as their sins, meekly. And yet the moment He declared "It is finished" (John 19:30), He set out to reclaim them. Even they will not be forgotten.

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The *Goodness of God* and His Children as a Fundamental Theological Concept in the Book of Mormon

Noel B. Reynolds

Abstract: *The phrase* goodness of God *does occur occasionally in the Hebrew Bible but has not been considered by Old Testament scholars to be an independent principle in Israelite theology. Rather, it has been interpreted as just another way of talking about God's acts of* hesed, *or loving kindness for his covenant people and is usually interpreted in the context of the covenants Israel received through Abraham and Moses. The Book of Mormon clearly echoes that Old Testament pattern but also presents two additional conceptual frameworks that are explained in terms of the goodness of God. It advances an explicit divine plan of redemption or salvation that existed before Abraham — even before the creation of the earth — which had as its purpose making eternal life possible for God's human children universally — not just the descendants of Abraham. And it also teaches the gospel or doctrine of Christ that provides the path individuals must walk to take full advantage of that plan — as they become good like God and qualify to enter his presence and receive eternal life. Nephite usage radically expands the Old Testament concept by portraying this mortal probation as each person's God-given opportunity to become good like God. The goodness of God is frequently invoked by the Nephite prophets as a basic theological concept which can explain why God advanced his plan of salvation for men before the world was and why he is completely reliable in blessing and protecting those who have entered the covenant path by embracing his gospel and striving to endure to the end. The Nephites also used the phrase in the Old Testament pattern to explain the acts of God in delivering, blessing, and preserving his covenant people. Furthermore, some usages seem to invoke all three of these contexts simultaneously, demonstrating the comfortable integration of each of these perspectives in Nephite theological understanding.*

Readers of the Book of Mormon do not have to wait long to be introduced to the *goodness of God* as a foundational concept. In the second sentence of the book, Nephi refers to his "great knowledge of the goodness … of God" as a reason for writing it.[1] In a 2016 article,[2] Matthew L. Bowen shared his discovery that Nephi had demarcated his writings in the small plates as a single rhetorical unit with an inclusio by referring to the *goodness of God* at the beginning and again at the end.[3] Nephi invokes different versions of the same phrase another six times in his writings. Benjamin uses it five times in his final sermon, and it occurs another twelve times in the writings of Jacob, Alma, Helaman, and Mormon.

As will be discussed below some Old Testament scholars have identified the *goodness of God* as one dimension of his *hesed*, the covenant love he displays to the Israelites when delivering them from their enemies and blessing them in their times of need. The phrase has received limited focused attention from Old Testament theologians and none I have been able to find from Book of Mormon scholars. *This paper will show that Book of Mormon prophets used the phrase in the same Old Testament way as an explanation for the blessings given to his covenant*

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1. In the same sentence, Nephi has described his own parents as "goodly." While this English term has attracted some commentary in scholarly discourse, perhaps the most obvious candidate for a Hebrew equivalent would be *tob* (to be or do good — the same root used for *goodness* in the Hebrew Bible) as applied to Moses in Exodus 2:2 where it is taken to signal "quality or nobility in human character." See Andrew Bowling's article on *tob*: "793 (טוב)" in *Theological Wordbook of the Old Testament* (*TWOT*), eds. R. Laird Harris, Gleason L. Archer, Jr., and Bruce K. Waltke (Chicago: Moody Bible Institute, 1980), 346.

2. See Matthew L. Bowen, "Nephi's Good Inclusio," *Interpreter: A Journal of Mormon Scripture* 17 (2016): 181–95, https://journal.interpreterfoundation.org/nephis-good-inclusio/; and now reprinted as the lead chapter in a collection of his related papers: Matthew L. Bowen, *Name as Key-Word* (Orem, UT: Interpreter Foundation, 2019), 1–15. This article expands and updates Bowen's earlier article: "Internal textual evidence for the Egyptian Origin of Nephi's Name," *Insights* 22, no. 11 (2002): 1; which in turn relies on John Gee's earlier articles "A Note on the Name Nephi," *Journal of Book of Mormon Studies* 1, no. 1 (1992): 189–91, and "Four Suggestions on the Name *Nephi*," in *Pressing Forward with the Book of Mormon*, eds. John W. Welch and Melvin J. Thorne (Provo, UT: FARMS, 1999), 1–5.

3. Cf. 1 Nephi 1:1 and 2 Nephi 33:14. Nephi's familiarity with and inclination to use this common biblical rhetorical figure is on full display in Second Nephi where he used it repeatedly to demarcate the principal thirteen sections of that book that anchor its overall chiastic structure. See Noel B. Reynolds, "Chiastic Structuring of Large Texts: Second Nephi as a Case Study," in *Chiasmus: The State of the Art*, eds. John W. Welch and Donald W. Parry (Provo, UT: BYU Studies and Book of Mormon Central, 2020), 177–92.

people but also in other ways as an explanation for his plan of salvation, the creation of the earth, the atonement performed by Jesus Christ, and the provision of a way (the gospel) for all men and women to become good like him and return to his presence.

Whatever the level of their understanding may have been previously, it is very clear that the great visions given to Lehi and Nephi in First Nephi taught them things about God that they had not known. As Lehi exclaims, "Great and marvelous are thy works, O Lord God Almighty. Thy throne is high in the heavens, and *thy power and goodness and mercy* is over all the inhabitants of the Earth" (1 Nephi 1:14).[4] Those visions had expanded their perspectives to see that the Lord loves all people equally and that Christ was coming to conquer both sin and death and to reveal his gospel through which all his creations might come unto him, becoming *good* themselves in the process, that they might receive eternal life.[5]

The *Goodness of God* in the Old Testament and in the Book of Mormon

Like Nephi's writings in the small plates, the Book of Mormon itself also concludes with a focus on the *goodness of God*. At some point in the final decline of the Nephite nation, Mormon wrote to his son Moroni expressing his continual prayer "unto God the Father … that he through *his infinite goodness* and his grace" would "keep [Moroni] through the endurance of faith on his name to the end" (Moroni 8:3). Moroni introduces his final statement by saying he will "write somewhat as *seemeth me good*" (Moroni 10:1). He will go on to use *good* six more times in his summary, but even more helpfully, he includes a number of new phrases which make what seems good to him even more specific and instructive for future followers of Christ.

He first identifies *all good things* as being "just and true," which means "nothing *that is good* denieth the Christ" (Moroni 10:6). This leads to a discussion of spiritual gifts and Moroni's exhortation to his readers to "remember that every *good gift* cometh of Christ"

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4. All quotations from the Book of Mormon are taken from the Yale critical text: Royal Skousen, ed., *The Book of Mormon: The Earliest Text* (New Haven, CT: Yale Univ. Press, 2009). Italics have sometimes been added for emphasis to ensure that readers will understand which words in a passage are important for the argument of the paper.

5. In another working paper, "Lehi's Vision, Nephi's Blueprint," I explain why I think the second vision described briefly in the preceding verses is the tree of life vision of chapter 8.

(Moroni 10:18) — inasmuch as "all these gifts comes by the Spirit of Christ" (Moroni 10:17). Without these gifts, "there shall be none that *doeth good*," "for if there be one among you that *doeth good*, he shall work by the power and gifts of God" (Moroni 10:25).

Moroni concludes by specifying four ways that the process of coming unto Christ by enduring to the end by laying "hold upon *every good gift*" enables his followers to become good.[6] For if they will (1) "deny [themselves] of all ungodliness," they will by his grace (2) become "perfect in Christ" (Moroni 10:32–33). That perfection is further defined as (3) being "sanctified in Christ … unto the remission of [their] sins, that [they] become (4) holy, without spot" (Moroni 10:33).

The same shift from the initial focus on the *goodness of God* to the potential goodness of men is foreshadowed by Nephi in his opening chapter when he announces as his thesis that he will show his readers "that the *tender mercies* of the Lord is over all them whom he hath chosen because of their faith to make them mighty, even unto the power of deliverance" (1 Nephi 1:20). This thesis is supported throughout Nephi's first book in the traditional Israelite way by reporting six accounts of God's powerful intervention to save the covenant faithful from threatened destruction.[7] His second book makes it clear that he is ultimately referring to the deliverance of all men and women from death and the covenant faithful (those who become good) from sin and the captivity of the devil.

This opening chapter provides even more clues about this theme, which will in turn guide the reader through the entire book. The story of the opening chapter focuses on Lehi, who had been deeply troubled by the prophecies of some contemporaries who were warning the people that Jerusalem and its inhabitants would soon be destroyed and taken captive because of their wickedness. After he cried to the Lord "with all his heart, in behalf of his people," he was subsequently shown a theophany of "God sitting upon his throne" and was given to know that the calamitous prophecies he had heard would in fact be fulfilled. Lehi's startling and even joyful response to this negative news shows

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6. See Noel B. Reynolds, "How 'Come unto Me' Fits into the Nephite Gospel," *Religious Educator* 18, no. 2 (2017): 15–29, for an explanation of how this phrase is usually equated with the gospel principle of enduring to the end in the teachings of Christ to the Nephites.

7. See the rhetorical analysis of First Nephi that shows the detailed and structured way in which Nephi defends his thesis in Noel B. Reynolds, "Nephi's Outline," *BYU Studies Quarterly* 20, no. 2 (1980): 1–18.

that he had also been given the big picture on God's relationship to his human creations and now understood these pending destructions in terms of God's "goodness and mercy," as he exclaimed:

> Great and marvelous are thy works, O Lord God Almighty. Thy throne is high in the heavens, and thy *power* and *goodness* and *mercy* is over all the inhabitants of the earth. And because thou art merciful, thou will not suffer *those who come unto thee* that they shall perish. (1 Nephi 1:5–14)

In this paper, I will also explore the possibility that *power, goodness, and mercy* are used here to describe eternal attributes of God, which in turn explain his decision to create this earth and its human population and to prepare a plan of salvation. That plan includes the atonement of Jesus Christ and his gospel as the way by which men and women can, with the benefit of his covenantal *mercy*, receive a forgiveness of their sins, come unto him, and attain goodness as well. In so doing, they may be delivered from the devil's captivity and dwell in the presence of God eternally.

The *Goodness of God* in the Old Testament

While both *mercy* and *goodness* do have principal equivalent terms in the Hebrew Bible (*rahamim, tub*), both have also been used as translations for the more complex and theologically prominent Hebrew term *hesed*.[8] For example, *mercy* is the most frequently used translation for *hesed* in the King James Version of the Old Testament. And most linguistic studies of God's *goodness* (*tub*) in the Hebrew Bible have concluded that it is just one of the many dimensions of Yahweh's *hesed* as demonstrated in his care for his covenant people as he blesses them with peace, land, or delivers them from their enemies: "For the Lord is *good* (*tub*), for his *steadfast love* (*hesed*) endures for ever" (Jeremiah 33:11, *RSV*).[9] As Stachowiak points out, "all the biblical texts refer to God's goodness,

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8. See my forthcoming paper, "Biblical *Hesed* and Nephite Covenant Culture," *BYU Studies Quarterly* (2021), for a detailed discussion of the term. Daniel Belnap first called the attention of LDS readers to Old Testament *hesed* in his essay "'How Excellent is Thy Lovingkindness': The Gospel Principle of *Hesed*," in *The Gospel of Jesus Christ in the Old Testament*, eds. D. Kelly Ogden, Jared W. Ludlow, and Kerry Muhlestein (Provo, UT: BYU Religious Studies Center, 2009), 170–86.

9. Cf. Jeremiah 31:12–14. The most thorough dictionary treatment is found in Ingeborg Höver-Jorhag, "טוֹב *tôb*; טוּב *tûb*; יטב *yṭb*," in *Theological Dictionary of the Old Testament* (*TDOT*), eds. G. Johannes Botterweck and Helmer Ringgren (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1977), 5:296–317.

either directly or by implication." But that goodness is focused on the people of the covenant: "Yahweh is the good, kind and benign one who shows his favour and benevolence to *his people* and does this *by virtue of their election and of the covenant*"[10] (emphasis added).

While "the idea of essential goodness underlies" all the different shades of meaning of *good* in the Old Testament, "the Hebrew word *hesed* expresses goodness in a more concrete form, in the sense of divine favour and God's loyal readiness to give help, particularly in connection with the covenant made on Mount Sinai."[11] The Psalms contain numerous passages praising the *goodness of God*, the proofs of which are the various examples of his fulfilling his responsibilities to bless and deliver his covenant people as part of his *hesed*. Only occasionally do these express a more universal view — as in Psalm 100:1–5, where "all the earth is called upon to praise God for his goodness."[12]

God's *Hesed* for His Covenant People

Scholarly opinion about the necessity of a prior relationship of obligation for *hesed* to be in effect between men and God or just between men has been mixed. When Nelson Glueck wrote his seminal work on *hesed*, he argued that the Lord's *hesed* was always grounded in a pre-existing covenant or other relationship of obligation.[13] It could not be equated to God's goodness generally or with spontaneous acts of kindness or friendship that were not so grounded:

> God's goodness, which is mentioned in these passages in connection with His *hesed*, in no way influences the established meaning of *hesed* and does not lead to a meaning of *hesed* as favor, as one might expect. For the pious, it was an act of Yahweh's grace that he had entered into a covenant

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10. F. L. R. Stachowiak, s.v. "Goodness," in *Encyclopedia of Biblical Theology: The Complete* Sacramentum Verbi, ed. Johannes B. Bauer (New York: Crossroad, 1981), 322.

11. Ibid.

12. Ibid., 324.

13. American archaeologist Nelson Glueck first published his University of Jena doctoral dissertation in 1927. As it gained classic status among Bible scholars, Hebrew Union College sponsored an English translation by Alfred Gottschalk in *Hesed in the Bible*, ed. Elias L. Epstein (Cincinnati, OH: Hebrew Union College Press, 1967), featuring an introductory essay, Gerald A. Larue, "Recent Studies in *Hesed*," pp. 1–32. This volume is now available as a paperback: Nelson Glueck, *Hesed in the Bible*, trans. Alfred Gottschalk (Eugene, OR: Wipf & Stock, 2011); see page 102. Further citations of Glueck refer to the paperback edition.

with them and showed them *hesed* in accordance with his promise. His *hesed*-deeds were miracles to them.[14] While the *hesed* relationship between Yahweh and his people was regarded as having originated through his goodness, *hesed* itself remained the mutual relationship of rights and duties which Yahweh had obligated himself to show.[15] In this sense only is *hesed* to be understood … . The reason for Yahweh's … demonstrating all his power for the sake of his people throughout the course of history, must not be sought in his favor, grace, or goodness … . He stood by the people of his covenant, faithfully executing the *hesed* to which they were entitled by virtue of that relationship … . *Hesed* is best translated in these stereotyped passages as "covenantal loyalty"[16] or "faithful assistance."[17]

Glueck here makes it clear that even though God's goodness can be seen as manifest in particular acts of *hesed*, he believes the Israelites understood the origins of their covenant with the Lord as a product of his pre-existing goodness, a distinction that has not been generally acknowledged in the literature. As he clarifies further, relating to God's goodness and grace:

[H]esed is not identical with God's favor. However, since the relationship between God and His people was established by the grace of its election, *hesed* is based upon the grace of God … . It could be held that the origin of the God-people (man) relationship stems from God's favor; and that the structuring of these relationships emanates from His ethical will … .[18]

Eichrodt interpreted the earlier prophets differently. Rather than seeing their use of *hesed* transforming into an ethical doctrine, he saw it as "a unique exaltation of the God with whom nothing on earth can be compared," and in this way providing "an expression adequate both to the all-surpassing greatness and to the goodness of God."[19]

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14. Psalms 138:2, 8; 25:10; 119:41, 76; 103:17–18.
15. Psalms 106:7; 107:8, 15, 21, 31; 136:4; 4:4; 17:7; 31:22.
16. Psalm 100:5.
17. Glueck, *Hesed in the Bible*, 81.
18. Ibid., 87.
19. Walther Eichrodt, *Theology of the Old Testament*, trans. J. A. Baker (Santa Ana, CA: Westminster Press, 1961), 1:363.

In her first monograph on *hesed*, Katherine Sakenfeld supported the claims of scholars who did not find biblical usage of the term that restrictive, pointing to evidence from the Peshitta. "The Peshitta normally uses *twybt'* ('goodness, kindness; a favor or benefit') as the translational equivalent of *hesed*."[20] However, Emanuel Tov has since demonstrated that the translational evidence for this less restrictive interpretation is late, dating to the Common Era.[21] And in his exhaustive application of modern linguistic methodologies to this question, Gordon Clark came down solidly in support of Glueck's older view:

> The methodology adopted in the present study has shown that a deep, enduring, personal commitment to each other is an essential feature of situations in which one human party extends חסד [*hesed*] to another. This is a mutual, bilateral commitment, unlike the unilateral commitment proposed by … Sakenfeld.[22]

Glueck was thus vindicated in his general conclusion that

> [t]he *hesed* of God, while it is not to be identified with his grace, is still based upon the latter, insofar as the relationship between God and people, structured by Him as a covenantal relationship, was effected by electing Israel through an act of grace.[23]

The seminal texts in Exodus 33:19 and 34:4–7, when read together, also seem to identify God's *goodness* (*tub*) with elements of his *hesed*:

> And he [the Lord] said, 'I will make all *my goodness* pass before you … The Lord, the Lord, a God *merciful* and *gracious*, slow to anger, and abounding in *steadfast love* (*hesed*) and *faithfulness* (*emeth*), keeping *steadfast love* (*hesed*) for thousands" (RSV).[24]

20. Katherine Doob Sakenfeld, *The Meaning of Hesed in the Hebrew Bible: A New Inquiry* (Missoula, MT: Scholars Press for the Harvard Semitic Museum Scholars Press, 1978), 16.

21. Emanuel Tov, *Textual Criticism of the Hebrew Bible*, 2nd rev. ed. (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 2001), 151–53.

22. Gordon R. Clark, *The Word "Hesed" in the Hebrew Bible* (New York: Bloomsbury, 2015), 261. It should be noted that in her second monograph on this topic, Sakenfeld found *loyalty* to be the best translation for *hesed* and did recognize the presence of "existing commitment" while emphasizing the "situation of need" for recipients of *hesed*. Katharine Doob Sakenfeld, *Faithfulness in Action* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1985), 131.

23. Glueck, *Hesed in the Bible*, 102.

24. See Robert P. Gordon's discussion in "3201 טוב," *New International Dictionary of Old Testament Theology and Exegesis*, ed. Willem A. VanGemeren (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1997), 2:355.

Dictionary treatments and linguistic studies of *hesed* and *tob* (to be or do good) and its derivatives tend to be consistent with one another in this approach. But they sometimes articulate some uneasiness about passages where *tub* would seem to signal that the *goodness* of the Lord may predate the establishment of his covenants with Israel. While these passages do undergird God's *hesed* toward his covenant people, they may also apply universally to his attitudes toward all mankind.[25] Glueck saw a similar universal ethic implicit in some of the minor prophets and wisdom literature.[26] As will be shown below, that distinction appears to be more pronounced and intentional in numerous Book of Mormon passages.

My Work and My Glory

Three decades ago in a festschrift honoring Hugh W. Nibley, I argued that there is strong and extensive evidence that the version of Genesis available to the Nephite prophets in the plates of brass must have been practically identical to the revised early chapters attached to Genesis in the Joseph Smith Translation.[27] One key passage in establishing that connection is Moses 1:39: "For this is my work and my glory to bring to pass the immortality and eternal life of man."[28] This straightforward statement of God's boundless good intentions toward his human children has no parallel in the Old Testament, but does inform the teachings of the Nephite prophets repeatedly. The language describing the possibilities of eternal life for men begins in 2 Nephi 2, the chapter that reminds us most strongly of the Moses texts, and is echoed thirty times by Nephi and

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25. See, *e.g.*, the summaries of studies by Felix Asensio and Hans Joachim Stoebe in Gerald A. LaRue, "Recent Studies in Hesed," in Glueck, *Hesed in the Bible*, 10–17.

26. Glueck, *Hesed in the* Bible, 56–66.

27. "The Brass Plates Version of Genesis," in *By Study and Also by Faith: Essays in Honor of Hugh W. Nibley on the Occasion of his Eightieth Birthday*, eds. John M. Lundquist and Stephen D. Ricks (Provo, UT: FARMS and Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 1990), 2:136–73. That essay has been updated and reprinted in *Interpreter: A Journal of Latter-day Saint Faith and Scholarship* 34 (2019): 63–96, https://journal.interpreterfoundation.org/the-brass-plates-version-of-genesis/. Its findings have been greatly expanded by the work of Jeff Lindsay in our co-authored paper, "'Strong Like unto Moses': The Case for Ancient Roots in the Book of Moses Based on Book of Mormon Usage of Related Content Apparently from the Brass Plates," *Interpreter: A Journal of Latter-day Saint Faith and Scholarship* 44 (2021):1–92, https://journal.interpreterfoundation.org/strong-like-unto-moses-the-case-for-ancient-roots-in-the-book-of-moses-based-on-book-of-mormon-usage-of-related-content-apparently-from-the-brass-plates/.

28. In other Moses passages the same concept is restated in the same terms (Moses 5:11; 6:59; 7:45).

every major writer of the book.[29] The companion concept of *immortality* or *immortal glory* shows up three times in Moses, twice in conjunction with *eternal life* (Moses 1:39; 6:59, 61).[30]

Modern scholars do find a few possible allusions in the Old Testament to Yahweh's concern for the immortality or even eternal life of all people, but these are not even noticed by most readers.[31] But the Lord's eternal focus on these possibilities for all mankind as articulated repeatedly in the Nephite teachings testifies to his *goodness* preexisting his covenant with Abraham or others, and therefore preexisting his covenant *hesed*.

Book of Mormon Expansions of the Old Testament Discourse about the *Goodness of God*

What may have been implicit only in the Hebrew Bible as a background for the covenant God gave to Abraham is made explicit and prominent in the discourse of the Nephite prophets. While the Nephites use God's goodness to explain the faithfulness, justice, mercy, and deliverances of God in his dealings with his covenant people, the Israelites, they also invoke their visionary understanding of that goodness to explain God's love and salvation proffered to all mankind. The visions given to Lehi, Nephi, and possibly others expanded their grasp of God's goodness in two directions. They were given firstly an understanding of "the great plans of the eternal God," which preceded Abraham and even the existence of the earth and provided salvation for all peoples in all times and all places: "salvation through the atonement which was prepared from the foundation of the world for all mankind which ever was, ever since the fall of Adam, or which is or which ever shall be, even unto the end of the world" (Mosiah 4:7). They refer explicitly to "the plan of salvation/redemption" by one or another of its labels thirty times and implicitly much more.[32] Secondly, they also marveled at "*the great goodness of our God*" who had prepared *a way* — the gospel of Jesus Christ — by which every man or woman as an individual could repent

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

30. Reynolds, "The Brass Plates Version of Genesis," (2019), 75–76.

31. One good example can be found in Edmond Jacob, *Theology of the Old Testament*, trans. Arthur W. Heathcote and Philip J. Allcock (New York: Harper and Brothers, 1958), 107 and 148–49.

32. See Noel B. Reynolds, "The Plan of Salvation and the Book of Mormon," *Religious Educator* 21, no. 1 (2020): 31–52.

and qualify to return to his divine presence.[33] These two key theological concepts were revealed to Lehi and Nephi in their first visions, dramatically expanding their traditional Israelite understanding of the ways in which God relates to humankind.

In a separate paper I have shown how the earliest visions given to Lehi and Nephi that launched the Nephite dispensation educated them in these two additional time frames and perspectives, equipping them with vastly expanded understandings of the goodness of God and its importance for all humankind.[34] They were introduced into the divine council and its eternal perspective which allowed them to grasp God's plan of redemption that was established before the creation of this world. And they were taught the gospel of Jesus Christ and *the way* it provides whereby individuals can become the Lord's children by covenant and walk the straight and narrow path that will lead them back to him — making them good in the process. Finally, they saw Israel's covenant with the Lord as a way of showing all the world how the Lord could establish a covenant relationship with people who would obey him and how he would discipline and bless them through cycles of obedience and rebellion. By teaching all three of these basic conceptions of God's relationships to humankind, the Nephite prophets clearly demonstrated their reliance on the *goodness of God* as a foundational theological concept.

The three time-frames featured in these visions include eternity, the history of humans on this earth, and the lifetimes of individuals. The visions given to Lehi and Nephi also provided a visualization for each of these. Eternity was assumed in the openings of heaven and the induction of new prophets into the divine council where God sits enthroned. God's relationship with the peoples of the earth in history and prophecy provides a salvation history that promises the possibility of covenant relationships between God and peoples of the earth, whether organized as tribes or churches. And the final reality that salvation does require making and keeping a prescribed covenant with the Lord by every individual who will be saved demonstrates how both larger time frames focus on the lives lived by individuals.

Depending on the time-frame perspective assumed in any scriptural passage, readers would be led to think in terms of the appropriate verbalization, whether it be the plan of salvation, the Abrahamic

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33. Jacob repeatedly exclaims in this manner as he presents the first comprehensive account of the plan of salvation in 2 Nephi 9–10. The quote is from 9:10.

34. Reynolds, "Lehi's Vision."

covenant, or the gospel of Jesus Christ. And Lehi's great vision provided a visualization to illustrate each of those verbalizations: the divine council, the allegory of the olive tree, and the image of the straight and narrow path leading to the tree of life.[35] These relationships can be illustrated conveniently in the following table.

	Time Frame	Visualization	Verbalization
1.	Eternity	Divine council	Plan of salvation
2.	Salvation history	Olive tree allegory	Abrahamic covenant
3.	Individual lifetimes	Tree of life vision	Gospel of Jesus Christ

The Nephite prophets clearly believed the Lord had blessed Abraham and his descendants with a covenant relationship that would tie them to him with the expectations of *hesed* being shown on all sides. They were able to accommodate that vision to their revelation of the gospel of Jesus Christ and to the plan of redemption, which would be extended not only to the descendants of Abraham, but also to all men and women throughout the earth as the means by which they could escape the captivity of the devil and receive eternal life.

Latter-day Saint literature tends to feature a multiplicity of strategies for explaining the differences and the connections between the gospel, the plan of salvation, and the Abrahamic covenant. Lehi's vision would appear to resolve that confusion by assigning each of these to its own time frame — all of which are both real and essential aspects of the relationship between God and his human creations. The eternal perspective of the plan of salvation provides the background or context that gives meaning to the Abrahamic covenant and to the gospel. While the Abrahamic covenant makes clear that God's covenant people have responsibilities for the material welfare and spiritual support of one another, the gospel also makes clear that salvation finally depends on each individual's level of commitment to the Lord and determination to endure to the end in keeping a covenant made personally. But there is no conceptual conflict or dissonance between the three concepts. Rather they are fully integrated with one another, and the focus of any discourse is determined by the time frame that provides its context. This would explain why the Nephite prophets could shift so easily and

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35. Nephi includes the allegory of the olive tree and the gospel of Jesus Christ in the list of sixteen things Lehi taught his family after receiving the great vision. See 1 Nephi 10:2–15.

even seamlessly between teaching and prophesying about the gospel, the Abrahamic covenant, and the plan of salvation.[36]

In so doing, they expanded the explanatory power of the Old Testament concept of the *goodness of God* far beyond what is explicit anywhere in the text of the Hebrew Bible. For the Nephites, the *goodness of God* provides the explanatory background for their very existence, for the existence of the earth and its peoples, for the nature of the probationary state in which men find themselves, and for the efforts of the Lord and his servants to bring all men and women to repentance that they might become holy like him and return to his presence. As Moroni was taught by Jesus Christ directly:

> A But he *that believeth these things* which I have spoken,
> B   him will I visit with the manifestations of *my Spirit*.
> C   And he shall know and bear record;
> B*   for because of *my Spirit*
> A* he shall *know that these things* are true,
> A for it *persuadeth men to do good*.
> B   And whatsoever thing persuadeth men to do *good* is *of me*,
> B*   for *good* cometh of none save it be *of me*.
> A* I am the same that *leadeth men to all good*. (Ether 4:11–12)

By contrast, the Old Testament is usually understood to tell the story of Abraham and his descendants, to whom God gave a covenant that if they would obey him in all things, he would prosper and protect them, delivering them from their enemies and even provoking them to repentance when they strayed.[37] While it is sometimes interpreted to promise salvation universally, that is not explicit or self-evident in the text itself. The Nephites saw themselves as descendants and beneficiaries of the Abrahamic covenant, but with this major interpretive expansion derived from their founding visions in which they had learned of the

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36. I have explored these connections at length in "Understanding the Abrahamic Covenant through the Book of Mormon," *BYU Studies Quarterly* 57, no. 3 (2018): 39–74 and in "Covenant Language in Biblical Religions and the Book of Mormon," *BYU Studies Quarterly*, forthcoming 2022.

37. Christian and Jewish interpretations of the Abrahamic covenant are compared with the Nephite interpretation in Noel B. Reynolds, "All Kindreds shall be Blessed: Nephite, Jewish, and Christian Interpretations of the Abrahamic Covenant," in *Seek Ye Words of Wisdom: Studies of the Book of Mormon, Bible, and Temple in Honor of Stephen D. Ricks,* eds. Donald W. Parry, Gaye Strathearn, and Shon D. Hopkin (Orem, UT: Interpreter Foundation, 2020), 115–40.

coming of Jesus Christ and his teachings as explained above.[38] They recognized that the salvation history based in the Abrahamic covenant (1) was itself based in God's universal plan of salvation for all men, and (2) that it would have effect in the lives of individuals only as they embraced the gospel of Jesus Christ. As Nephi bluntly stated:

> For behold, I say unto you:
>
> A As many of the Gentiles as will repent are the covenant people of the Lord;
>
> B   and as many of the Jews as will not repent shall be cast off.
>
> A* For the Lord covenanteth with none save it be with them that repent
>
> *Ballast* and believe in his Son, which is the Holy One of Israel.[39]

Nephite Understandings of *Hesed* and the *Goodness of God*

The second half of this paper reviews the Book of Mormon passages in which the *goodness of God* occurs considering the discussion to this point.

The *Goodness of God* Experienced by Covenant Keepers

Eight of the twenty-five references to the *goodness of God* in the Book of Mormon can readily be understood as explanations for the blessings God gives to his covenant people when they are obedient — with the Nephite clarification that the covenant at issue is the gospel covenant they have made as individuals to repent and endure to the end in obedience to Jesus Christ. Benjamin refers directly to that covenant when he reminds his hearers that they "have known of *his goodness* and tasted of his love" when they received a remission of their sins, "which causeth such exceeding great joy in [their] souls" (Mosiah 4:11).

The same understanding is evoked when Mormon speaks of tasting and knowing "of *the goodness of Jesus*" (Mormon 1:15) in his youth and when he prays that "through *his infinite goodness* and grace" the Lord "will keep [his son Moroni] through the endurance of faith on his name to the end" (Moroni 8:3).[40] Mormon sounds just like an Old Testament

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38. See Reynolds, "Understanding the Abrahamic Covenant."

39. 2 Nephi 30:2.

40. Mormon uses the same gospel understanding to explain "the sorrowing of the damned" negatively because they are not moved to repentance "because

prophet when he comments as editor: "We can see that the Lord in *his great infinite goodness* doth bless and prosper those who put their trust in him" (Helaman 12:1). In similar Old Testament style, three additional passages link the *goodness of God* to his deliverance of his faithful people from captivity or from destruction in perilous conflicts: "When they thought of *the immediate goodness of God* and his power in delivering Alma and his brethren out of the hands of the Lamanites and of bondage, they did raise their voices and gave thanks to God" (Mosiah 25:10. Cf. Alma 57:25 and 36).

God's Pre-Covenant Goodness

The other references to the *goodness of God* either explicitly or implicitly appeal to the broader perspective given to Lehi and Nephi in their early visions rather than to the Old Testament perspective as defined by the Abrahamic covenant. Lehi had responded to those first visions by declaring his new universalistic understanding that "thy power and *goodness* and mercy is over *all the inhabitants of the earth*," all of whom are promised that if they will come unto him (through his covenants), "they shall not perish" (1 Nephi 1:14). Lehi later cites "the creation of the earth" twice as context for his understanding of God's "*infinite goodness*" in bringing his people "into this precious land of promise" (2 Nephi 1:10). Nephi refers to that same expanded vision when he praises "*the great goodness of the Lord* in shewing me his great and marvelous works" (2 Nephi 4:17). Jacob is in the middle of his explanation of the universal plan of salvation when he exclaims, "O how great *the goodness of our God* who *prepareth a way* for our escape" (2 Nephi 9:10).[41]

Benjamin also saw God's salvation applying *to all "the children of men"* because of "the atonement which hath been prepared from *the foundation of the world*" (Mosiah 4:6).[42]

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of the *goodness of God*" (Mormon 2:13). That basic gospel understanding is spelled out several times in the Book of Mormon by Christ in his own voice. See Noel B. Reynolds, "The Gospel According to Mormon," *Scottish Journal of Theology* 68, no. 2 (2015): 218–34, revised and updated for *Interpreter: A Journal of Mormon Scripture* 29 (2018): 65–103, https://journal.interpreterfoundation.org/the-gospel-according-to-mormon/; and Reynolds, "How 'Come unto Me' Fits."

41. *The way* is one of the principal alternative labels for the gospel of Jesus Christ in the Book of Mormon text and occurs in that role 82 times. See Noel B. Reynolds, "This is the Way," *Religious Educator* 14, no. 3 (2013): 75.

42. When the Book of Mormon prophets date things "from the foundation of the world," they may be getting this phrase and concept from the version of Genesis in their plates of brass. See Reynolds and Lindsay, "'Strong Like Unto Moses,'" 18.

I say unto you that

    if ye have come to a knowledge of the *goodness of God*

        and his matchless power

        and his wisdom

        and his patience

        and his long-suffering towards the children of men,

a   and also the atonement which hath been prepared from the foundation of the world,

b   that thereby salvation might come to him

c   that should put his trust in the Lord

d   and should be diligent in keeping his commandments

c*   and continue in the faith, even unto the end of his life —I mean the life of the mortal body—

I say that

b*   this is the man that receiveth salvation

a*   through the atonement which was prepared from the foundation of the world

i   *for all mankind* which ever was, ever since the fall of Adam,

ii   or which is

ii*   or which ever shall be,

i*   even unto the end of the world.

a   And this is the means whereby salvation cometh.

b   And there is none other salvation save this which hath been spoken of;

b*   neither is there any conditions whereby man can be saved

a*   except the conditions which I have told you. (Mosiah 4:6–8)

Benjamin is clearly saying that the atonement was prepared from the beginning as the means by which salvation could be made available "for all mankind," from Adam to the end of the world. The plan of salvation preceded the creation and the covenant of Abraham.

It may be that when the Nephite prophets describe the *goodness of God* as "great" or "infinite" they are often referring to its pre-covenantal reality. Benjamin refers directly to "*the infinite goodness of God*" as made manifest in the Nephite visions and "their great views of that which is to come" (Mosiah 5:3) — without any trace of a reference to the Abrahamic

covenant. Alma explained the plan of redemption to the apostate people of Ammonihah "according to *the supreme goodness of God*" (Alma 12:32). In the course of their 25 references to the *goodness of God*, the Nephite writers refer four times to his goodness as "infinite," which also seems to signal their broader perspective.[43] In the same sense, it is called "great" three times. It is also described as "supreme" and "exceeding," which would seem to have the same expansive implications as "infinite."

The Invitation to Experience the *Goodness of God* Personally

Less explicit, but more likely based in the expanded vision of Lehi and Nephi than in the traditional perspective are prophetic appeals to recognize God's goodness in its fullness as motivation to enter into or return to his covenant. Both Lehi and Nephi appear to be referring to those visions as the source of their "knowledge of *the goodness … of God*" (1 Nephi 1:1, 1:14, and 5:4). In his final address to his people, Benjamin urges them to "remember and always retain in remembrance the greatness of God and your own nothingness and *his goodness* and *long-suffering* [*hesed?*] towards you unworthy creatures, and humble yourselves even in the depths of humility" (Mosiah 4:11. Cf. v. 5). After Alma was converted in a visionary experience in which he saw the same heavenly things Lehi had been shown centuries previously (cf. 1 Nephi 1:8 and Alma 36:22) , his father assembled the priests to hear Alma's words "that the eyes of the people might be opened, to see and know of *the goodness and glory of God*" (Mosiah 27:22).[44]

Drawing on the great vision of the tree of life where Lehi and Nephi had been shown how the Lord's straight and narrow path leads people to the opportunity "to partake of the fruit" of the tree of life which is "most sweet above all,"[45] Nephi uniquely characterizes the process of accepting

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43. I have already indicated above that Mormon may be an exception. He twice seems to use *infinite goodness of God* in the Old Testament covenantal pattern (Moroni 8:3 and Helaman 12:1).

44. Alma provides a condensed version of his own vision in Alma chapter 36, which he links explicitly to Lehi's account by quoting 1 Nephi 1:8. I have previously published a detailed rhetorical analysis of Alma 36 and will not repeat any of that here. The abbreviated article can be seen in Noel B. Reynolds, "Rethinking Alma 36," in *Give Ear To My Words: Text and Context of Alma 36–42*, eds. Kerry M. Hull, Nicholas J. Frederick, and Hank R. Smith (Provo, UT: Religious Studies Center, 2019), 457 and the complete version published subsequently in *Interpreter: A Journal of Latter-day Saint Faith and Scholarship* 34 (2020): 292, https://journal. interpreterfoundation.org/rethinking-alma-36/.

45. See 1 Nephi 8:10–18, 24–35.

and following the gospel of Jesus Christ as "*partaking of the goodness of God.*" In preparation for his foundational presentation of the doctrine or gospel of Christ, Nephi asks rhetorically: "Hath the Lord commanded any that they should not *partake of his goodness*?" He then answers his own question by assuring his readers that the Lord "inviteth them all to come unto him and *partake of his goodness*" (2 Nephi 26:28, 31).

> For he inviteth them all to come unto him and *partake of his goodness*. And he denieth none that come unto him, black and white, bond and free, male and female; and he remembereth the heathen. And all are alike unto God, both Jew and Gentile. (2 Nephi 26:33)

After presenting the gospel as taught to him by the Father and the Son in vision,[46] he looks to his readers in the distant future and warns those who will not accept his message and "*partake of the goodness of God,*" that "these words shall condemn you at the last day" (2 Nephi 33:14). His brother Jacob then takes up the pen and begins his brief record by linking Nephi's phrase to the gospel of Christ explicitly: "Wherefore we labored diligently among our people that we might persuade them to come unto Christ and *partake of the goodness of God*" (Jacob 1:7).

Alma later invokes the same image and connects it to the same gospel message: "Come and be baptized unto repentance, that ye also may be *partakers of the fruit of the tree of life*" (Alma 5:62. Cf. verses 34–35). Expanding the same image for his wayward son Corianton, Alma tells him, "I would that ye should come unto Christ, which is the Holy One of Israel, and *partake of his salvation* and the power of his redemption; whosoever will come may come and *partake of the waters of life* freely" (Alma 42:27).[47]

Closely related to the metaphor of "partaking," Nephi and Lehi also spoke of *knowing* the goodness of God (1 Nephi 1:1 and 5:4), and later prophets fashioned their own variations on this phrasing, including Mormon who spoke of his own experience at age fifteen when he "was visited of the Lord and *tasted and knew of the goodness* of Jesus" (Mormon 1:15). Here Mormon may be echoing his own record of Benjamin who used the verbs of tasting, remembering, and knowing.[48]

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46. See 2 Nephi 31 and the analysis provided in Noel B. Reynolds, "The Gospel According to Nephi: An Essay on 2 Nephi 31," *Religious Educator* 16, no. 2 (2015): 51–75.

47. Mormon and Moroni may have modified the same image from Nephi when they spoke of "partaking of the heavenly gift." See 4 Nephi 13, Ether 12:8–9, and 13:11.

48. Cf. Mosiah 4:5 and 6, 27:22 and 32, and Mormon 2:15–16.

> And again I say unto you … that as ye have come to the *knowledge of the glory of God* or if ye have *known of his goodness* and have *tasted of his love* and have received a remission of your sins, which causeth such exceeding great joy in your souls, even so I would that ye should remember and always *retain in remembrance the greatness of God* and your own nothingness *and his goodness and long-suffering* towards you unworthy creatures. (Mosiah 5:11)

One reference speaks of the *goodness of God* as being "immediate" (Mosiah 25:10). As the Oxford English Dictionary warns us, we should not assume that this reference is to time.[49] Recognizing that the modern Book of Mormon translation appears to have significant Early Modern English influence, we should understand *immediate* to mean "unmediated."[50] Recipients experience and feel God's goodness directly and without secondary intervention. This passage refers to the experience in which Alma's people were miraculously delivered in one day from the Lamanites. Others speak of knowing, partaking of, or tasting his goodness as they experience the remission of sins. In these 25 mentions of God's goodness, we can recognize that it is frequently characterized as personally relevant to each person — that every human being is invited to partake of his goodness by repenting and taking up the covenant path the gospel describes for them as individuals, receiving the Holy Ghost in their lives.

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49. The general definition given for *immediate* as an adjective: "Said of a person or thing in its relation to another. That has no intermediary or intervening member, medium, or agent; that is in actual contact or direct personal relation." *OED*, s.v. "Immediate."

50. With the collaboration of Stanford Carmack, Royal Skousen has determined that the "words, phrases, expressions, grammatical forms, and syntactic patterns" of the original Book of Mormon "are archaic English" and conform well with Early Modern English (approximately 1450–1720). See Royal Skousen, *The History of the Text of the Book of Mormon: Part Three, The Nature of the Original Language* (Provo, UT: Foundation for Ancient Research and Mormon Studies and Brigham Young University Studies, 2018), 3. Carmack has kindly provided me with the following mid-seventeenth century example: "Upon a serious perpension of the irresistible pressure or weight of this plain and genuine inference, I once resolved to supersede all other Arguments of the Creation of the World out of nothing, by the sole and *immediate Goodnesse*, Wisdome, and Power of the Supreme, because most perfect Being." Walter Charleton, *The Darknes of atheism dispelled by the light of nature: a physico-theologicall treatise* (London: 1652), 39–40.

The Power and Goodness and Mercy of God

Goodness is not the only eternal attribute of God that the Nephite prophets invoked to explain his plan of salvation. Nephi also referred to the Lord's knowledge and power: "But the Lord *knoweth all things* from the beginning. Wherefore he *prepareth a way* to accomplish all his works among the children of men. For behold, he hath *all power* unto the fulfilling of all his words" (1 Nephi 9:6). In the very earliest mention of the *goodness of God* chronologically, Lehi also cites his *power* and *mercy*. While *mercy* is one of the English terms translators invoke most frequently for *hesed*, it also is the standard translation for *rahamim* for which it seems most adequate.[51] In either case, God's mercy is connected to his covenantal *hesed*. But the divine *power* that Lehi refers to is clearly needed in this and other passages to explain God's ability to make and execute his plan of salvation including the creation of the world and the defeat of death and the devil through his resurrection. The divine mercy of God enables him to forgive sins before bringing his repentant children to a final judgment with its consequent rewards of eternal life or eternal punishment.

Benjamin later echoed this same connection, citing the "wisdom and *power* and justice and mercy of him *who created all things in heaven and in earth*, who is *God above all*" (Mosiah 5:15). And God also wields his power throughout salvation history to bring new peoples such as the Gentiles into covenant relationships with him. Nephi was shown in vision how the future Gentile nations would be "delivered by *the power of God* out of the hands of all other nations" and "*lifted up by the power of God* above all other nations upon the face of the land" (1 Nephi 13:19, 30). His divine purpose would be to "bring forth unto them *in mine own power* much of my gospel" (1 Nephi 13:34). Those who would choose to receive that gospel and "seek to bring forth my Zion at that day," would be blessed with "the gift and *the power* of the Holy Ghost. And if they

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51. Horacio Simian-Yofre sees *rahamim* as "a fundamental element of Yahweh's nature" and resists the tendency of translators to equate it with *hesed*, with which it sometimes occurs in a parallel structure. He sees this parallelism suggesting that the combination be treated "as a compound of complementary expressions: *hesed* expresses the fundamental goodness of God, *rhm* the special favor shown by God in the situation of sin and affliction" (cf. Isa. 54:8: 'Because of [my] everlasting goodness I have had compassion on you'). See his dictionary article on mercy in the Hebrew Bible: "רחם *rhm*," *TDOT* 13:437–452 at 452. This seems to contradict the view of Glueck and others who saw God's mercy as one of the chief elements or manifestations of his *hesed*, but is more in line with the Nephite view that God's mercy was also evident as one dimension of his pre-Abraham goodness.

endure unto the end, they *shall be lifted up* at the last day and shall be saved in the everlasting kingdom of the Lamb" (1 Nephi 13:37).

However, the vast majority of over 300 mentions of *the power of God* in the Book of Mormon occur in texts describing how God can bless, protect, or deliver his covenant people *after* they have received the gospel. God's dependable *hesed* is clearly a function of both his goodness, his mercy, his knowledge, and his power. Nephi's thesis as quoted above states this clearly: "But behold, I Nephi will shew unto you that the *tender mercies* of the Lord is over all them whom he hath chosen because of their faith to make them mighty, even unto the *power* of deliverance" (1 Nephi 1:20b). While most of the references to *the power of God* do refer to his deliverance of his people from captivity and other major dangers, many others are explicitly spiritual and refer to their being rescued from the powers of the devil. In his closing sentences, Moroni makes explicit this principal blessing that comes through *the power of God*:

> And if by the grace of God ye are perfect in Christ, ye can in no wise deny *the power of God*. And again, if ye by the grace of God are perfect in Christ and deny not *his power*, then are ye sanctified in Christ by the grace of God through the shedding of the blood of Christ, which is in the covenant of the Father, unto the remission of your sins, that ye become holy, without spot. (Moroni 10:32–33)

Knowledge of the *Goodness of God*

It should also be noted that eight of the twenty-five references to the *goodness of God* reviewed above explicitly mention it as something that is "known" or "remembered."[52] These recognitions of God's infinite power and goodness motivated people repeatedly to praise God and to enter into the covenant relationship proffered by his gospel. Those who chose to do so and obeyed his commandments as they walked day by day up that covenant path could testify that they were blessed, protected, and guided from all evil by his power which was often described as "the power of the Holy Ghost."[53] In every case, as Nephi explains, it is "coming

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52. Cf. 1 Nephi 1:1, 5:4, Mosiah 4:5, 6, 11, 25:10, 27:22, Mormon 1:15.

53. See Noel B. Reynolds, "The Language of the Spirit in the Book of Mormon," *Interpreter*, 33 (2019), 209–14, https://journal.interpreterfoundation.org/the-language-of-the-spirit-in-the-book-of-mormon/; for a detailed discussion of the ways in which the Nephites saw God using the power of the Holy Ghost to accomplish his purposes.

to the *knowledge* of the true Messiah, their Lord and their Redeemer" which is an essential first step.[54]

Nephi makes this point emphatically by using some form of *know* or *knowledge* six times in the same summary statement to Laman and Lemuel — in the exchange that occurred immediately after Nephi's reception of the great vision:

> A And at that day shall the remnant of our seed *know* that they are of the house of Israel and that they are the covenant people of the Lord.
>
> B   And then shall they *know* and *come to the knowledge of their forefathers*
>
> C   and also to *the knowledge of the gospel of their Redeemer*, which was ministered unto their fathers by him.
>
> B*   Wherefore they shall come to *the knowledge of their Redeemer* and the very points of his doctrine,
>
> A* that they may *know* how to come unto him and be saved.
>   (1 Nephi 15:14)

Nephi's explanation to his brothers starts off with two elements that refer to the understanding of the Abrahamic covenant (A and B), which they already recognize, before linking and transitioning to and focusing on (C) the prophesied "gospel of their Redeemer" and (B*) "the very points of his doctrine" that will become the means by which (A*) all future peoples "may *know* how to come unto him and be saved" — the message that they will repeatedly reject.

The Goodness — and the Depravity — of the People

The Book of Mormon also repeatedly emphasizes the high contrast between the *goodness of God* and the potential goodness of men on the one hand and the wickedness of so many men on the other. Mormon's selections of stories from Nephite history feature this theme throughout. And then Moroni emphasizes this contrast dramatically in his penultimate chapter by inserting an epistle from his father in which the unimaginable depravity of the Nephites is described.

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54. 1 Nephi 10:14. The essential role of knowledge in this process for those who will enter a covenant relationship with the Lord is documented in Reynolds, "Understanding the Abrahamic Covenant," 69–71.

> O the depravity of my people! They are without order and without mercy. … And they have become strong in their perversion. And they are alike brutal, sparing none, neither old nor young. And they delight in every thing *save that which is good*. And the sufferings of our women and our children upon all the face of this land doth exceed every thing. Yea, tongue cannot tell, neither can it be written. (Moroni 9:18–19)

This potential for evil was also shared by all men. Abinadi taught the Nephites that the devil had beguiled their "first parents" which was

> the cause of all mankind's becoming carnal, sensual, devilish, knowing evil from good, subjecting themselves to the devil. … But remember that he that persists in his own carnal nature and goes on in the ways of sin and rebellion against God, he remaineth in his fallen state, and the devil hath all power over him. Therefore he is … an enemy to God. (Mosiah 16:2–5)

And as Alma explained to his son Corianton:

> And thus we see that all mankind were fallen, and they were in the grasp of justice, yea, the justice of God which consigned them forever to be cut off from his presence.

> And now the plan of mercy could not be brought about except an atonement should be made. Therefore God himself atoneth for the sins of the world, to bring about the plan of mercy to appease the demands of justice, that God might be a perfect just God and a merciful God also. (Alma 42:14–15)

God's great plan was grounded in his ability and desire to overcome all evil through his mercy, power, knowledge, and goodness.

Possible Nephite Hendiadyses
Employing the *Goodness of God*

One side note that should be included in this paper is the possible occurrence of the rhetorical figure of hendiadys in connection with the *goodness of God*. Hebrew writers often conjoined two nouns in the same grammatical form to convey a more complex meaning, rather than their two separate meanings. This phenomenon has been richly documented in the Book of Mormon and may explain some of the interesting usages

of the *goodness of God* in this text.[55] Nephi leads with a reference to "the goodness and the mysteries of God" (1 Nephi 1:1). Given that he uses "mysteries of God" to refer to those truths which are only known by revelation, is he suggesting that the *goodness of God* is only to be known through that means? Benjamin twice links the *goodness of God* with his *long-suffering* (Mosiah 4:6, 11). One of these occurrences includes a linkage to God's wisdom and to his patience. The suggestion here could be that God's goodness is not just a moral stance or achievement, but that it is also structured by his knowledge and understanding of how human things work and the need to be patient and long-suffering with his children as they proceed through this mortal probation and up the covenant path as they return to him, one day at a time. Single occurrences of God's "goodness and glory" (Mosiah 27:22) and "goodness and grace" (Moroni 8:3) would seem to invite a similar analysis. But when God's power is linked three times to his goodness, both nouns seem to carry their own meaning independently, without adjustment. For example, when the narrator tells us that "they thought of the immediate goodness of God and his power in delivering Alma and his brethren out of the hands of the Lamanites" (Mosiah 25:10),[56] we think of power and goodness as two separate attributes that function in concert, but that are not merged into something more complex.

Conclusions

In all their teachings, the Nephite prophets recognized the human potential for both goodness and evil. Because of his infinite goodness, God prepared a plan of salvation, including the atonement of Jesus Christ, so that in this state of probation, all humankind could choose the covenant path of his gospel by repenting and coming to him. And this path will prepare them as they follow him and endure to the end to become good like him that they might enter into his presence and into eternal life. Or they could choose to follow their own desires and be led captive by the devil, who desires "that all men might be miserable like unto himself" (2 Nephi 2:27).

In Nephite discourse, the *goodness of God* was a phrase that was used in two different ways — to explain God's provision for the possibility of

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55. Hendiadyses have shown up in my current studies of several basic gospel principles, but in none of these so impressively as repentance. See, Noel B. Reynolds, "The Language of Repentance in the Book of Mormon," *Journal of Book of Mormon Studies* 29 (2020): 197–213, for a discussion of rhetorical hendiadyses and how they work in the Bible and the Book of Mormon

56. Cf. 1 Nephi 1:14 and Mosiah 46.

eternal life for all men and women and to explain his miraculous support and deliverances, day by day, for those who are enduring to the end on the covenant path. While traces of that first way have been noticed by some Bible scholars, the general pattern of scholarly interpretation of the Old Testament has been to identify the *goodness of God* as one part of the covenantal *hesed* that he shows to his people as he protects, delivers, and reclaims them through their cycles of obedience and disobedience. The Book of Mormon sometimes echoes that usage, but then goes on to portray the *goodness of God* as the divine feature he desires all his human children to emulate and to incorporate into their souls. The very purpose of this mortal probation that he has provided to his children is to give them the opportunity to choose the *goodness of God* for themselves, that they may become good and qualify to be in his presence eternally. Further, from the opening page of the Book of Mormon, the Nephite prophets make it clear that this is God's purpose for all his human children and not for the descendants of Abraham alone.

[Author's Note: I am grateful to Carlisle G. Packard for insights he shared in a private conversation that first inspired me to take this topic on as a research project.]

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Adam, Eve, the Book of Moses, and the Temple: The Story of Receiving Christ's Atonement

Bruce C. Hafen and Marie K. Hafen

Abstract: *The authors begin by the highlighting the importance of Book of Moses research that has discovered plausible findings for its historicity, rendering it at least reasonable to give the benefit of the doubt to sacred premises — even if, ultimately, the choice of premises is just that, a choice. Emphasizing the relevance of the Book of Moses to the temple, they note that the Book of Moses is not only an ancient temple text, but also the ideal scriptural context for a modern temple preparation course. Going further, the authors address an important question raised by some who have asked: "Since Christ is at the center of the gospel, why doesn't the temple endowment teach the story of the life of Christ? What's all this about Adam and Eve?" The answer given in detail in the paper is as follows: "The story of the life of Christ is the story of **giving** the Atonement. And the story of Adam and Eve is the story of **receiving** the Atonement. Their story is our story, too."*

FAIR; Tooele, UT: Eborn Books, 2021), page numbers forthcoming. Further information at https://interpreterfoundation.org/books/ancient-threads-in-the-book-of-moses/.]

Historicity and Plausibility of the Book of Moses

Bruce: The description for this conference states, "Because we believe that the Book of Moses includes authentic history, the possibility of evidence for that belief interests us as scholars." In other words, the papers throughout this book have been prepared by scholars who believe in the general historicity of the Book of Moses, and their research has found evidence that supports that belief. I'd like to begin by offering some context and support for their approach.

I see clear parallels between our current interest in the historicity of the Book of Moses and what happened some years ago with research about the Book of Mormon. During the unfortunate Mark Hofmann era of the mid-1980s, the Church encountered an unusual barrage of criticism about Joseph Smith and the historicity of the Book of Mormon—that is, whether the history described there actually happened. Elder Neal A. Maxwell, then on Brigham Young University's board of trustees, described this criticism as "a new generation of fiery salvos, including a few duds and re-used, old darts."[1]

These issues prompted Elder Maxwell to galvanize the skilled and faithful scholars he knew at Brigham Young University (BYU) to "protect our flanks" rather than just "wave our arms."[2] And instead of focusing primarily on such external evidence as archaeology, he favored an approach that studied "parallels between the ancient world and the Book of Mormon," especially parallels "drawn from texts and historical facts" discovered since 1829.[3] This approach simply made sense to Elder Maxwell, who believed that there was so much internal evidence supporting the Book of Mormon that "the notion that it was concocted in the nineteenth century [is] just plain unscientific as a conclusion."[4]

He encouraged a research approach that began with "gospel premises" and "with the mind [and scholarly research tools] still involved," rather than importing the "secular vocabulary and viewpoint [of non–Latter-day Saint biblical scholars] into a Church setting."[5] This model looked for "historical contextualizing," such as grounding "the Book of Mormon in ancient history."[6]

Elder Maxwell believed that science would never be able to conclusively "prove or disprove holy writ." So he saw these scholars' work as a source of defense, not offense, because their research could verify the *plausibility* of religious propositions—meaning not that the proposition necessarily *did* happen, but that it *could have* happened—enough to offset attacks that claimed to be based on physical or logical evidence. Neutralizing those attacks—what C. S. Lewis called using good philosophy to answer bad philosophy[7]—doesn't claim to prove the gospel's truth; rather, it has the more modest but crucial purpose of nourishing a climate where voluntary belief is free to take root and grow. Only when belief is not compelled, by external evidence or otherwise, can it produce the growth that is the promised fruit of faith. In Elder Maxwell's terms, "enough plausible evidence" about the truth of the scriptures will "come forth to prevent scoffers from having a field day" and from having "slam dunks"—but this evidence will not remove "the requirement of faith."[8]

That approach to defending the Book of Mormon's historicity is an apt model for defending the historicity of the Book of Moses, as this conference demonstrates. I'm grateful to our program participants, because their impressive credentials, attitudes, and skills show that it's possible to gain the tools of a fine graduate level education and to use those tools to research and analyze ancient texts, scriptures, and other resources just as Elder Maxwell had hoped—through the lens of sacred premises rather than primarily through secular premises.

Evidence from ancient history will almost always be ambiguous, partly because specific, reliable ancient data are nearly impossible to find and identify with absolute certainty. Amid such uncertainty, a scholar's premises can significantly influence his or her findings and conclusions. But where to look for research premises? A sacred map of reality can look at all knowledge through the gospel's lens, allowing us to integrate the secular map of reality into the bigger, broader sacred map—and still include what the secular map shows. But the smaller secular map, with its more limited tools and framework, typically excludes religious insights. For example, I still remember reading years ago what the brilliant, but by then secularized, University of Utah professor Sterling McMurrin said when an interviewer asked what he thought of the Book of Mormon: "You don't get books from angels."[9] And his premise largely determined his conclusion of disbelief.

Drawing on my own discipline of law, the varying standards of proof used in criminal and civil cases offer useful comparative tools when

we want to understand how much evidence, and what kind, should be enough to "prove" (or disprove) a historical or other claim. In addition to the standard options of "true" and "false," what does a jury (or we) do when, even after much effort, the real answer is "We can't tell for sure"? That's when the legal standard (like a research premise) about which side should receive the benefit of the doubt will decide a case. Lawsuits deal constantly with that problem.[10]

In nearly all universities today, the default position—where we place the benefit of the doubt—is with secular premises. If we don't have adequate "empirically verifiable evidence," we assume the secular default position—such as, "You don't get books from angels."

Another example. The current Wikipedia entry on "Abraham" tells us that until the 1970s, the leading biblical scholars and archaeologists believed that the Abrahamic patriarchs "were either real individuals or believable composites of people who lived in the 'patriarchal age.'" Then other scholars challenged these views based on the relative lack of archaeological evidence and their own reading of ancient texts. So "by the beginning of the 21st century, archaeologists had given up hope of recovering any context that would make Abraham, Isaac or Jacob credible historical figures."[11] Thus an inadequate degree of verifiable empirical evidence can be taken to mean "no historicity," when what it really means is that there is insufficient empirical evidence to *prove* historicity within the premises of the secular map.

People who seek graduate training today in such fields as ancient languages and biblical studies typically study at the feet of experts whose disciplines teach them to reason from secular premises and to bracket their personal faith in their scholarly discourse—partly as a matter of professional courtesy. It is natural for these graduate students to learn to teach and write with an implicit personal detachment that can leave their students and those who read their work quite uncertain about their personal beliefs—an assumption that can serve important purposes in professional gatherings. However, when BYU faculty and students teach or otherwise share their work with other Church members, as Elder Holland said recently while paraphrasing Stephen Prothero, the approach of bracketing one's faith will "cost scholars credibility with [these] readers [or students] because . . . no one knows exactly where [they] are coming from ideologically."[12] Or, as Elder Maxwell put it, "Some [Latter-day Saint scholars] hold back by not appearing overly committed to the Kingdom, lest they incur the disapproval of particular

peers [like those from their graduate school departments] who might disdain such consecration."[13]

The institutional academic freedom protected by BYU's explicit written religious mission consciously removes the brackets around one's faith, like taking the mute out of a trumpet. And that unmuting allows the talented trumpets of BYU faculty and students to give an especially certain sound while integrating their faith with their academic disciplines—a liberating quality for the BYU community and for Latter-day Saints generally.

The larger sacred map tells us that Abraham did exist—indeed, modern scriptures tell us that he has already entered into his exaltation (see Alma 7:25; Doctrine and Covenants 132:7).[14] And did Moses really exist? In 1836, Joseph and Oliver testified that Moses personally appeared to them in the Kirtland Temple and committed to them the keys for the gathering of Israel—a principal step in authorizing the Restoration (see Doctrine and Covenants 110:11). For the historical Moses to have conferred such authority on Joseph Smith makes his revelatory visit a matter "of great consequence to [our] faith."[15]

The papers from this conference will share plausible findings that support the historicity of the Book of Moses—and scoffers won't have slam dunks or a field day. Such findings do help make the historicity of the Book of Moses more believable, rendering it at least reasonable to give the benefit of the doubt to sacred premises—even if, ultimately, the choice of premises is just that, a choice. The Lord deliberately leaves us free to make such choices. He doesn't create circumstances that compel our belief, even as He also invites us to be believing. For "as many as *received* him, to them gave he power to become the sons of God, even to them that [choose to] believe on his name" (John 1:5, 11–12; emphasis added). Why? Because something happens to people who choose to receive Him. They learn. They grow. Following His will changes them. Our uncoerced choices set in motion the process of becoming like Him.

One blessing of the Restoration is that Joseph received so much of his evidence and his authority firsthand—from those like John the Baptist and Peter, James, and John. That's why the Lord could say that the Book of Mormon "contains a record of a fallen people, and the fulness of the gospel of Jesus Christ . . . ; which was given [to Joseph] by inspiration, and is confirmed to others by the ministering of angels, and is declared . . . by them—*proving to the world that the holy scriptures are true, and that God does inspire men and call them to his holy work in this age and*

generation, as well as in generations of old" (Doctrine and Covenants 20:9–11).

Those who say that the Book of Mormon is a valuable allegorical text while also denying its divine and historical origins as the Lord described them here are missing the crucial point that through the visits of Moroni, Moses, and the others, God Himself gave Joseph the authority and power to accomplish the "holy work" of the Restoration.

Let us move now from the historicity of the Restoration and its founding scripture to a discussion of Adam, Eve, the Book of Moses, and the temple.

Adam, Eve, the Book of Moses, and the Temple: *Receiving Christ's Atonement*

It is very fitting that we should begin this conference on the Book of Moses by talking about the temple — because the Book of Moses is an ancient temple text[16] as well as the ideal scriptural context for a modern temple preparation course. In answering the question "Why do we care about the Book of Moses?," John Welch said, "To me, it's all about the temple," even though the Lord revealed this temple text to Joseph "well before [Joseph] had any idea about building a temple, let alone what was to be done in the temple." And yet, "much of the blueprint for the endowment is here and only here."[17]

I have for years encouraged people preparing to receive their temple endowment to study the Book of Moses. The book gives them unique and rich doctrinal perspective for understanding the endowment — the concepts of heavenly ascent, the Creation, the Fall, the Atonement, the purposes of mortality and its trials, ritual prayer, sacrifice, obedience, consecration, priesthood, revelation, building Zion, and preparing to meet God.[18] And as Welch points out, the Book of Moses also teaches the difference between secular, self-centered marriage and "God-sanctioned, interdependent, child-rearing marriage."[19]

In what follows, we will explore several of these concepts as taught by the Book of Moses and by the temple through the great archetypal story of Adam and Eve, with a central focus on their relationship to the Atonement of Jesus Christ.[20]

In recent years, we Latter-day Saints have been talking, teaching, and writing much more about Christ's Atonement, in testimonies, articles, books, and conversations. This is a most welcome and much-needed development. At times, however, some of our conversations seem to lack doctrinal clarity.

For example, Jan Shipps, a non–Latter-day Saint scholar who is among the most astute and sympathetic observers of the Church, believes that what she calls our increasing "LDS atonement discourse" has failed "to specify how [Christ's] atoning act is connected to the 'fulness of the gospel.'" Our discourse, she says, especially "fails to link the atonement to that part of the 'plan of salvation' that includes progression toward godhood."[21] And just weeks ago, a very thoughtful Church member asked me, "Is there more to 'drawing on the power of the Atonement' than faith in Christ, repentance, and baptism?"

Christ's Atonement indeed offers us great blessings *in addition to forgiveness* and the Resurrection—and those blessings are key elements in the fulness of the gospel, the plan of salvation, and our progression toward acquiring a perfected divine nature. But Marie and I have felt a need to identify some kind of existing doctrinal structure that would help us explain the source and meaning of those additional blessings. As we've searched for such structure, we've been led especially to the temple and to the Book of Moses.

Figure 1 shows a picture of the St. George Utah Temple. I grew up about four blocks from this temple, my sense of "home" in multiple ways. In returning there in 2010 to serve for three years, the two of us came to feel that the doctrines and ordinances of the temple provide much of the doctrinal framework we had been looking for.

Figure 1. The Ascending Path of True Followers of Christ, Shown Against the Backdrop of the St. George Utah Temple.

Years ago, a friend said to me, "Christ is at the center of the temple. And Christ is at the center of the gospel. So why doesn't the temple endowment teach the story of the life of Christ? What's all this about Adam and Eve?" At that time, neither of us could answer his question.

But Marie and I now feel settled with this answer: the story of the life of Christ is the story of *giving* the Atonement. And the story of Adam and Eve is the story of *receiving* the Atonement. Their story is our story too. We can look at them and say, "That's the story of my life." And when we're in the temple, we can naturally think of ourselves as if we were Adam and Eve.

For what will follow, refer to the headings located in table 1—"Priesthood," "Principles," "Ordinances," "Adam and Eve Receive the Atonement," and "Blessings of Christ's Atonement."

The St. George Utah Temple was the first temple dedicated after the Nauvoo Temple, and it is actually the same size and shape as the Nauvoo Temple. Indeed, architectural historian Elwin Robinson told us that the St. George Utah Temple is Joseph's temple—even though Brigham Young planned and dedicated it.[22] The deliberate design of this temple, like the first few that followed it, represents what we might call the original intent of the founders—that is, it's what the Lord gave Joseph for us. Baptism is the first saving ordinance, and the baptistry is always on the temple's lowest floor, symbolizing a new life—the beginning of ascending discipleship.

In the early temples of this dispensation, as a patron moved from the baptistry to each succeeding ordinance, he or she stepped up, literally, to a higher level. Think of the Salt Lake Temple, which has retained that design. With each move—from the creation room to the garden room to the telestial room and eventually to the celestial room—we climb upward. So it is in all the temples where it's physically possible, even if only slightly. That upward climb symbolizes the pattern of ascending back to God's presence.

President David O. McKay called the temple endowment "the step-by-step ascent into the Eternal Presence."[23] As Joseph Smith said, "When you climb up a ladder, you must begin at the bottom, and ascend step by step[.] . . . You must begin with the first [principles], and go on until you learn all the principles of exaltation."[24]

This upward pattern could plausibly derive from the Book of Moses, given to Joseph 12 years before he administered the first endowments in Nauvoo. In a clear prologue to the Adam and Eve story, chapter 1 begins with Moses in God's presence, learning that he is God's son and that God has a work for him to do. Knowing his identity and purpose,

he then falls back to the earth, where he must overcome Satan's power before beginning his upward journey of return, calling on God, hearing His voice, seeing His heavenly vision, and regaining His presence.

The same cosmic pattern repeats in Adam and Eve's story of being created, falling, overcoming opposition, being redeemed, and growing and returning to God. Then Enoch, their descendant, experiences and extends the pattern, moving on to lead his entire city back to God's presence. Thus "the temple themes in the Book of Moses extend beyond the . . . story of Adam and Eve" to their culmination in the story of Enoch.[25]

Moreover, Jeff Bradshaw and his colleagues have shown that the narrative and details of Moses 1 "place it squarely in the genre of the ancient heavenly ascent literature" that Joseph Smith couldn't have known about in 1830.[26] And where is Christ in these Book of Moses stories? Right in the middle of them, in every sense, as we'll see—because, as Richard Bushman wrote, "Christ enters the [Book of Moses] discourse almost at once and remains present [because] Joseph Smith's Moses is a Christian . . . even in pre-Christian times."[27]

Terryl Givens describes the stunning implications of this insight: "Positing Adamic foundations to the [Christian] gospel meant the collapse of all those polarities on which traditional Christian understanding was based," such as works and grace, "catastrophic fall and reparative redemption." That is now all "integrated into a seamless vision of a premortally conceived plan delivered in the Garden [of Eden] and made new again in [Joseph] Smith's day."[28]

Consider now how the Book of Moses gives us the detailed story of Adam and Eve—the story of "receiving" Christ's Atonement. We begin with baptism, the first temple ordinance in doing work for the dead. Some time after leaving the garden, Adam asks God in Moses 6:53, "Why is it that men must repent and be baptized?" God replies, "Behold, I have forgiven thee thy transgression in the Garden of Eden. . . . The son of God hath atoned for original guilt, wherein the sins of the parents cannot be answered upon the heads of the children, for they are *whole* from the foundation of the world" (Moses 6:53).

Those simple sentences introduce a doctrinally unique foundation for our understanding of why we need the Atonement of Jesus Christ. With some variations among denominations, the entire Christian world had taught for centuries that, because of Adam and Eve's Fall, children are born with an evil nature. And that natural depravity is why mortals sin, so we need the grace of Christ mostly to overcome our inherited

fallen nature. But here the Lord says, "No, the Savior has already cleansed your children from that original sin." As Joseph Smith would later write, "We believe that men will be punished for their own sins, and not for Adam's transgression." (Articles of Faith 1:2). An echo in Doctrine and Covenants 93:38 tells us that because Christ redeemed all infants from Adam's Fall, they are born "innocent." Hence no need for infant baptism.

The Lord then tells Adam in Moses 6:55–56 why his children would still need Christ's Atonement—language that revealed in 1830 a totally new understanding, after centuries of misunderstanding both the Fall and the Atonement. "Inasmuch as thy children are conceived in sin"—that is, born into a fallen world that is subject to death, sin, and temptation—"when they begin to grow up, sin conceiveth in their hearts, and *they taste the bitter, that they may know to prize the good*. And it is given unto them to know good from evil."

So the bitterness we taste in life is not because there's something wrong with us, with God, or with life. Rather, we taste the bitter so we may know to prize the good. We came to earth to learn from experience, some of it bitter enough to require very demanding repentance. But Christ's Atonement is not just for the purpose of erasing black marks. It is a *developmental* doctrine about our personal growth and learning. The Atonement and repentance make that process possible by protecting us while we learn from our wise and unwise choices what love really is or why wickedness cannot produce happiness. Because of the Atonement, we can learn from our experience without being condemned by it.

Moreover, after the Lord's angel had taught Adam and Eve the purpose of their animal sacrifices, they taught their children the wondrous news of the Redemption. Immediately, however, Moses 5 tells us in a remarkable passage that "Satan came among them," and he "commanded" their children not to believe what their parents had taught, "and they believed it not, and they loved Satan more than God. And men began *from that time forth* to be carnal, sensual, and devilish" (5:13). Those free choices by some of Adam and Eve's children then, not their parents' choice in the garden, created the first examples of what King Benjamin called "the natural man" who is "an enemy to God" (Mosiah 3:19).

Thus, writes Terryl Givens, the Book of Moses is "an audacious critique [of the Bible] with no Christian parallels."[29] Adam and Eve's choice was "designed rather than tragic." It did not "bring sin or fallenness on their race but opportunity and progress," with "mortality conceived as an educative ascent from premortality." These astounding doctrinal

ideas were "decisively outside any recognizably Christian cosmology or etiology, at least of the nineteenth century."[30] Imagine the irony, then, of arguing that Joseph Smith found these new ideas somewhere in his 19th century environment.

Returning to the story of Adam and Eve, once they are forgiven, shouldn't they just go back to Eden? No — as we see in the progressive sequence of the temple endowment, they don't return to the garden. Rather, they continue their journey of ascent from the fallen telestial world toward their ultimate exaltation. That's what the terrestrial and celestial rooms are all about.

The next ordinance is receiving the gift of the Holy Ghost — or confirmation. Again, that part of Adam's story is described only in the Book of Moses, chapter 6: "Thus he was baptized, and . . . born of the Spirit, and . . . quickened in the inner man." Adam heard a voice saying, "Thou art baptized with fire, and with the Holy Ghost," then these interesting words: "Thou art after the order of" the son of God (Moses 6:65–67). This tells me that Adam next received the higher or Melchizedek Priesthood (see Doctrine and Covenants 107:3).

With these ordinances, Adam and Eve climbed the path of discipleship to receive forgiveness and the Atonement's other blessings. What happens on that path? After King Benjamin's people accepted the Atonement by baptism, the king told them, "This day he hath spiritually begotten you." You have entered into a covenant to become "the children of Christ" (Mosiah 5:7). So they took His name upon themselves, entering into the relationship of becoming disciples of Jesus.

Thus they did as we do, embracing the two-way covenants that are reaffirmed in the sacrament prayers. By accepting the bread and water, we pledge our willingness to take upon ourselves His name, to always remember Him, and to keep His commandments. And He covenants that His Spirit may always be with us — to what end? As we keep climbing, learning, and growing, He bestows upon us three broad categories of blessings: (1) redeeming blessings, (2) strengthening blessings, and (3) perfecting blessings. These three kinds of blessings are all made possible by the Atonement of Jesus Christ.

Isaiah speaks of the redeeming blessings in terms that connect our repentance and baptism to our *relationship* with Christ — the two-way relationship made possible by His Atonement. First, the Lord says through Isaiah, "*I have redeemed thee, . . . thou art mine*" (Isaiah 43:1; emphasis added). Second, again through Isaiah, the Savior describes what will follow from this mine-thine relationship: "*I will strengthen*

thee; yea, I will help thee" (Isaiah 41:10; emphasis added). What is He saying? We've become the children of Christ. Now we are following Him along a straight, narrow path—the steep ascent, sometimes the rocky ridges. Every step of that way, He is *The Way*, and He will be *with us* to strengthen us. Then third, Moroni exhorts us to keep moving until we qualify to receive His perfecting blessings: "*Come unto Christ, and be perfected in him*." For if you "deny yoursel[f] of all ungodliness" and "love God with all your might, mind and strength, then is his grace sufficient for you, that . . . ye may be *perfect* in Christ" (Moroni 10:32).

The next time you sing all the verses of "How Firm a Foundation," think about the Lord's promise to His followers about the Atonement's strengthening and perfecting blessings:

> When through fiery trials thy pathway shall lie,
> My grace, all sufficient, shall be thy supply.
> The flame shall not hurt thee; I only design
> Thy dross to consume and thy gold to refine.[31]

Our covenant *relationship* with Christ, being born again as His covenant children, is the source of these redeeming, strengthening, and perfecting blessings of the Atonement. Apart from this relationship, as President Russell M. Nelson has said, "There is no amorphous entity called 'the Atonement' upon which we may call for succor, healing, forgiveness, or power. Jesus Christ is the source."[32]

Succor, healing, and power are indeed among the blessings made possible by Christ's Atonement, in addition to forgiveness. But "Jesus Christ"—not some amorphous entity—"is the source" of these blessings.[33] And His Atonement is what qualifies Him to enter into the relationship with us that produces these blessings. We grow toward maturity as His spirit children on the bedrock of this covenant relationship. How firm a foundation.

As his people climb this covenant path, King Benjamin urges them to "be steadfast and immovable, always abounding in good works." And if they faithfully do that, they will eventually receive this supernal blessing: "That Christ, the Lord God Omnipotent, *may seal you his* . . . that ye may have everlasting salvation and eternal life" (Mosiah 5:15).

Beginning as the baptized children of Christ, Adam and Eve walked the mortal path with its sweat, thorns, and occasional bitterness. And He called to them, "I will help thee. I will strengthen thee. Thou art mine." With His help, they overcame Satan and all mortal opposition until one day He "sealed" them His. That's a temple word. Then they were truly

"at one" with Him, among the perfected, full-grown men and women of Christ.

Amulek shows us the inverse image of this sacred idea. Moses 5 tells us that when many of Adam and Eve's children chose to love Satan more than God, they became carnal, sensual, and devilish. What is the destiny of this natural man if he continues on that carnal path? Amulek said he becomes "subjected to the spirit of the devil, and he doth *seal you his*" (Alma 34:35).

So those who are sealed to Christ become saints through His Atonement (Mosiah 3:19), and they will know a life of eternal joy. Those sealed to Satan become devilish by nature, and they will know a life of eternal misery. So what do the Book of Moses and other modern scriptures teach is the nature of man? At birth we are neither good nor evil but whole and innocent. Then we're free to choose whom, and whose plan, we will follow—until we eventually acquire either a saintly or a devilish nature.

Now let us apply this doctrinal context to the framework of the temple's ordinances and covenants. Table 1 lists the ordinances in ascending order—from baptism and confirmation to the temple ordinances of initiatory, endowment, and sealing. We won't discuss each ordinance here, but we will note again that the temple teaches the story of Adam and Eve to show us how to receive the full blessings of Christ's Atonement.

The upward sequence of table 1 shows Aaronic Priesthood and then Melchizedek Priesthood ordinances. For both men and women, the temple endowment makes clear the sequential progression from the Aaronic Priesthood level to the Melchizedek Priesthood level. Why does that matter? Because in the ordinances of the Melchizedek Priesthood— meaning primarily the temple ordinances—"the power of godliness is manifest." And without those temple ordinances, "the power of godliness is not manifest unto men in the flesh; for without this [power] no man [or woman] can see the face of God . . . and live" (Doctrine and Covenants 84:19–22).

So Aaronic to Melchizedek, from the lesser to the higher priesthood. In table 1, at the lower, or Aaronic, level the principles of faith and repentance are on the same level as baptism, an Aaronic Priesthood ordinance. And faith, repentance, and baptism are the first three principles and ordinances of the gospel, followed by confirmation and the gift of the Holy Ghost.

If these four are the *first* principles and ordinances, there must be more. Consider, for example, sacrifice and consecration, gospel principles that *illustrate* the higher, or Melchizedek-level, principles embedded in temple covenants. Table 1 shows these higher principles and covenants on the same level as the higher ordinances of the temple—the initiatory ordinance, the endowment, and the sealing. Perhaps we could say that *the principles of sacrifice and consecration are to the Melchizedek Priesthood ordinances what the principles of faith and repentance are to the Aaronic priesthood ordinances.* The higher *perfecting* principles ascend alongside the higher ordinances and covenants.

As we ascend upward from the first principles, we will always stand on the permanent foundation of faith, repentance, and baptism. Faith will always be the first and foundational principle, constantly needed and never outgrown. Repentance is similarly essential as a crucial, ongoing process. That said, we do learn in Doctrine and Covenants 84 and 107 about the differences between the two priesthoods. Among other things, the "lesser" or Aaronic Priesthood holds the keys of "the preparatory gospel" (Doctrine and Covenants 84:26). And the "greater" or Melchizedek Priesthood holds the keys of "all the spiritual blessings" (Doctrine and Covenants 107:18). So priesthood, principles, and ordinances are all connected in ways that reflect the temple's progressive ascent—suggested by the ascent of Moses in Moses 1 and in the ancient heavenly ascent literature. In summary, "While baptism [focuses] on the *cleansing* of the soul, the temple [focuses] on the *development* of the soul."[34]

As we've seen, Moses 6 makes clear the Atonement's developmental dimension. Thus after repentance, baptism, and initial forgiveness, Adam and Eve continue climbing and learning from experience until they enter what President McKay called "the Eternal Presence," the presence of God.[35] Would being in God's presence then be different from when they were in His presence in the Garden of Eden?

T.S. Eliot wrote, "We shall not cease from exploration, and the end of all our exploring will be to arrive where we started and know the place for the first time."[36] For Adam and Eve, "the place where we started" was in God's presence in the innocence of Eden. Yet they were so inexperienced then that they didn't know what it meant to be there. But finally, after tasting enough of the bitter that they could prize—that is, they could *comprehend*—the sweet, they returned to Him. And they were probably overwhelmed to discover what it *meant* to be with Him. Now they *knew* the place—His presence—fully for the first time.

Marie: Let's look again at how Eve and Adam show us the temple's ascending development — in particular, what it means to *receive* Christ's Atonement. This interactive *receiving* assists Eve and Adam step-by-step in becoming enough like Christ that they can stay *with* Him. That same *receiving* of His Atonement blesses us in the same way.

Near the end of his life, Lehi chose — of all possible topics — to teach his children about Adam and Eve *receiving* the blessings of the Savior's Atonement in their mortal lives. If our first parents had "remained in the garden of Eden," Lehi said, they "would have had no children." Instead, they would have "remained in a state of innocence, having no joy, for they knew no misery" (2 Nephi 2:22–23).

Oh, I get it: no children -- no misery! But verse 23 goes on: ". . . doing no good, for they knew no sin." And then the famous lines, "Adam fell that men might be." And here we need to fill in a blank, right? That men might be "mortal." And why are men mortal? "That they might have joy" (2 Nephi 2:25).

Lehi illustrates here what the Lord had told Adam about his and Eve's children: "They [will] taste the bitter, that they may know to prize the good" (Moses 6:55). Lehi calls his version of this concept "opposition in all things" (2 Nephi 2:11). Without misery and opposition, we have no comparison, no contrast. We would have no way to *understand* the difference between good and evil — and therefore no way to *choose* between good and evil, no way to choose between the bitter and the sweet, and no way to choose to learn and grow from our experience.

As we've noted earlier, in all of Christianity, the Restoration's *developmental* perspective is an entirely unique way of looking at sin, experience, and Christ's Atonement. Our development in this sense helps us to change and become sanctified — prepared to comprehend being again in His presence. The Book of Moses tells us this story — what Eve and Adam are thinking and feeling and how they are developing — in ways we simply would not know otherwise.

To illustrate this developmental perspective, I want to share a narrative poem about Eve by Arta Romney Ballif, President Marion G. Romney's sister. She is trying to imagine what it was like for Eve after she and Adam had been driven out of Eden. They were alone in a fallen world. There was no way for her to call her mother to ask, "What do I do with these boys? They're driving me crazy. They're on their cell phones all the time!" What was it like for her? Arta Ballif shows us what she imagines Eve thought and felt in the midst of one of her most wrenching experiences.

Her poem has levels of symbolic meaning. Look for the following symbols:

- *"Fruit."* Eve trades the *"fruit"* of the garden for the "fruit" of her body.
- The *"storm."* Storms in Eve's life. Storms in our lives.
- *"Seed."* "Seed" of plants. "Seed" of animals. Our "seed."

As you look for the symbols, look for Eve's feelings. How do we know Eve's attitude at the end of the poem when she asks, "Why?" Arta Ballif calls her poem "Lamentation."

> And God said, *"BE FRUITFUL, AND MULTIPLY—"*
> Multiply, multiply— echoes multiply--
> God said, *"I WILL GREATLY MULTIPLY THY SORROW—"*
> Thy sorrow, sorrow, sorrow—
>
> I have gotten a man from the Lord
> I have traded the fruit of the garden for the fruit of my body
> For a laughing bundle of humanity.
>
> And now another one who looks like Adam.
> We shall call this one, "Abel."
> It is a lovely name, "Abel."
>
> Cain, Abel, the world is yours.
> God set the sun in the heaven to light your days
> To warm the flocks, to kernel the grain
> He illuminated your nights with stars
> He made the trees and the fruit thereof yielding seed
> He made every living thing, the wheat, the sheep, the cattle
> For your enjoyment.
> And, behold, it is very good.
>
> Adam? Adam,
> Where art thou?
> Where are the boys?
> The sky darkens with clouds.
> Adam, is that you?
> Where is Abel?
> He is long caring for his flocks.
> The sky is black and the rain hammers.

Are the ewes lambing
In this storm?

Why your troubled face, Adam?
Are you ill?
Why so pale, so agitated?
The wind will pass
The lambs will birth
With Abel's help.

Dead?
What is dead?

Merciful God!

Hurry, bring warm water
I'll bathe his wounds
Bring clean clothes
Bring herbs
I'll heal him.

I am trying to understand.
You said, "Abel is dead."
But I am skilled with herbs
Remember when he was seven
The fever? Remember how—

Herbs will not heal?
Dead?

And Cain? Where is Cain?
Listen to that thunder.

Cain cursed?
What has happened to him?
God said, "A fugitive and a vagabond?"

But God can't do that.
They are my sons, too.
I gave them birth
In the valley of pain.
Adam, try to understand
In the valley of pain

I bore them
> fugitive?
> vagabond?

This is his home
This [the] soil he loved
Where he toiled for golden wheat
For tasseled corn.

To the hill country?
There are rocks in the hill country
Cain can't work in the hill country
The nights are cold
Cold and lonely, and the wind gales.

Quick, we must find him
A basket of bread and his coat
I worry, thinking of him wandering
With no place to lay his head.
Cain cursed?
A wanderer, a roamer?
Who will bake his bread and mend his coat?

Abel, my son dead?
And Cain, my son, a fugitive
Two sons
Adam, we had two sons
Both — Oh, Adam —
> multiply
> sorrow
Dear God, Why?
Tell me again about the fruit
Why?
Please, tell me again
Why?[37]

I'm looking forward to meeting Eve one day. I want to thank her.

Did you notice how Eve asked her questions at the end of the poem? And with what attitude? Did she demand, "Heavenly Father! Tell me! After *all* we've sacrificed, why are you doing this to me?" I don't think so. She didn't ask why she felt such anguish and agony about Cain and

Abel; rather, she asked with more trust, "Heavenly Father, why do we have all the terrible difficulties to work through in this world? And where could working through those difficulties lead us? What is, after all, the 'fruit' of this life?"

As I think about the developmental ascent we're all struggling in, I'm grateful for Elder Maxwell's honest insight, asked ironically: "How can you and I really expect to glide naively through life, as if to say, 'Lord, give me experience, but not grief, not sorrow, not pain, not opposition, not betrayal, and certainly not to be forsaken. Keep from me, Lord, all those experiences which made Thee what Thou art! Then let me come and dwell with Thee and fully share Thy joy!'"[38]

So . . . what does Christ's Atonement have to do with what Eve describes in the poem? Again, the best answer—a ringing doctrinal answer—is in the Book of Moses, in an angel's visit to an altar. "Why," the angel asks, "dost thou offer sacrifices unto the Lord?"

Figure 2. Walter Rane: The Angel with Adam and Eve.
© by Intellectual Reserve, Inc.

"I know not," Adam replies, "save the Lord commanded me" (Moses 5:6).

Figure 2 depicts Walter Rane's painting showing the angel teaching Adam and Eve. Again, the Book of Moses paints a clearer picture. "This thing is a similitude of the sacrifice of the Only Begotten of the Father. . . . Wherefore, . . . thou shalt repent and call upon God in the name of the Son forevermore" (Moses 5:7–8).

Look at the angel's face. What is his attitude? Is he scolding them? No. He wants them to understand. He wants them to want to do the hard things they will *have* to do to ascend. He wants them to ascend, to get their feet out of the mud and get themselves into the fiery light of heaven. He loves them.

Look at Adam's and Eve's faces. It's not fear you see. They're leaning forward, desiring to understand. Look at the diagonal division in the painting. In the lower right is the reality, the mud of mortality. The glory of God can be reached only by stretching up and out and through the difficulties created by that symbolic mud. And notice Eve's hand on Adam's shoulder, as if she's saying, "We're going to do this together."

The angel and the Holy Ghost teach them not only about Christ's sacrifice but also about the great plan of redemption and salvation (see Moses 5:9). What is Eve's reaction to the these divine teachings? Eve and Adam were not novices at this point—they'd been around the block in mortality a few times. They had had children and many hard experiences. And Eve is no Pollyanna; yet Moses 5:11 tells us that she "heard all these things and was *glad,* saying: Were it not for our transgression we never should have had seed ["seed" again], and never should have known good and evil, and the joy of our redemption." She's saying, "If we hadn't chosen to taste the bitter, we wouldn't, we couldn't, prize the good."

Eve is getting it. Remember—no experience, no children, no misery, no sin—and therefore no joy. So she says that without the anguish they wouldn't know "the joy of our redemption, and the eternal life which God giveth unto all the obedient" (verse 11). I love how she doesn't say "unto all the perfect," but "unto all the obedient"—those who are striving. In this story, the Book of Moses again makes clear the unique doctrine that Christ and his atoning mission were central to Adam and Eve from their earliest days and that mortal afflictions are designed not to punish us, but to teach us. Mortal afflictions are a catalyst to growth.

Adam and Eve are stepping up, as in the temple's pattern, to the terrestrial world and moving toward the celestial (see table 1). And as part of that stepping up, we can also see the additional blessings of the

Atonement. The Savior is so ready to give us what is good for us when we become ready and when we're willing to reach up.

As we think of the *redeeming blessings*, the *strengthening blessings*, and the *perfecting blessings*, notice how the perfecting blessings relate to the endowment and to the higher priesthood with sacrifice, with consecration. The angel's visit strengthened Adam and Eve. And I believe the Savior is strengthening us *while* we're being redeemed and *while* we're trying to become perfected.

If Eve and Adam could grow through their extreme difficulties, maybe I could. The Book of Moses teaches this doctrine: I can climb up and out of any anguish *if* I stick with Him. I believe that *if my faith is based on trust in God, and not on blessings, I can grow through any trial. It is a doctrine of hope.*

Bruce: Let me add two brief thoughts about Adam and Eve's marriage—and the doctrines of sealing and sacrifice, which culminate the story of receiving the Atonement. We noted earlier that the Book of Moses shows the contrast between other-centered and self-centered marriage; we'll discuss more on that shortly. We have also seen that Eve and then Adam chose wisely in the garden because only the natural, mortal consequences of eating the fruit could provide the experience—including the children—needed to fulfill God's plan for them and for us.

In contrast, traditional Christianity teaches that Eve's choice was a terrible mistake, bringing down the wrath of God on all mankind. Some Christian churches still teach that because women are the daughters of foolish Eve, wives should be *dependent* on their husbands. Reacting strongly against this idea, most people today would say that a wife should be *independent* of her husband. And, in fairness, they would add, a husband should also be independent of his wife. But when both spouses are independent of each other, they usually accept today's standard of marriage as a "nonbinding commitment," which makes them *both* more likely to leave their marriage when the fun stops—or when the trouble starts.

Which is correct in a marriage: *dependence* or *independence*? Neither one. Resting on the doctrinal foundation provided by the Book of Moses, the restored gospel—unlike the rest of Christianity—teaches that Eve and Adam's choice in the garden wasn't a mistake or an accident; rather, their action was a deliberate, even glorious, part of the plan of salvation. Thus the Restoration sees Eve—and all women—as noble beings who are the complete equals of men. So Eve is not dependent on Adam, nor is she independent from him. Rather, Eve and Adam are *interdependent* with

each other. As the Church's "The Family: A Proclamation to the World" states, they are "equal partners" who "help one another" in everything they do.[39] That concept was also not likely to have been present in Joseph Smith's 1830 New England culture.

The Adam and Eve story also teaches us about sacrifice — both in general and as a sanctifying dimension of marriage. During our time in the St. George Utah Temple, I was asked to perform a sealing in the same sealing room where Marie and I had been married about half a century earlier. As I invited the young couple to come to the altar, suddenly I realized something I hadn't caught before. I would be asking them to kneel — like Adam and Eve — at the sacred altar of prayer, the altar of covenant, the altar of sacrifice. And what would they be doing there?

I found myself telling them that when the Savior spoke to the Nephites after He had completed His atoning mission, He said that He no longer wanted animal sacrifices. He wanted instead the new sacrifice of a broken heart and a contrite spirit (see 3 Nephi 9:20).

Animal sacrifice was symbolic of the Father offering His Son. But having a broken heart and a contrite spirit is a symbol of the Savior offering *Himself* as a sacrifice for us. James E. Talmage taught that Jesus literally died of a broken heart. When we make that kind of sacrifice, offering ourselves, we seek to emulate Him. So that couple were meekly offering themselves on the altar — to God and to each other, holding nothing back — like Adam and Eve.

And what will happen to them as they try to live for each other and for their family in a way that emulates Christ? This thing is in similitude of the Only Begotten. As they try individually to live as He did, they offer themselves to God vertically and they offer themselves to each other horizontally. As "Adam said: This [woman] . . . is bone of my bones and flesh of my flesh." "Therefore shall a man . . . cleave unto his wife; and they shall be one flesh." And "Eve, also, his wife, did labor with him" (Moses 3:23–24; 5:1).

Think of a triangle, with the bride and groom in the two bottom corners and the Lord at the apex above them. As they individually ascend toward Him on either side of the triangle, the closer they come to the Lord, the closer they will come to each other. And eventually, when they come to the point of being "at one" with Him, they will also be at one with each other. As their sealing is sanctified in this way, they are personally sanctified — as the Savior's perfecting grace blesses their lifetime of placing their hearts on the altar of selfless love.

This covenantal, sacrifice-based understanding of marriage differs starkly and powerfully from the prevailing cultural view of marriage today. In His parable of the good shepherd, Jesus describes a hireling—someone who is paid to care for the sheep. When the wolf comes, He says that the hireling "leaveth the sheep, and fleeth." Why does the hireling run away? Because "his own the sheep are not." By contrast, Jesus said of Himself, "I am the good shepherd. . . . I lay down my life for the sheep" (John 10:12, 14–15). In today's culture, many marriage partners view themselves like hirelings—who too often flee when the wolf of trouble comes. They are like Adam and Eve's misguided descendants who "hearkened not" to the words of Noah and who were "lifted up in the imagination" of their own hearts (Moses 8:21–22). But *we*, in similitude, try to give our lives for the sheep of our marriage covenant—an hour, a day at a time.

I know that the Good Shepherd lives and that our personal relationship with Him leads to a joining of His sacrifice and ours. Within and through that relationship, He redeems us, He strengthens us, and He perfects us.

Finally, when I was assigned to meet in the St. George Utah Temple with people ready to receive their own endowment, I would tell them that they were about to have an experience similar to what Moses had, as described in Moses 1. And I would say that what the Lord said to Moses, He would be saying to *them* during the endowment: "[imagine the Lord saying your name], thou art my son [or my daughter]," and "I have a work for thee" to do (Moses 1:4, 6). I'm so thankful for the Book of Moses, because through the temple it teaches us the divine *vision* of who we really are, and it teaches us the *work* that will return us to His presence.

Discussion

Dan Peterson:

You have given us a rich banquet of reflections on the temple and the Book of Moses and a really marvelous introduction to this conference. We're grateful for that. So, thank you very much. I have some questions here—some of my own, and some that have come in. One is this: "How does the Book of Moses address the criticism that Joseph Smith's theology evolved, especially regarding the temple?"

Bruce C. Hafen:

Well, we believe in continuing revelation. Of course Joseph's theology would evolve. As we've already said, he was given what Jack Welch called the blueprint for the temple endowment in 1830 in the Book of Moses. And then, over time, the Saints became ready to receive that endowment. But we didn't even receive the full endowment in Kirtland. Beautiful as that temple was, historic as it was, with the visit of Moses and all the others, it wasn't time for the complete endowment until the Saints were in Nauvoo. So was Joseph's understanding—his theology—evolving? Beautiful. Yes.

Marie K. Hafen:

Yes. And even then, we didn't have it all until St. George.

Bruce C. Hafen:

This was once the matron of the St. George Temple. What do you mean, Sister Hafen?

Marie K. Hafen:

We didn't have all of the ordinances for the dead—like the endowment for the dead. So the pattern for temple work wasn't complete until then.

Bruce C. Hafen:

Yes, that's a wonderful point, really. And we didn't realize that ourselves until we were working in the St. George Temple a few years ago. The first endowments for the dead took place there in 1877, when the St. George Temple was first dedicated. Later that year came the celebrated temple visit of the Founding Fathers, who essentially said to temple president Wilford Woodruff, "Finally, you're doing endowments for the dead, but you haven't done ours." Well, it was all part of the evolving understanding. Why didn't the Saints do all of that in Nauvoo? They barely received their own endowments and marriage sealings before their enemies chased them out of town. Yes—it was evolving.

Marie K. Hafen:

But the blueprint was there, for the basic—

Bruce C. Hafen:

Yes, the blueprint. The foundation.

Dan Peterson:

But Brigham Young asked President Wilford Woodruff, your predecessor there, to systematize and organize the temple ordinance work. This was really our first chance, I think, to have a peaceful place where we could really contemplate what we were doing in a temple.

Bruce C. Hafen:

Nice way to put it, Dan. I mean, Brigham Young broke ground for the Salt Lake Temple within just a few years of when the Saints entered the Salt Lake Valley in 1847. Yet it took 40 more years to build that temple. And they had so much trouble, such as when they once had to cover up the foundation and prepare to run for the hills. They didn't know what was happening. They didn't know when the dedication day would ever come. And so Brigham Young went to St. George in 1871 *to a*nnounce the construction of that temple. The temple was then partially dedicated in 1877 in January, then fully dedicated in April. And Brigham Young died just a few months later.

Marie K. Hafen:

So that temple was built in six years.

Bruce C. Hafen:

Right. And talk about peaceful conditions — peace and poverty. They often go together in a strange way. But Brigham Young also asked Wilford Woodruff and others who were there to write down the temple ordinances for the first time. They had kept them sacred —

Marie K. Hafen:

They were in their minds.

Bruce C. Hafen:

—and confidential. That was under Brigham Young's direction. And after he had dedicated the St. George Temple, within the next few months he dedicated the temple sites for both the Manti Temple and the Logan Temple. And then he died one week after the Founding Fathers visited President Woodruff in August of 1977.

Dan Peterson:

If I could just add something myself, years ago I was on the Gospel Doctrine writing committee, and I was asked to do a lesson about Brigham Young. And I decided that I was tired of reading about Brigham Young as the great pioneer leader. We knew that. I wanted to show Brigham Young, the religious leader devoted to temples. One quote sticks in my mind where he said sometimes he wanted the tongues of seven thunders to wake up the people. He said, "If you understood how important this work is, this house [speaking about the St. George Temple] would be open 24 hours a day, seven days a week." It would never close, there's so much work to be done.

Bruce C. Hafen:

The quote that you just offered so accurately was from his talk at the dedication of the St. George Temple.

Dan Peterson:

So he was committed to that. He wasn't only the practical man of action, irrigation, canals, and colonizing. It was all in the service of the work of the Lord and temples, particularly.

Bruce C. Hafen:

Tying that back to something you said earlier, Dan, about Joseph and evolving theology, Hugh Nibley once said Brigham Young was Joseph Smith's most faithful disciple. You may remember that we quoted the temple architecture historian Elwin Robinson, who has done a lot of historical work for the Church, even though he lives in Ohio. He told us the St. George Temple was Joseph's temple. The relationship between Joseph and Brigham was so clear in the temple work. And my own personal little theory about why Brigham Young was in such a hurry to get that temple built in St. George is that he sensed he didn't have much longer. And he wasn't about to face his mentor Joseph and say, "Sorry, we had too many problems." No, we'll just go to poverty-stricken but peaceful little St. George and get it done.

Dan Peterson:

That's a great point. Here's another question that came in. "Should we take the archetypal story of Adam and Eve as an allegory, based on

a prospective series of Adam and Eves in our universe?" That's fairly speculative, I think.

Marie K. Hafen:

OK, read the last part again.

Dan Peterson:

It says, "Based on a prospective series of Adam and Eves in our universe."

Bruce C. Hafen:

Hmm. I don't know much about other Adams and Eves in our universe. So I guess I'd say, "What's the next question?"

Dan Peterson:

Well, I'll go on because there's even another part to this one, which I didn't understand.

Marie K. Hafen:

Or is he saying, "If Adam and Eve lived, then are we all like Adam and Eve?" Or "Did they do it because there would be a lot of Adam and Eves?"

Dan Peterson:

I don't know exactly. Are there Adams and Eves in other worlds? I suppose there might be something like that. This question goes on to say, "They might seem to merge to the point where we can actually tell, is this right?" I'm not sure I know what that means. I thought maybe you might.

Bruce C. Hafen:

Well, maybe what that means, just giving the questioner the benefit of the doubt—sometimes speculative questions come from a good place—

Dan Peterson:

Yes.

Bruce C. Hafen:

Maybe when we say archetypal pattern, we mean something so fundamental that it's universal. And if the Adam and Eve story is so archetypal that it's universal, then maybe that's what he's talking about, and it could well be true.

Dan Peterson:

Yes. I think in Persian, for example, they use the word *Ādăm*, Adam, to refer to just any person, a person. Because Adam is everybody, every man. I think that's really striking in a non-Christian, non-Jewish culture, but they still do it. Now, here are some other thoughts that occurred to me—some are thoughts, some are questions. One is, on the whole, my sense is that we're not doing an adequate job of preparing young people and others to go to the temple for the first time. If so, how might we improve on that as individuals, in our families, in the Church?

Bruce C. Hafen:

Wonderful question, Dan. And it's on the minds of the First Presidency and the Twelve—they've talked about it in conference. They're serious about that. We don't have those temples popping up all over the world just hoping someday, somebody might see one. They're there on purpose. And so we need to prepare our young people everywhere. I think of the places where the Church is so new, and yet they already have temples. We had a granddaughter just come back from a mission to Cambodia. I hardly knew the Vietnam War was over, and she was called as a missionary to Cambodia! And now there's a temple coming there. So the Lord is hastening His work. And that must mean hastening the process of teaching our young people. So what are we going to do about that? Well, how about starting with the Book of Moses—because it contains the doctrinal foundation. It's one thing to talk about the practical nuts and bolts of going to the temple, and there are lots of them, and we need to understand them. But knowing the doctrinal perspective is fundamental. And I sense that the Brethren are telling us, if we're careful, if we follow the guidance on the Church website, we can say more, we can teach more, we can talk more. And that includes the doctrinal big picture, such as the scriptures we were talking about tonight. Then when people go, they are more ready.

Marie K. Hafen:

So we can certainly teach anything that's in print, and there's a lot of published material available now. But I think maybe you also have to go back to the real base where, say, a mother teaches her children to pray. A mother talks with her children around the dinner table. The father is there, and they discuss what the temple means to them. What did they learn from going to the temple? So that step-by-step teaching, as they're ready, as it's age appropriate, then they learn what the next steps are so

that they can be ready with their hearts, and also with their minds, to understand what they will be presented with in the temple.

Dan Peterson:

I think the Church is being much more open nowadays, showing photographs of temple clothing, and so on. Now I heard an objection just the other day. Someone told me of a person who had gone to the temple and was turned off because one of the characters representing people in the temple had buttons, and buttons didn't exist in the days of Adam and Eve. And I thought, Oh my, someone missed the point. Maybe we can help out a little there.

Bruce C. Hafen:

Well, there again, we don't know our own history very well. One of the delightful discoveries we made being in the St. George Temple was the history of how they decided what clothing they would wear. Marie and I love the story of Wilford Woodruff.

Marie K. Hafen:

When he and the other ordinance workers first came to work inside the temple, they didn't wear white.

Bruce C. Hafen:

He was the temple president, but they were just figuring this out. And one day he showed up in white clothing, as did Lucy Bigelow Young, who was the matron of the temple and one of Brigham Young's wives. They were both clothed in white. And then the ordinance workers began wearing white. And then the patrons. There were so many other things that happened like that. It was line upon line, and precept upon precept.

Bruce C. Hafen:

Can I put in a plug for one other point, Dan? And that is the value of the new four-volume history of the Church entitled *Saints*. It is so candid. So open. It's based on stories — and that's what we've been doing here tonight with the story of Adam and Eve. We want each other in the Church to know these stories, the doctrinal ones about the temple, about the issues that people said they didn't know enough about earlier. And there might have been a time earlier when it was better to kind of let people wait until they were ready to look deeper into the Adam and Eve story. But we live in a culture that isn't waiting until anybody's ready for

anything. It's all sort of in your face, ready or not, here we come. And I think we're starting to do that more in the Church. And that history is a good example of it.

Marie K. Hafen:

Also, I was just thinking about the instructions that I was privileged to give to young women who were coming to the temple — mostly younger women coming for the first time, either as missionaries or to be married. I would tell them that if they understood what a symbol is, then they would take a big step up toward understanding the temple. Because the Lord will take whoever comes to the temple where he or she is, and then He will teach them based on their desire, based on their living, based on their understanding, the next step that they need to have. And He teaches them in a way that is not obvious on the surface, but if you look for the symbols and understand the symbols, then you're going to understand the temple better and better, deeper and deeper.

Dan Peterson:

I can say some of my best moments in the Church, but specifically in the temple, have been when suddenly a light bulb goes on, and I get something. I see what it means — at least, I think I do. I'm seeing a new light on this now.

Marie K. Hafen:

In a new way.

Dan Peterson:

Yes, yes. And I've made a step, I think. And these are tremendous moments. Oh, this is sort of related to it. I'm intrigued by the idea of the Book of Moses as a temple text. And sometimes it seems to me, the temple is kind of out there in normal church experience: before you've gone to the temple, you've been to sacrament meetings. The temple's nothing like a sacrament meeting in a lot of ways. And we say, "Well, we don't have all the symbolic stuff," and so on. And then people go to the temple, and we do. And there's kind of a disconnect. And I think talking about the Book of Moses as a temple text maybe suggests one way that we might integrate the temple with our more common, everyday, outside-of-the-temple experience as Latter-day Saints.

Marie K. Hafen:

Well, can I comment just a little bit? Because I think the Book of Moses gets closer to the temple, being a poem, than our regular everyday speech. And if you look at the temple as a poem, rather than as just a narrative story, then that also helps you to understand why and how it's going to be different from our normal everyday life.

Bruce C. Hafen:

I would just add that we've been getting a little taste recently in the Church of what sacrament meeting is really all about. I would sometimes say to young people coming to the temple for their own endowment that, actually, ordinances are central to what we do outside the temple, as well as inside. I would say, occasionally, "What if you would go to sacrament meeting, and the only thing you did was walk in, sit down, and somebody brings you the sacrament, and then you go home, you're done?" Well, that's kind of what the temple is. It's receiving an ordinance. And why don't we think of the sacrament in those terms? Maybe we can understand it better now, since that's what we're sometimes doing during this season of COVID-19 restrictions.

Dan Peterson:

I think sometimes we've seen the sacrament as something you get out of the way so you can get to the real heart of the meeting—

Bruce C. Hafen:

Yes. Yes.

Dan Peterson:

—which is the talks. Whereas, actually, the talks are dispensable. Even if they're good, they're dispensable. The sacrament is not.

Marie K. Hafen:

Again, it's condensed like a poem.

Dan Peterson:

Yes.

Marie K. Hafen:

And it has unfolding meanings as you bring more to it.

Dan Peterson:

Yes, yes. I remember baptizing one of my sons, and it suddenly hit me how simple the ordinance of baptism is. It only takes a few seconds, and it's a very simple thing. You say a few words — dip them in water, bring them out. That's baptism. And yet it's so profoundly, symbolically rich, and obviously so eternally important. But we can skip it by. And I remember when I was a bishop once, there was a person who came to me, and he was thinking of not getting married in the temple. He was worthy in every way. I couldn't understand why. I asked him, and he said, "Well, because I don't want all the expense, and all that sort of thing, the reception." And I said, "Look, you've got this all mixed up. The reception — maybe you should have one, maybe you shouldn't. But it's not necessary. The temple is very simple. You don't have to shell out a lot of money. If you just want to go there with your fiancée and get married, you can do that. Don't drop the temple — drop the reception, if you're going to let one go or the other."

Marie K. Hafen:

Elope.

Dan Peterson:

Yes, I didn't think I was really supposed to counsel someone to elope. But it was going to be a choice of temple or not. You might choose that. Elope to the temple.

Bruce C. Hafen:

There's actually a similar problem, Dan, with those going on missions. It was interesting to me to hear the members of the First Presidency and Twelve talk about this more than once. They wanted temple presidents, and they wanted priesthood leaders and families, to understand that when people receive a mission call and they can now go to the temple, that's not just to check the first box on the way to the MTC. It has an independent, significant meaning that we've been talking about all evening — to be able to go to the temple for itself, with all of the meaning it has. And so to have missions kind of disrupted, and missionaries going to the temple have been disrupted — maybe that will help us think in fresh ways about both of those things.

Marie K. Hafen:

I think it is, because of COVID-19. When our grandson recently went on his mission without having been to the temple, he just had to wait until there was an opportunity.

Dan Peterson:

Right. Now, this is, I think, helping us to boil things down to the essence, and that can be very good sometimes. A lot of things can grow up around the essence, and we begin to confuse them with the core. So . . .

Bruce C. Hafen:

Well now, can I ask you a question, Dan?

Dan Peterson:

[Laughs] I don't know if we allow that.

Bruce C. Hafen:

This is a question about the Book of Moses conference. Getting ready for this conference has been really intriguing for both of us. And you've heard us say some things tonight that some people might consider new ideas. The restored gospel of Jesus Christ teaches an understanding about the Fall, the Atonement, the meaning of life — all of those fundamental essences about the mortal experience — that the rest of Christianity doesn't know about. I don't condemn them. They just don't know any better.

Dan Peterson:

Right.

Bruce C. Hafen:

But are we trying to keep this a secret in the Church? Because I find that a lot of our people don't recognize how unique our doctrine is. We've talked tonight about the developmental nature of the Restoration's doctrine about Christ's Atonement. The temple traces that, and the scriptures teach it, especially in the Book of Moses. So I say hooray for this conference, because it will give some visibility to the uniqueness and the value of our theology. There's something far more at stake here than "Is there historicity behind the Book of Moses?"

Dan Peterson:

Oh yes. And we talk that way. As time went on in our preparation, we talked that way on purpose. And we do salute you for opening the conference. And we believe in trying to get the word out about the temple. Let's also get it out about the theology that's in the Book of Moses.

Dan Peterson:

I don't think that we fully appreciate — most of us, probably any of us fully appreciate — how rich and radical, in the good sense, the doctrine is. This came home to me once in a way. I'm supposed to be asking you questions, but I'm telling stories.

Marie K. Hafen:

That's good.

Bruce C. Hafen:

You're just answering our question.

Dan Peterson:

But I remember years ago, I was in a conference with Muslims, Christians, and Jews in Graz, Austria. And I ended up spending a little extra time there. My wife and children were already in Jerusalem. I was going to teach there. But I couldn't catch my flight right away. So I was there with a rabbi who taught at a university back east. And we were talking about the Church a little bit. He wanted to know about it. And I said, well, one of the issues it was facing was rapid growth in many areas and having to staff new units. And he said, "Growth?" He said, "I don't mean to insult you, but I've always thought of Mormonism as the sort of quintessential boring midwestern Protestantism." And I said, "Boy, you really don't know anything about us at all." But it was clear, he thought of us as just basically evangelicals or fundamentalists with an extra book, maybe an extra wife, I don't know. And I thought, Sometimes I just want to scream, "No, we're much weirder than you think we are. We're really different."

Bruce C. Hafen:

Yes.

Dan Peterson:

And our theology is radically different in a really good way.

Marie K. Hafen:

Yes, we have all the rungs in the ladder.

Dan Peterson:

Yes, yes. We're not just another form of Protestantism. It's very different than that. Of course, some of our critics know that, but they don't appreciate it. But others don't know it at all. Well, I don't want to keep this going too long, but there are questions and issues that maybe you'd have something to say about. There seems to be a rising tendency among some members of the Church to say, "Well, the historicity of the Book of Mormon and the Book of Moses doesn't really matter." Or some even say they just aren't historical, and what difference does that make? It's always been the position of people outside the Church. And it's probably been the position of people who were leaving the Church, fading out of membership. But I hear it more often nowadays — occasionally among people who are still in. "I'm thoroughly active. I just think the Book of Mormon — well, Joseph Smith made it up." And how do you react to that?

Bruce C. Hafen:

We're kind of that same way about our culture. The "cancel culture" of people today would like to just do away with historicity in general. If you don't like something, cancel it. If you don't understand something, cancel it. But we don't know who we are without our history. So to say that in our country, as well as in our modern scriptures, there's no historicity, is to say — we kind of alluded to that earlier — that you don't really grasp the reality and the nature of the Restoration. It's not just Protestantism with another book. So hooray again for this conference, because that will help people think more clearly.

Dan Peterson:

Well, I think you raised one really strong point about this. Moses appeared to Joseph Smith in the Kirtland Temple. I also want to ask, "If the Book of Mormon's not historical, then who was it that appeared in his bedroom and told him where the plates were? What's going on here? Who are these persons who keep showing up who you say weren't historic?"

Bruce C. Hafen:

And there are so many of them. That's another reason for—let's read *Saints*—

Dan Peterson:

Yes.

Bruce C. Hafen:

—because there are so many people who came to Joseph. The Restoration was such a huge process. And once you see the size of it, then these questions about the historicity of something specific just sort of fade into relative insignificance.

Dan Peterson:

Yes, yes. I just think, it's one thing to bracket the historicity of the ancient scriptures that we have. But that also makes a hash of the Restoration, because you've got Peter, James, and John. And you've got Moroni. You've got Moses. You've got all of these figures who are coming. And so the ancient history matters, and it matters in the 19th century, and the end of the 21st too. You can't just ignore that. Well, there were a couple of other things you said that I just really loved. I've loved your quotation from Elder Maxwell: "How can we expect to receive everything the Lord has if we say, 'Well, I want experience, yes, but none of the unpleasant things'?"

Marie K. Hafen:

None of the hard things that made Him who He is.

Dan Peterson:

Yeah. The stuff that He had to go through. I don't want that. But then I want to be rewarded. I remember one day when I was becoming active in the Church as a teenager. I grew up in a part-member family. And my mother wasn't overly active. But I was suddenly just oppressed by the thought that Abraham may have already entered into his exaltation, but I'm nowhere near Abraham. How can I even think of reaching that sort of status? What would I have to do to get there? But somehow we're assured that we can follow that path. But then we have to be willing, I guess, to take what the Lord gives us too, and that may or may not be the trials and tests of Abraham.

Marie K. Hafen:

Yes, yes—as in Mosiah 3:19.

Bruce C. Hafen:

But the pattern is the same. And that's, I think, what we're talking about. That's why I'm so grateful for the Book of Moses—

Marie K. Hafen:

For the blueprint.

Bruce C. Hafen:

—and the temple. The temple's blueprint is the archetypal pattern. Sure, there are all these variations, but that pattern fits all times, places, seasons. It's just remarkable.

Dan Peterson:

I love the image too from your comments about sealing a young couple. I would love to have had it as a bishop when I was sending young couples to the temple. I like this one: think of a triangle with the bride and groom at the two bottom corners, kneeling at the altar, and the Lord at the apex, above them, as they individually ascend toward Him on either side of the triangle. The closer they come to the Lord, the closer they will come to each other. And eventually, when they come to the point of being at one with Him, they will also be at one with each other. I thought that was a marvelously profound statement.

Bruce C. Hafen:

There are some little hints there about the blessings of the at-one-ment.

Dan Peterson:

Yes. And one other thing—I'm entering into this much more than I intended to, but I like the comments you made about trying to see more clearly the link between Latter-day Saint atonement discourse and the plan of salvation, especially progression toward the divine nature. It seems to me, I actually made an argument, something like this, in a piece for Jack Welch a few years ago, that the full atonement, the full at-one-ment with God, actually already entails partaking of the divine nature. If you're fully at one with God, you're there. That's what it is. And you're at one with everyone else who is at one with God.

Bruce C. Hafen:

But knowing it is a developmental process changes the way you look at everything about it. And this process is in the temple, and in the Book of Moses. So when you make that paradigm shift, "Oh, it's developmental," it's not just a kind of one-and-done thing overnight. It's the comparison with the typical doctrines of other Christian faiths, where they're doing the best they can. But knowing that it's developmental changes everything.

Marie K. Hafen:

But that's what gives you hope as well.

Dan Peterson:

Yes.

Marie K. Hafen:

Because you think, well, I can do that a step at a time.

Bruce C. Hafen:

Are we lurching to a close here, Dan? There's another image that occurs to me. One of the things I like about the developmental nature of our spiritual experience is that we know where this leads us. We go to the temple, and we learn where that developmental pattern ends up. There's a message there for us. This process, this pattern, in the Book of Moses and in the temple is, as Marie said so beautifully, both simple and symbolic. It's a way of saying, Where are we going? What did the angel want for Adam and Eve, and all the rest of us? "I'm trying to get you home." This isn't some club that's reserved for an elect few who somehow learn some secret password or code or know somebody. No, everybody, "come, follow me." And we know where we can go, what we can become, by developing through experience and with all the blessings of the Atonement. So even though it seems so far away, there's something about these stories and these doctrines that bring "Home" within reach enough for us to keep going. And that's really all we need.

Marie K. Hafen:

Yes. "And follow me through the difficulties and the hard things that I have 'inflicted upon you' [see Mosiah 3:19] so you can become as I am." So, yes. "Come, follow me." But where does that lead?

Dan Peterson:

It's a stirring vision. I remember the thing that probably caught my attention. I've told this story in some contexts, and then I'll be quiet and allow you to do some closing thoughts. But I discovered a little book when I was staying home from school one day. I think I may have really been sick. I don't remember. But I found a book that we just inherited from my grandmother called *Added Upon*, by Nephi Anderson.

Marie K. Hafen:

Yes, I know that one.

Dan Peterson:

And I don't know, I've tried to read it again, and it didn't age well with me. But when I read it the first time, I had thought that church was just a series of boring meetings, and I was not very interested in it. And then I read that—and for the first time, I think I caught a vision of the plan of salvation, that panorama from premortal existence on through. I thought, and I still think, that is the most breathtaking thing that I had ever read or seen. Just astonishing to me. And suddenly, I thought, Oh, now if this is true, this changes everything. It puts everything in this life in a different light. It all makes sense, and it's worth devoting oneself to. And the temple is a summary of that same path.

Marie K. Hafen:

Love that title. My mother read that book as a girl in Old Mexico when she was growing up there in the colonies.

Dan Peterson:

Wow.

Marie K. Hafen:

Yes. The vision. And she always had that. I think it's one of those things you try to help your children see—the vision of what they can achieve and become.

Dan Peterson:

Well, thank you very much. And now if you have any parting thoughts, I will depart the stage.

Bruce C. Hafen:

Marie, do you have anything you'd like to say?

Marie K. Hafen:

No, I think we've probably said more than they'd like to hear. I don't know.

Bruce C. Hafen:

Oh yes. I can't see the unseen audience. Where are they? Are you still there?

Marie K. Hafen:

That *Added Upon*. I think the temple adds upon—

Bruce C. Hafen:

Yes.

Marie K. Hafen:

And the Book of Moses adds upon. It's a great, great thought.

Bruce C. Hafen:

As I mentioned in our presentation, I did used to talk to people who were being endowed about the Book of Moses. I simply believed in it. It had been my own experience. I would say, "As you go through this endowment, imagine—I don't know when it will happen to you, maybe it won't be the first time—but as you keep coming back, the Lord will be whispering two ideas to you. First, 'Thou art my son, or my daughter.'" What's that? It's the vision of who you are. That's what he gave Moses. And once Moses understood that, then, second, the Lord said, "I have a work for thee to do." Yes, go get Israel out of Egypt. Well, for a lot of us, we don't have to do that. We maybe have to get—

Marie K. Hafen:

Egypt out of us.

Bruce C. Hafen:

Yes. The vision and the work, it's all in the temple. It's all in the Book of Moses. And it's so simple. I love the power of the simplicity—the vision

and the work. And we can all understand it, it's so accessible and so needed. Thanks for the opportunity to be with you.

Dan Peterson:

Oh, thank you. Thank you.

Notes

1. Bruce C. Hafen, *A Disciple's Life: The Biography of Neal A. Maxwell* (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 2002), 508.

2. Hafen, *A Disciple's Life*, 509.

3. Noel B. Reynolds. "The coming forth of the Book of Mormon in the twentieth century." *BYU Studies Quarterly* 38, no. 2 (1999): 6–47. https://scholarsarchive.byu.edu/byusq/vol38/iss2/2, 36, quoted in Hafen, *A Disciple's Life*, 510.

4. Truman G. Madsen, Oral History Interview, 37–38, Church History Library. Unpublished manuscript in the possession of the author, quoted in Hafen, *A Disciple's Life*, 510.

5. John Woodland Welch interview: Salt Lake City, Utah, 2000 September 13-29, OH 570, Church History Library, quoted in Hafen, *A Disciple's Life*, 511.

6. Hafen, *A Disciple's Life*, 511.

7. "Good philosophy must exist, if for no other reason, because bad philosophy needs to be answered" (C. S. Lewis, "Learning in War-Time," in *The Weight of Glory and Other Addresses* (Orlando, FL: Macmillan, 1980, reverse and exp. ed.), 28.)

8. Neal A. Maxwell, *Plain and Precious Things* (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 1983), 4.

9. Sterling McMurrin, "An Interview with Sterling McMurrin," interview by Blake Ostler, *Dialogue: A Journal of Mormon Thought* 17, no. 1 (Spring 1984): 25, https://dialoguejournal.com/wp-content/uploads/sbi/articles/Dialogue_V17N01_20.pdf.

10. On the role of evidence in nurturing faith, see John W. Welch, "The Power of Evidence in the Nurturing of Faith," in *Echoes and Evidences of the Book of Mormon*, ed. Donald W. Parry, Daniel C. Peterson, and John W. Welch (Provo, UT:

Foundation for Ancient Research and Mormon Studies, 2002), 17–53, https://archive.bookofmormoncentral.org/content/power-evidence-nurturing-faith.

11. "Abraham," Wikimedia Foundation, last modified 5 November 2020, 00:45, https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Abraham.

12. Jeffrey R. Holland, "The Maxwell Legacy in the 21st Century," 10 November 2018, Joseph Smith Building auditorium, Brigham Young University, in Neal A. Maxwell Institute for Religious Scholarship, 2018 Annual Report, p. 16, https://byumiuploads.s3.amazonaws.com/uploads/2019/06/2018-Maxwell-Institute-Annual-Report-small.pdf. See Stephen Prothero, "Belief Unbracketed: A Case for the Religion Scholar to Reveal More of Where He or She Is Coming From," *Harvard Divinity Bulletin* 32, no. 2 (Winter/Spring 2004): 10–11.

13. Neal A. Maxwell, "Discipleship and Scholarship," *BYU Studies* 32, no. 3 (1992): 8, https://scholarsarchive.byu.edu/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=2783&context=byusq.

14. For a website with relevant perspectives on the Book of Abraham, see https://www.pearlofgreatpricecentral.org/#. The site includes 40 historical validations of Abraham.

15. "Tracing Ancient Threads in the Book of Moses: 2020 Interpreter Foundation Conference," Interpreter Foundation, https://interpreterfoundation.org/conferences/2020-book-of-moses-conference/.

16. "I define a 'temple text' as one that contains the most sacred teachings of the plan of salvation that are not to be shared indiscriminately, and that ordains or otherwise conveys divine powers through ceremonial or symbolic means, together with commandments received by sacred oaths that allow the recipient to stand ritually in the presence of God." John W. Welch, "The Temple in the Book of Mormon: The Temples at the Cities of Nephi, Zarahemla, and Bountiful," in *Temples of the Ancient World: Ritual and Symbolism*, ed. Donald W. Parry (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 1994), 300.

17. John W. Welch, email message to Bruce C. Hafen, 9 September 2020.

18. John Welch suggested several of these terms in our recent exchange of emails on this subject. See Welch, email message to Hafen, 9 September 2020.

19. Welch, email message to Hafen, 9 September 2020.

20. We first explored many of the themes described in this paper in Bruce C. Hafen, *The Broken Heart: How the Atonement Applies to Life's Experiences*, 2nd ed. (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 2009); and Bruce C. Hafen and Marie K. Hafen, *The Contrite Spirit: How the Temple Helps Us Apply Christ's Atonement* (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 2015). The doctrinal foundations for both books rely heavily on scriptural passages from the Book of Moses.

21. Jan Shipps, *Sojourner in the Promised Land: Forty Years Among the Mormons* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2000), 112.

22. Elwin Robinson, conversation with Bruce C. Hafen and Marie K. Hafen, 2013.

23. David O. McKay, Los Angeles Temple dedication, Los Angeles, CA, 11 March 1956, quoted in Truman G. Madsen, "House of Glory," in *Five Classics by Truman G. Madsen* (repr., Salt Lake City, UT: Eagle Gate, 2001), 282.

24. *Teachings of Presidents of the Church: Joseph Smith* (Salt Lake City: The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, 2007), 268.

25. Jeffrey M. Bradshaw, "The LDS Book of Enoch as the Culminating Story of a Temple Text," *BYU Studies* 53, no. 1 (2014): 44.

26. Jeffrey M. Bradshaw, David J. Larsen, and Stephen T. Whitlock, "Moses 1 and the *Apocalypse of Abraham*: Twin Sons of Different Mothers?" *Interpreter: A Journal of Latter-day Saint Faith and Scholarship* 38 (2020): 190, https://journal.interpreterfoundation.org/moses-1-and-the-apocalypse-of-abraham-twin-sons-of-different-mothers/.

27. Richard Lyman Bushman, *Joseph Smith: Rough Stone Rolling* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 2005), 134.

28. Terryl Givens and Brian M. Hauglid, *The Pearl of Greatest Price: Mormonism's Most Controversial Scripture* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2019), 5.

29. Givens and Hauglid, *Pearl of Greatest Price*, 30.

30. Givens and Hauglid, *Pearl of Greatest Price*, 40–42.

31. "How Firm a Foundation," *Hymns*, no. 85.

32. Russell M. Nelson, "Drawing the Power of Jesus Christ into Our Lives," *Ensign* or *Liahona*, May 2017, 40.

33. Nelson, "Drawing the Power of Jesus Christ," 40.

34. Allan Rau, email message to Bruce C. Hafen, 25 June 2012; emphasis added.

35. McKay, in Madsen, "House of Glory," 282.

36. Thomas Stearns Eliot, "Little Gidding," in *Four Quartets* (New York City: Harcourt, 1971), 59.

37. Arta Romney Ballif, Lamentation and Other Poems. Privately printed, 1989, with permission. Quoted in Bruce C. Hafen. *Covenant Hearts: Marriage and the Joy of Human Love* (Salt Lake City, UT: Deseret Book, 2005), 67-70.

38. Neal A. Maxwell, "'Lest Ye Be Wearied and Faint in Your Minds,'" *Ensign*, May 1991, 88.

39. "The Family: A Proclamation to the World," *Ensign* or *Liahona*, November 2010, 129.

The Origin and Purpose of the Book of Mormon Phrase "If Ye Keep My Commandments Ye Shall Prosper in the Land"

Taylor Halverson

Abstract: *We are told in the Title Page of the Book of Mormon that the Book of Mormon was revealed in our day "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." Hence, the covenantal context, structure, and logic of the Book of Mormon demand further consideration, exploration, and elucidation. A prosperous starting point is the phrase "If ye keep my commandments ye shall prosper in the land." This covenantal phrase is used throughout the Book of Mormon as a summary of the theological logic of the suzerain-vassal treaty covenant type in which God sought to secure the fidelity of his people, who would receive in exchange continued prosperity in His appointed promised lands.*

One of the most commonly occurring phrases in the Book of Mormon, "If ye keep my commandments ye shall prosper in the land," may easily be mistaken as an almost trite way of saying that it's good to obey God. However, if the Book of Mormon is read with an understanding of ancient covenants, the meaning of the phrase takes on new light. Understanding that ancient context means not just recognizing the pervasive use of covenants and their monumental importance in the ancient Near East but also appreciating the formulas and conventions that were used to express and make covenants. The theme of prospering in the (promised) land first occurs in 1 Nephi 2:20, where the Lord speaks to Nephi: "And inasmuch as ye shall keep my commandments, ye shall prosper, and shall be led to a land of promise; yea, even a land

which I have prepared for you; yea, a land which is choice above all other lands." Nephi recalls those words in 1 Nephi 4:14, observing that the Lord had told him, "Inasmuch as thy seed shall keep my commandments, they shall prosper in the land of promise." The form that may be most familiar to Book of Mormon students is first given in Lehi's farewell speech to his family in 2 Nephi 1:20, quoting what the Lord has said: "Inasmuch as ye shall keep my commandments ye shall prosper in the land; but inasmuch as ye will not keep my commandments ye shall be cut off from my presence."

The simple core concept in all of this is the promise "If ye will keep my commandments ye shall prosper in the land," the wording of Alma 37:13. But why is this concept repeated over 20 times in almost every book of the Book of Mormon, with many other related exhortations? What was the purpose of this phrase or formula? I propose that this phrase is a powerful summary statement of a covenant relationship between the people and the Lord, directly related to what is now (thanks to scholarship that began long after Joseph Smith's day) the familiar concept of the suzerain-vassal treaty,[1] whose conceptual worldview and theology seem to undergird significant portions of the Book of Mormon.[2]

A suzerain-vassal treaty is a conditional covenant type found in the ancient Near East, the Bible, and other scripture. The purpose of this covenant is for God (or a king) to secure the fidelity of his people with a promise for protection and prosperity in their lands. This covenant typically follows a six-part format:

1. *Introduction*: The great king or God identifies Himself (see Exodus 20:2)
2. *Historical review*: The great king or God reviews past relationship with the vassal (subjects), while emphasizing His blessings to evoke loyalty and allegiance (see Exodus 20:2)
3. *Stipulations*: The great king or God promises security in a promised land insofar as the vassal demonstrates total fidelity and loyalty by keeping the covenant stipulations (see Exodus 20:3-17)
4. *Recording and depositing the text*: The covenant is recorded and deposited in a secure or lasting location, such as at a temple (see Exodus 25:21)
5. *List of witnesses*: God and angels serve as witnesses, though people could as well (see Exodus 24:3)
6. *Curses and blessings*: Consequences are stipulated for obeying or violating the terms of the covenant (see Deuteronomy 27-28)

Book of Mormon writers, conscious of space limitations on the plates and not wanting to write out a lengthy yet significant covenant over and over again, may have resorted to using the shorthand phrase "If ye keep my commandments ye shall prosper in the land." As we see in 1 Nephi 2:20 and 4:14, "prosper in the land" is obviously linked to the promised land, or rather the covenant land. In light of the covenant message of the Book of Mormon, we can naturally understand that the Lord's purposes in His covenants do not focus simply on material prosperity, though that can clearly be one of the blessings a people at peace and living God's laws may experience. *Prospering* may also contemplate individual and family happiness, social harmony, honesty and kindness in relationships and transactions, personal purity, and fulfilling one's purpose in life. The intent of the Book of Mormon as a text for our day should lead us to contemplate the blessings that await all of us individually and especially as a people if we can make and keep covenants with the Lord in our various lands of promise. But for the Nephites and the authors of the Book of Mormon writing with the strong influence of major cultural and religious themes from the ancient Near East, today we can see that this simple phrase recalls, renews, and reinvigorates the entire complex of meaning associated with suzerain-vassal treaties and the theological implications connected to such covenants.

Significantly, we may consider the Book of Mormon as the new covenant (see D&C 84:57), the new witness or symbol of the suzerain-vassal treaty — that if we demonstrate our unswerving loyalty to God, we will have prosperity in the land.

With this phrase in mind, we begin to see this covenant terminology of suzerain-vassal treaties throughout the Book of Mormon. Here are a few examples, though this is definitely not an exhaustive list:

In Alma 45, Alma interviews his son Helaman one last time before giving Helaman charge of the Nephite religious records. As part of that interview Alma asks, "Will ye keep my commandments?" "Yea, I will keep thy commandments with all my heart," Helaman responds. Alma then pronounces the reward: "Blessed art thou; and the Lord shall prosper thee in this land" (Alma 45:6–8).

The core purpose of the suzerain-vassal covenant was to secure prosperity in the land if one was faithful to the commands of God or the king. We see that Alma promises that prosperity to Helaman because Helaman has vowed to be faithful to the commandments (that is, the stipulations of covenantal loyalty).

A counterexample is found in Mosiah 12:15. The people of Noah, who had thoroughly disregarded the stipulations of covenant fidelity (primarily summarized in the Ten Commandments), needed Abinadi to remind them that they had forgotten the Mosaic Law. Believing in the promises of prosperity in the land but forgetting that covenantal loyalty bought such prosperity, the morally failing people of Noah boasted to their king: "And behold, we are strong, we shall not come into bondage, or be taken captive by our enemies; yea, and thou hast prospered in the land, and thou shalt also prosper." Sadly, they totally misunderstood the covenant. Their lack of faithfulness brought the curses identified for failing to observe the covenant: war, slavery, loss of land, and destruction.

Not many chapters later, Alma the Elder heeded the message of Abinadi and taught his new covenant community all the words of Abinadi. Because they demonstrated covenantal fidelity they received the promises of prosperity: "And it came to pass that they began to prosper exceedingly in the land" (Mosiah 23:19).

What do we see in the books of Alma, Helaman, 3 Nephi, and 4 Nephi? Multiple instances in which the promise of "prospering in the land" is put in peril or is secured depending on the people's faithfulness to God as demonstrated by "keeping his commandments." Alma preached repentance to the people of Ammonihah with this call to remembrance: "Behold, do ye not remember the words which he spake unto Lehi, saying that: Inasmuch as ye shall keep my commandments, ye shall prosper in the land? And again it is said that: Inasmuch as ye will not keep my commandments ye shall be cut off from the presence of the Lord" (Alma 9:13). The people of Ammonihah fully rejected the word of God and were literally cut off from the face of the land and from the presence of God; "And thus ended the eleventh year of the judges, the Lamanites having been driven out of the land, and the people of Ammonihah were destroyed; yea, every living soul of the Ammonihahites was destroyed, and also their great city, which they said God could not destroy, because of its greatness" (Alma 16:9).

Alma taught this covenantal principle repeatedly to his sons (see Alma 36:1, 30; 37:13; 38:1), ensuring that generations of Nephites and Book of Mormon readers would be thoroughly exposed to God's covenant. In fact, the theological covenantal logic of the suzerain-vassal treaty serves as the frame for the beautiful chiasmus of Alma 36:1–30.

The editorial comments of Mormon, or his use of earlier commentary in Nephite records, point to additional aspects of the basic theme of this phrase. In chapters dealing with war and conflict, we see that simply retaining one's

land in a time of danger is a grand blessing. By the same token, we read that the loss of such blessings and the calamities of war without the Lord's assistance may follow from the sins and crimes of a people who fail to keep the commandments (see, for example Alma 50:19–22).

After years of civil war and of external conflict with the Lamanites, brought on by failing to be faithful to God, the Nephites finally humbled themselves sufficiently so that God allowed them to recover their lost lands. Mormon editorializes on the consequences of covenantal faithfulness in Alma 62, concluding with this thought: "And they did pray unto the Lord their God continually, insomuch that the Lord did bless them, according to his word, so that they did wax strong and prosper in the land" (v. 51).

Unfortunately, the covenantal gains experienced at the end of the Book of Alma did not endure. We find Helaman (Helaman 3) laboring to encourage the people to keep the commandments so that they might prosper. Interestingly, we hear that Helaman himself prospered in the land, even though Mormon makes no comment about the people prospering in the land, because they could not claim the blessings of prosperity when they were not keeping the commandments; "Nevertheless Helaman did fill the judgment-seat with justice and equity; yea, he did observe to keep the statutes, and the judgments, and the commandments of God; and he did do that which was right in the sight of God continually; and he did walk after the ways of his father, insomuch that he did prosper in the land" (Helaman 3:20).

In 4 Nephi, after Jesus had established a society of covenant-keeping saints, Mormon explains the covenantal outcomes of loyalty and fidelity to God: "And the Lord did prosper them exceedingly in the land; yea, insomuch that they did build cities again where there had been cities burned. … And how blessed were they! For the Lord did bless them in all their doings; yea, even they were blessed and prospered until an hundred and ten years had passed away; and the first generation from Christ had passed away, and there was no contention in all the land. … And now I, Mormon, would that ye should know that the people had multiplied, insomuch that they were spread upon all the face of the land, and that they had become exceedingly rich, because of their prosperity in Christ" (4 Nephi 1: 7, 18, 23).

Unfortunately, the Nephites eventually persisted in breaking the commandments, demonstrating ongoing covenantal disloyalty to God. Their final end was utter ruin; they lost *all* peace and prosperity in the land, as Mormon so potently laments: "O ye fair ones, how could ye have departed from the ways of the Lord! O ye fair ones, how could ye have rejected that Jesus, who stood with open arms to receive you! ... O that

ye had repented before this great destruction had come upon you. But behold, ye are gone, and the Father, yea, the Eternal Father of heaven, knoweth your state; and he doeth with you according to his justice and mercy." (Mormon 6:17, 22).

We are told in the Title Page of the Book of Mormon that the Book of Mormon was revealed in our day "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." Hence, the covenantal context, structure, and logic of the Book of Mormon demand further consideration, exploration, and elucidation. A prosperous starting point is the phrase "If ye keep my commandments ye shall prosper in the land." This covenantal phrase is used throughout the Book of Mormon as a summary of the theological logic of the suzerain-vassal treaty covenant type in which God sought to secure the fidelity of his people, who would receive in exchange continued prosperity in His appointed promised lands.

Taylor Halverson *is an aspiring master learner who has discovered his life purpose is to help people find and act on the best ideas and tools in order to experience enduring joy. He currently is an Entrepreneurship Professor in the BYU Marriott School of Business. As an executive coach and entrepreneur, he builds leaders and businesses while creating transformative professional and personal development experiences. Taylor leads acclaimed travel tours to incredible locations throughout the world (Israel, China, India, Europe, Central America, and America's national parks). Tour members have loved his irresistible enthusiasm, encyclopedic knowledge, spirit of adventure, and sense of fun. Taylor is a prolific author and editor of 20 books and more than 300 articles and a developer of breakthrough scripture study resources with Book of Mormon Central (ScripturePlus app) and BYU's Virtual Scripture Group (3D Ancient Jerusalem project). Taylor loves to spend time with his wife Lisa and kids David and Rachel on all sorts of adventures including exploring the nooks and crannies of the American West and Southwest, participating with geology and archaeology teams on location, creating and mixing electronic music, watching and discussing edifying shows, reading good books, playing*

games, learning, and laughing. Taylor's academic training includes: BA, Ancient Near Eastern Studies, Brigham Young University; MA, Biblical Studies, Yale University; MS, Instructional Systems Technology, Indiana University; PhD, Instructional Systems Technology, Indiana University; PhD, Judaism & Christianity in Antiquity, Indiana University.

Endnotes

1. Morton Cogan, *Imperialism and Religion: Assyria, Judah, and Israel in the Eight and Seventh Centuries B.C.E.* (Missoula, MT: Scholars Press, 1974); Rintje Frankena, "The Vassal-Treaties of Esarhaddon and the Dating of Deuteronomy," *Oudtestamentische Studien* 14 (1965): 122–54; A. Kirk Grayson, "Akkadian Treaties of the Seventh Century B.C.," *Journal of Cuneiform Studies* 39 (1987): 127–60; Jon D. Levenson, *Sinai and Zion: An Entry into the Jewish Bible* (New York: Harper Collins Publishers, 1985); George E. Mendenhall, "Covenant Forms in Israelite Tradition," *The Biblical Archaeologist* 17, no. 3 (1954): 50–76; Dennis J. McCarthy, "Covenant in the Old Testament: The Present State of Inquiry," *Catholic Biblical Quarterly* 27, no. 3 (1965): 217–40; Dennis J. McCarthy, *Treaty and Covenant: A Study in Form in the Ancient Oriental Documents and in the Old Testament* (Rome: Biblical Institute Press, 1978); Gene M. Tucker, "Covenant Forms and Contract Forms," *Vetus Testamentum* 15 (1965): 487–503; Moshe Weinfeld, "The Covenant of Grant in the Old Testament and in the Ancient Near East," *Journal of the American Oriental Society* 90, no. 2 (1970): 184–203; Moshe Weinfeld, *Deuteronomy and the Deuteronomic School* (Oxford, UK: Oxford University Press, 1972): 116–29; Moshe Weinfeld, "Covenant Terminology in the Ancient Near East and Its Influence on the West," *Journal of the American Oriental Society* 93, no. 2 (1973); Moshe Weinfeld, "The Loyalty Oath in the Ancient Near East," *Ugarit-Forschungen* 8 (1976): 379–414, https://www.academia.edu/44235674/Moshe_Weinfeld_The_Loyalty_Oath_in_the_Ancient_Near_East_Ugarit_Forschungen_vol_8_1976_379_414. For an example of an ancient Near Eastern suzerain-vassal treaty see "The Treaty between Mursilis and Duppi-Tessub of Amurru," in *Ancient Near Eastern Texts Relating to the Old Testament*, ed. James B. Pritchard (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1969): 203–205, also available at http://jewishchristianlit.com/Topics/Contracts/treat01.html.

2. This covenantal style has also been found in the Book of Mormon: Stephen D. Ricks, "Kingship, Coronation, and Covenant in Mosiah 1–6" in *King Benjamin's Speech: "That Ye May Learn Wisdom,"* eds. John W. Welch and Stephen D. Ricks, (Provo, UT: Foundation for Ancient Research and Mormon Studies, 1998): 233–75, https://archive.bookofmormoncentral.org/content/kingship-coronation-and-covenant-mosiah-1%E2%80%936-0; RoseAnn Benson and Stephen D. Ricks, "Treaties and Covenants: Ancient Near Eastern Legal Terminology in the Book of Mormon," *Journal of Book of Mormon Studies* 14, no. 1 (2005): 48–61, https://scholarsarchive.byu.edu/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=1389&context=jbms; it is also found in lament psalms of the Old Testament, Daniel Belnap, "A Comparison of the Communal Lament Psalms and the Treaty-Covenant Formula," *Studies in the Bible and Antiquity* 1 (2009): 1–34. Some suggest that the Restoration follows this covenant formulary pattern. See David R. Seely, "The Restoration as Covenant Renewal" in *Sperry Symposium Classics: The Old Testament*, ed. Paul Y. Hoskisson (Provo and Salt Lake City, UT: Religious Studies Center, Brigham Young University, and Deseret Book, 2005): 311–36. This suzerain-vassal treaty covenant type may even underlie D&C 58–59. This would be significant since these were some of the first revelations received when the early saints first arrived to Missouri, the *land* of Zion which God had promised to his people if they would remain faithful.

The Practice and Meaning of Declaring Lineage in Patriarchal Blessings

M. Steven Andersen

Abstract: *In this paper, I show that declarations of lineage in patriarchal blessings have, since the earliest days of the Restoration, evolved in terms of frequency of inclusion, which tribal lineages predominate, and understanding of the meaning of the declaration. I argue for a non-literal understanding consistent with scripture and science, but posit that these declarations have deep and important significance in connection with the gathering of Israel.*

Two and a half years into my service as a Church[1] patriarch, I found myself puzzled by the subject of the declaration of lineage. I embarked on a study of the matter, which in turn led to this paper. I concluded and will show that the practice of declaring lineage evolved over time. I will discuss the extent to which these declarations have contemplated a literal Abrahamic bloodline. I argue that there is a way to give respect to the concepts of literal bloodlines without connecting them to patriarchal declarations of lineage. Finally, I propose that there can be a literal gathering of Israel without concern for bloodlines.

When Did the Church Start Declaring Lineage as Part of Patriarchal Blessings, and When Did It Evolve from Common Practice to Required Element?

The practice of including a declaration of lineage in a person's patriarchal blessing was not routine in the beginning of the Restoration. Michael H. Marquardt has collected as many as he could find of the

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1. All references to "the Church" indicate The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints.

blessings given between December 1833 and September of 1845.[2] The charts shown in figures 1 and 2 reveal the trend.[3]
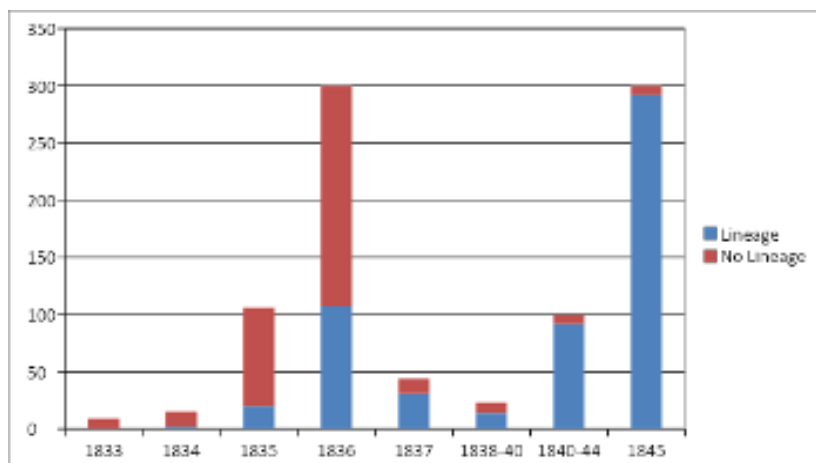

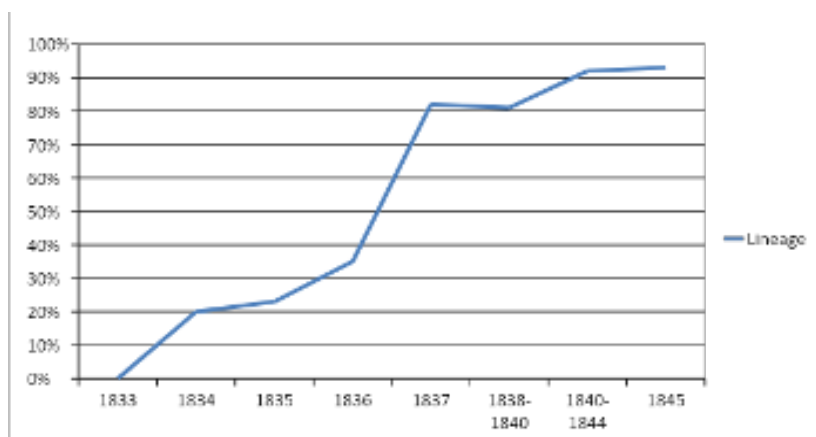Figure 1. Blessings with and without a declaration of lineage in Marquardt's sample, 1833 to 1845.

Figure 2. Percentage of blessings with a declaration of lineage in Marquardt's sample, 1833 to 1845.

2. H. Michael Marquardt, *Early Patriarchal Blessings of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints* (Salt Lake City: Signature Books, 2007). Marquardt's second compilation, *Later Patriarchal Blessings of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints* (Salt Lake City: Signature Books, 2012), contains some additional early blessings, but mostly later blessings.

3. I make no pretense that the information I have mined from Marquardt, *Early Blessings,* and Marquardt, *Later Blessings,* has been vetted for suitability for deriving statistically meaningful data. I present it here only for what it may be worth.

For each year from 1835 through 1846, and for 11 of the 17 years from 1847 through 1862, Marquardt's book *Later Patriarchal Blessings of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints* contains some blessings for which no lineage was declared. But from 1863 through 1995, only 23 of the 471 blessings in the book fail to declare lineage.

When did a declaration of lineage become a more or less required element of a patriarchal blessing? Lacking access to the various editions of the Church's manuals for and written instructions issued to patriarchs over the years, I have not been able to determine when (or whether) the patriarchs of this dispensation were first instructed to declare lineage, how those instructions may have changed over time, and whether they were accompanied by suggestions on how to go about it. The sixth Church Patriarch, Hyrum G. Smith, who served from 1912 to 1932, issued instructions from time to time to all stake patriarchs. In one (undated) document, he included the following as one of the duties of the patriarch: "According to the promptings of the Holy Spirit, declare the lineage of those you bless."[4] The document gives the impression this was more a reminder than a new directive.

At a 2005 training meeting for stake patriarchs and stake presidents, then Elder Dallin H. Oaks declared that "an essential part of every patriarchal blessing is the declaration of lineage."[5] At the same meetings, President Gordon B. Hinckley taught that "a patriarchal blessings is still a patriarchal blessing without the naming of lineage, but the recipient is entitled to a declaration of his or her lineal birthright."[6] I expect that no blessing given these days omits a declaration of lineage.

Do These Declarations Involve a Literal Abrahamic Pedigree?

A variety of positions has been taken on the extent to which patriarchal declarations of lineage contemplate a literal Abrahamic lineage. Logically flowing out of the literal position are concepts of blood purging, adoption, assignment, and so forth, as discussed in the following sections.

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4. Irene M. Bates and E. Gary Smith, *Lost Legacy: The Mormon Office of Presiding Patriarch* (University of Illinois Press, 2003), 162.

5. Dallin H. Oaks, "Patriarchal Blessings," in *Transcript of Worldwide Leadership Training Meeting on The Patriarch* (Salt Lake City: The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, January 2005), 7.

6. Gordon B. Hinckley, "Message to Patriarchs," in *Transcript of Worldwide Leadership Training Meeting on The Patriarch* (Salt Lake City: The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, January 2005), 13.

Literalist Thinking about Lineage in the Church

The biblical scriptures in which the early Church was steeped are saturated with the language and vocabulary of an important and chosen literal bloodline. Given that the Lord speaks to men and women in their language according to their understanding (2 Nephi 31:3), it is to be expected that the early Church would hear and understand the latter-day revelations in these same terms.

As one scholarly article has noted,

> Quite literally, in fact, early Mormons believed they were descended from the fabled "Ten Lost Tribes" of Israel, whose members were presumed to have been dispersed throughout the world … (hence the designation of lineage given in patriarchal blessings to recipients).[7]

Being of Abraham's literal bloodline was thought to bring with it certain rights. One revelation given to the Lord's servants proclaimed, "Thus saith the Lord unto you, with whom the priesthood hath continued through the lineage of your fathers — for ye are lawful heirs, according to the flesh … . Your life and priesthood have remained, and must needs remain through you and your lineage" (Doctrine and Covenants 86:8 10). Patriarchs are instructed that, subject to worthiness, "lineage may give a person the right to receive blessings in Israel."[8]

The idea seems to be that those in the world who are literal, pedigree descendants of Abraham have "believing blood."[9] But not others. Missionaries were to be sent out to find and gather in the literal descendants: "Will we go to the Gentile nations to preach the Gospel? Yes, and gather out the Israelites, wherever they are mixed among the nations of the earth. … When we send to the nations we do not seek for the Gentiles, because they are disobedient and rebellious. We want the blood of Jacob, and that of his fathers Isaac and Abraham, which runs in

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7. Gordon Shepherd and Gary Shepherd, *Binding Earth and Heaven: Patriarchal Blessings in the Prophetic Development of Early Mormonism* (University Park, PA: Penn State University Press, 2012), 62.

8. Oaks, "Patriarchal Blessings," 8.

9. "What then is believing blood? It is the blood that flows in the veins of those who are the literal seed of Abraham — not that the blood itself believes, but that those born in that lineage have both the right and a special spiritual capacity to recognize, receive, and believe the truth. … It identifies those who developed in pre-existence the talent to recognize the truth and to desire righteousness." Bruce R. McConkie, *A New Witness for the Articles of Faith* (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 1985) 38–39.

the veins of the people. There is a particle of it here, and another there."[10] Those not literal descendants could still be baptized, but they enjoyed a different, lesser status.

Many of the early blessings that mentioned lineage could be quite specific on the matter of blood lineage, but not so others, as in these examples in blessings given by William Smith:

- "thou are designated as one of the house of Israel and appointed out as the seed of Joseph"[11]
- "for among the remnants of Israel thou shalt receive thy inheritance"[12]
- "in Jacob's inheritance thou shalt be crowned"[13]
- "the blessings of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob are upon thee … for in [Jacob's] heritage shall thine inheritance be called and of his promised inheritance that thou be an inheritor"[14]
- "thou art of the Royal stock a descendant of Joseph, for altho [sic] in this blessing thy lineage is revealed, yet in that day thou shall be numbered with Joseph['] s children, and with his posterity"[15]
- "the Spirit saith concerning thee that thou art a sharer of the blessings of Abraham, and one of his daughters by faith"[16]

In 1943, Apostle John A. Widtsoe wrote, "In the great majority of cases, Latter-day Saints are of the tribe of Ephraim, the tribe to which has been committed the leadership of Latter-day work. Whether this lineage is of blood or adoption does not matter."[17] The idea of adoption may sound quite reassuring, but there remains the question "adopted into what, exactly?" The notion that non-lineals are being adopted into a favored bloodline still inhabits this thinking.

Our concern with literal bloodlines and that — Elder Widtsoe notwithstanding — bloodlines *do* matter, has persisted for many

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10. Brigham Young, "Preaching and Testimony — Gathering of Israel — The Blood of Israel and the Gentiles — the Science of Life," *Journal of Discourses* 2 (April 1855): 268. https://jod.mrm.org/2/266.

11. Marquardt, *Early Blessings*, 374.

12. Ibid., 377.

13. Ibid., 388.

14. Ibid., 395.

15. Ibid., 402.

16. Ibid., 408.

17. John A. Widtsoe, *Evidences and Reconciliations* (Salt Lake City: Bookcraft, 1943), 72–77.

generations in the Church. In the April 1952 General Conference, the final Patriarch to the Church, Eldred G. Smith, taught, "Joseph [of Egypt] received a special blessing which we are most interested in because we are his descendants, the most part of us, and the blessings of the gospel have come through this line, for Joseph Smith, Senior, was a true descendant, through Ephraim, the younger son of Joseph."[18]

A fully literal point of view was still on display a quarter century later. Daniel Ludlow extensively discussed and embraced a literalist point of view in a 1991 *Ensign* article:

> The question is raised hundreds of times each year throughout the Church: **Are Church members literal descendants of Israel, as most patriarchal blessings state? Or are we Gentiles and belong to the house of Israel only by adoption? The answer is important**, for the literal seed of Abraham are the natural heirs to the remarkable promises given anciently to Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. … The basic meaning of *lineage* is "descent in a line from a common progenitor." Thus, in a patriarchal blessing, lineage is being declared (from Abraham, or Israel, or Ephraim, etc.) when terms indicating direct descent are used, such as "son of," "daughter of," "seed of," "blood of," "descendant of," or "from the loins of." … In view of the foregoing statements, we can see that the lineages declared in patriarchal blessings are almost always statements of actual blood lines; they are not simply tribal identifications by assignment. … President Joseph Fielding Smith emphatically stated: "The great majority of those who become members of the Church are literal descendants of Abraham through Ephraim, son of Joseph." … [Brigham Young said] "The Book of Mormon came to Ephraim, for Joseph Smith was a pure Ephraimite, and the Book of Mormon was revealed to him." … The clear teaching of the prophets is that few persons *not* of the blood of Abraham have become members of the Church in this dispensation; the terms "adopted into the house of Israel" or "assigned to a tribe of Israel" pertain *only* to those relatively few members. … From what the prophets have said, then, most members

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18. Eldred G. Smith, "Patriarchal Order of the Priesthood," *One Hundred Twenty-second Annual Conference of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints* (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book Company, 1952), 38–41, https://archive.org/details/conferencereport1952a/page/n41/mode/2up.

of the Church come from Gentile nations, but they have some Israelite ancestors in their lineage. Therefore, they are not "assigned to" or "adopted into" the house of Israel. They are legal heirs of the covenant, and the lineage proclaimed in their patriarchal blessings identifies the bloodline that ties them back to Abraham.[19]

The 2001 edition of the Church's Old Testament Gospel Doctrine teacher's manual (the most recent one I can find, currently available on the Church's website) suggested the following question and answer as part of the introduction to lesson 7 on the Abrahamic covenant: "What does it mean to have the patriarch declare our lineage in a blessing? (When a patriarch declares our lineage, he reveals to us that we are descendants of the prophet Abraham through Ephraim, Manasseh, or another of Abraham's descendants.)"[20]

Likewise, the 2011 Gospel Principles manual stated that "The Lord promised Abraham that he would have numberless descendants. He promised that all of them would be entitled to receive the gospel, the blessings of the priesthood, and all of the ordinances of exaltation. … [But, t]he blood descendants of Abraham are not the only people whom God calls His covenant people. … [T]wo groups of people are included in the covenant made with Abraham: (1) Abraham's righteous blood descendants and (2) those adopted into his lineage by accepting and living the gospel of Jesus Christ."[21]

The current Gospel Topics essay on patriarchal blessings on the Church's website, while embracing Elder Widtsoe's teaching that the distinction between lineal and non-lineal is unimportant, still speaks in terms of different bloodlines:

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19. Daniel Ludlow, "Of the House of Israel," *Ensign* 21, no. 1 (January 1991) (italics in original; bold emphasis added). tps://www.churchofjesuschrist.org/study/ensign/1991/01/of-the-house-of-israel.

20. "Lesson 7: The Abrahamic Covenant," *Old Testament: Gospel Doctrine Teacher's Manual* (Salt Lake City: Intellectual Reserve, Inc., 2001), https://www.churchofjesuschrist.org/study/manual/old-testament-gospel-doctrine-teachers-manual/lesson-7.

21. "Chapter 15: The Lord's Covenant People," *Gospel Principles* (Salt Lake City: Intellectual Reserve, Inc., 2011), https://www.churchofjesuschrist.org/study/manual/gospel-principles/chapter-15-the-lords-covenant-people. See also "Every member of the Church belongs to one of the twelve tribes of Israel. Those who aren't literal descendants are "adopted" into the house of Israel through baptism." "About Patriarchal Blessings," *New Era* 34, no. 3 (March 2004), https://www.churchofjesuschrist.org/study/new-era/2004/03/about-patriarchal-blessings.html?lang=eng#title1.

A patriarchal blessing includes a declaration of lineage, stating that the person is of the house of Israel — a descendant of Abraham, belonging to a specific tribe of Jacob. Many Latter-day Saints are of the tribe of Ephraim, the tribe given the primary responsibility to lead the latter-day work of the Lord.

Because each of us has many bloodlines running in us, two members of the same family may be declared as being of different tribes in Israel.

It does not matter if a person's lineage in the house of Israel is through bloodlines or by adoption. Church members are counted as a descendant of Abraham and an heir to all the promises and blessings contained in the Abrahamic covenant (see Abrahamic Covenant).[22]

Clearly, then, literal bloodline concepts still manifest themselves in our current literature, thinking, and teaching, and result in a "two group" (lineal and non-lineal) paradigm.

How to Think About "Non-Lineals" in the Church

As stated in 1952 by Church-wide patriarch Eldred G. Smith, "Now we know that some of the inhabitants of the earth are not descendants of Israel. … We know that some of the inhabitants of the earth who join the Church are not direct descendants of Israel."[23] This was still the view in 1995, when President Faust said, "There may be some come into the church in our day who are not of Jacob's blood lineage."[24] The aforementioned 2001 Gospel Doctrine Old Testament manual instructs that "all Church members are the 'seed of Abraham,' which means we are his descendants. [But t]hose who are not literal descendants of Abraham and Israel must become such," which, the manual goes on, happens by accepting the gospel and being grafted in. So unavoidably connected with literalist thinking is the problem of how to understand those who embrace the gospel but are not (supposedly) of literal Israel. I will endeavor to show that the vocabulary used to refer to such non-lineal members and our

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22. "Patriarchal Blessings," Gospel Topics, the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, accessed May 19, 2021, https://www.churchofjesuschrist.org/study/manual/gospel-topics/patriarchal-blessings.

23. Smith, "Patriarchal Order," emphasis added.

24. James E. Faust, "Priesthood Blessings," *Ensign* 25, no. 11 (November 1995), https://www.churchofjesuschrist.org/study/ensign/1995/11/priesthood-blessings.

understanding of how they fit in has evolved in a direction that places ever less importance on literal bloodlines.

Literal Blood Purging

Quite consistent with the idea of literal, pedigree lineage is the concept of blood purging upon conversion. Joseph Smith is said to have taught that when

> the Holy Ghost falls upon one of the literal seed of Abraham, it is calm and serene; … while the effect of the Holy Ghost upon a Gentile, is to purge out the old blood, and make him actually of the seed of Abraham. That man that has none of the blood of Abraham (naturally) must have a new creation by the Holy Ghost.[25]

Brigham Young relied on this teaching in stating

> If a pure Gentile firmly believes the Gospel of Jesus Christ, and yields obedience to it, in such a case I will give you the words of the Prophet Joseph — "When the Lord pours out the Holy Ghost upon that individual he will have spasms, and you would think that he was going into fits." Joseph said that the Gentile blood was actually cleansed out of their veins, and the blood of Jacob made to circulate in them; and the revolution and change in the system were so great that it caused the beholder to think they were going into fits.[26]

Joseph's teaching was quoted with approval by Elder Joseph Fielding Smith in 1972.[27] Elder Faust quoted it in a speech at BYU in 1980.[28] Though they may exist, I have not found any more recent iterations of this unusual concept.

Adoption

A step away from blood purging is the construct of adoption. Most members are probably acquainted with the teaching that those not born in Abraham's bloodline can be adopted into his literal lineage. Paul often used the word adoption to describe how converts may

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25. *Scriptural Teachings of the Prophet Joseph Smith*, ed. Joseph Fielding Smith (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 1972), 149–50, https://scriptures.byu.edu/tpjs/STPJS.pdf.

26. Young, "Gathering Israel," 269.

27. *Scriptural Teachings.*

28. James E. Faust, "Patriarchal Blessings," Speeches, Brigham Young University, March 30, 1980, https://speeches.byu.edu/talks/james-e-faust/patriarchal-blessings/.

become the children of Abraham (Romans 8; 9 King James Version[29]; 2 Corinthians 6:17–18). The vocabulary of "adoption" is seen as early as 1834 in a patriarchal blessing given by Father Smith.[30]

We seem to be somewhat inconsistent on whether there is any difference between the birthright literals and the adoptees. In his 1991 *Ensign* article, quoted above, Ludlow explored whether members of the Church are "literal descendants of Israel," or are "Gentiles and belong to the house of Israel only by adoption," noting that "[t]he answer is important … " The phrase "*only by adoption*" stands out. It is interesting that he would still perceive an important distinction in the wake of Elder Widstoe's teaching that literal vs. adopted has no importance at all.

Assignment

Even in the earliest years, patriarchs were (as noted above) giving some blessings that used language stopping short of a declaration of literal blood lineage, as William Smith began using such terms as "numbered with," "counted with," "as one of the house of," "of his blood and lineage thou shalt be called," "I shall number thee in this blessing as one of the children of," and "thine inheritance shall be appointed unto thee by lot." "Assignment" may be a useful term to describe these expressions. Whether there is a meaningful difference between "adoption" and "assignment" is less than clear to me — maybe the terms are interchangeable.

In 1952, Eldred G. Smith said in a General Conference talk, "A patriarchal blessing today, given by an ordained patriarch, should contain a declaration of lineage, that is, the tribe of Israel through which the promises of inheritance shall come, *even as assignments of inheritances [that is, lands] were given in ancient Israel*. … [A]s these patriarchal blessings are given, there is given a declaration of lineage, *or an assignment*. We have people on the earth we know are not descendants of Israel, yet in the acceptance of the gospel of Jesus Christ they are entitled to the blessings of Israel, *and through the power of inspiration the patriarch will assign them to Israel*."[31] Thus, Brother Smith discussed both literal lineage and *assignment* (with *assignment* possibly — though not clearly — being reserved for those not literal descendants).

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29. All biblical references are to the King James Version unless otherwise stated.
30. Marquardt, *Early Blessings*, 71.
31. See Smith, "Patriarchal Order," emphasis added.

Nothing in the current literature made available to Church patriarchs encourages or endorses the use of the term "assignment," and it is sometimes taught that patriarchs do *not* assign lineage.[32]

"The tribe through which …"

As Church leaders have worked through these issues, a different solution (that is, different from blood purging, adoption, and assignment) for the declaration of lineage to non-lineals has surfaced. It is that the declaration of lineage simply indicates "the tribe through which" the blessings of Abraham will be received by the member. As noted, Eldred G. Smith employed this language in his 1952 conference talk (along with the language of *assignment* as discussed above). It has now found its way into official teachings: "In declaring lineage, the patriarch identifies the tribe of Israel through which the person will receive his or her blessings."[33]

This phrasing seems quite careful. The idea may be that you will receive your blessings *through* this tribe, not that you are, ancestrally or genetically, *of* this tribe. What this means, exactly, is not spelled out. In fact, it seems to be helpfully vague, and can perhaps accommodate everything from literal blood lineage, to purging, to adoption, to assignment.

Identification of Responsibilities

In another segue away from literal bloodline ideology, the idea developed that being of the house of Israel is about responsibilities. The Church's website declares,

> In the last days [Ephraim's] privilege and responsibility is to bear the priesthood, take the message of the restored gospel to the world, and raise an ensign to gather scattered Israel. … The children of Ephraim will crown with glory those from the north countries who return in the last days.[34]

The *Encyclopedia of Mormonism* maintains that "many of Ephraim's descendants are being gathered first, for they have the responsibility of preparing the way for the gathering of the other tribes."[35] Perhaps

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32. Oaks, "Patriarchal Blessings," 7.

33. Ibid.

34. "Ephraim," Guide to the Scriptures, the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, accessed May 19, 2021, https://www.churchofjesuschrist.org/study/scriptures/gs/ephraim.

35. Brian L. Smith, *Encyclopedia of Mormonism*, s.v. "Ephraim," accessed July 11, 2021, https://eom.byu.edu/index.php/Ephraim.

"lineage" could be regarded as shorthand for the declaration of a set of responsibilities and should be understood that way rather than as a matter of lineal descent. That said, while we have some scriptural information on what might be the responsibilities of Ephraim and Manasseh, it is harder to find much on the responsibilities of the other tribes (though some writers have treated the subject[36]). And the patriarchs were taught in 2005 that "a patriarch would want to be very sure of his inspiration if he declared lineage from a tribe other than [Ephraim, Manasseh or Judah]."[37]

A Softening of Strictly Literal Concepts

Notwithstanding decades of literalist statements, summarized in the 1991 Ludlow piece quoted above and persisting thereafter, and consistent with softening in the ways of talking about the distinction between lineals and non-lineals, the strictly literalist paradigm is no longer the only view. Among patriarchs, it appears, there has been a lack of uniformity in understanding. In 1999, Armand Mauss reported on having interviewed some two dozen stake patriarchs on the subject and noted that their

> responses range along a continuum: At one end is the traditional explanation that by inspiration the patriarch identifies a person's literal descent. At the other end are some who routinely assign a person to the tribe of Ephraim, simply because that is the lineage given responsibility for the Lord's kingdom in this dispensation. Between these two positions are some patriarchs who occasionally feel inspired to specify an unusual lineage (perhaps for manifest racial reasons) but who routinely name Ephraim. Still others explain that lineage is indeed assigned by inspiration but does not necessarily have anything to do with actual ancestry.[38]

Six years ago, in a July 2015 *By Common Consent* blog post, Kevin Barney wrote,

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36. Brad Wilcox, *Born to Change the World: Your Part in Gathering Israel* (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 2019), 39–49; Alonzo L. Gaskill, *65 Questions and Answers about Patriarchal Blessings* (Springville, UT: Cedar Fort, 2018).

37. Oaks, "Patriarchal Blessings," 8.

38. Armand L. Mauss, "In Search of Ephraim: Traditional Mormon Conceptions of Lineage and Race," *Journal of Mormon History* 25, no. 1 (Spring 1999): 168, https://digitalcommons.usu.edu/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=1032&context=mormonhistory.

What does the lineage assignment mean? Opinions on this subject differ widely. To some it is referring to literal genealogical ancestry; to others, adoptive ancestry; to others, it is a metaphor or symbol of inclusion within the House of Israel, while still others see the different tribes as representing different responsibilities in building the Kingdom of God in the last days.[39]

My own informal survey of patriarchs reveals no consistency in understanding,[40] and the comments in the Latter-day Saint blogosphere are likewise diverse.[41] Today, it seems, there is no single point of view as to the meaning of a patriarchal declaration of lineage.

As stated by former BYU professor Wilfreid Decoo,

"Lineage" can continue to have special significance in the patriarchal blessing which, since the dawn of Mormonism, has become a treasured once-in-a-lifetime experience for Latter-day Saints. In earlier times, when nearly all members were of North European descent (including the American-born white converts), it seemed uncomplicated to assume literal tribal descendency from Ephraim, in line with the beliefs of scattering of the lost tribes. For American Indians, as supposed descendants of Lamanites, the physical lineage was evidently traced to Manasseh. But in view of expanding the church to all countries and races, as well as of advancing insights in demography, adjustments in rationale and formulation help smooth the attribution to a certain tribe. … Whether literal or spiritual, the determination of tribal descent is meant as an emotional confirmation of *belonging* to the House of Israel.[42]

39. Kevin Barney, "Patriarchal Blessing Lineages," *By Common Consent* (blog), July 29, 2015, https://bycommonconsent.com/2015/07/29/patriarchal-blessing-lineages/.

40. One said lineage "makes no difference in this life." BYU History Professor Ignacio Garcia said the same at a February 20, 2020, campus lecture entitled "A Vision To Be Whole: Unlearning Ephraim and re-engaging 2 Nephi 26:33," https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=jNBDbVf8LXQ.

41. See, e.g., comments on the post "You are of the tribe of Ephraim," *By Common Consent* (blog), May 11, 2004, https://bycommonconsent.com/2004/05/11/you-are-of-the-tribe-of-ephraim/.

42. Wilfried Decoo, "The Blood of Israel in Europe," *Times and Seasons* (blog), September 25, 2012, https://www.timesandseasons.org/harchive/2012/09/the-blood-of-israel-in-europe/.

Armand Mauss seems to have had something like this in mind when he wrote, "It is important for all peoples, but especially scholars, to understand that these constructed histories and lineages carry their own truths and have their own purposes totally apart from historically reality."[43] He went on to say that "the collective construction by a people of their own ethnic and genealogical past is probably more important than the historical and empirical realities, even if these could be scientifically determined. After all, people act on what they *believe* to be true and real, about themselves and about others, rather than on what science has 'shown' to be real."[44]

To the extent such views suggest that patriarchal declarations of lineage are nothing more than a bestowal of warm, emotional comfort, they are, I believe, incorrect. But to the extent they are leading us to something "true and real" that happens to be unconnected with bloodlines, they are very useful. This leads to the next topic.

Is There a Way to Give Respect to Literal Bloodlines without Connecting Them to Patriarchal Declarations of Lineage?

Perhaps there is a way to think about these issues that gives respect and meaning to blood lineage and literal pedigree without the drawbacks of seeing the family of man divided into the "favored lineage" and "only adopted" categories that have prevailed. Such a paradigm would allow us to dispense with concepts of adoption, assignment, etc.

Somewhere in the range of 2,500 years after Abraham, Israel not only survived as a literal (if not undiluted) bloodline but continued as a self-aware culture. As of the time of Christ, the lost tribes, though forcibly removed from their lands centuries earlier, evidently still maintained a separate identity as branches of Israel. In 3 Nephi 16, after the Lord told the Nephites they were the "other sheep" of which he spoke in Jerusalem, he explained that besides them he had yet "other sheep, which are not of this land, neither of the land of Jerusalem, neither in any parts of that land round about whither I have been to minister." And though they had "not as yet heard [his] voice," He was commanded of the Father to "go and show [himself] unto them." Nephi assures us 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

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43. Armand L. Mauss, *All Abraham's Children: Changing Mormon Conceptions of Race and Lineage* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2003), 4.

44. Mauss, *All Abraham's Children*, 6.

Jews" (2 Nephi 29:13). Of necessity then, as of that time "these lost tribes understood their identity and had prophets among them."[45]

For how long after the time of Christ the various peoples of the lost tribes retained such self-awareness is unknown. In the illustrative case of the Lehites, a self-aware identification with the house of Israel lasted until at least 421 CE. But eventually the Abrahamic identity of the lost tribes became extinct, as foretold by the prophets. As reviewed in the following paragraphs, the words of Jacob, Moses (or those attributed to him in the case of Deuteronomy), Amos, Isaiah, Ezekiel, Nephi, and Zenos support the proposition that the loss of self-aware identity is what is meant by the tribes becoming "lost."

Speaking to Joseph, Jacob said, "Therefore, O my son, he hath blessed me in raising thee up to be a servant unto me, in saving my house from death" (JST Genesis 48:8). Of course, the most obvious meaning of these words is that Joseph would provide safe harbor for Jacob and his house during the famine. But the scriptures often have layers of meaning, and I wonder if another meaning here is that Israel's house would again need saving from a form of "death" in a later day.

We read in Deuteronomy of a scattering "from one end of the earth even unto the other" (Deuteronomy 28:64) and even to "the outmost parts of heaven" (Deuteronomy 30:4). Israel would become "unmindful" (Deuteronomy 32:18). God said he "would scatter [Israel] into the corners" and "would make the *remembrance* of them cease from among men" (Deuteronomy 32:26, emphasis added). As Amos prophesied, God would "sift the house of Israel among all nations, like as corn in a sieve" (Amos 9:9). Isaiah foresaw the day when Ephraim (meaning, in this context, all tribes of the northern kingdom) would "be broken, that it be not a people" (Isaiah 7:8).

Ezekiel was shown a valley of "very dry" bones (Ezekiel 37:2). They were totally lifeless. God said to Ezekiel, "Son of man, these bones are the whole house of Israel: behold, they say, Our bones are dried, and our hope is lost: we are cut off for our parts" (Ezekiel 37:11). To be clear, *literal* Israel would not die: Abraham's (and Jacob's) bloodline seed would, as promised, continue as numberless as ever. But God showed the Old Testament prophets that *covenant* Israel, cultural Israel, self-aware Israel, would become dead among all the tribes (other than Judah, speaking in cultural terms).

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45. Paul K. Browning, "Gathering Scattered Israel: Then and Now," *Ensign* 29, no. 7 (July 1998), https://www.churchofjesuschrist.org/study/ensign/1998/07/gathering-scattered-israel-then-and-now.

I think Nephi achieved a similar understanding. Nephi was steeped in Old Testament notions of the importance of seed and blood lineage. He viewed their journey from Jerusalem as part of the prophesied scattering: "[A]re we not broken off from the house of Israel, and are we not a branch of the house of Israel?" (1 Nephi 15:12). Nephi knew his *bloodline* would survive, having seen in vision his seed in "the latter days" (1 Nephi 15:13). Nevertheless, he was "overcome because of my afflictions, for I considered that mine afflictions were great above all, because of the destruction of my people, for I had beheld their fall" (1 Nephi 15:5). "O the pain, and the anguish of my soul for the loss of the slain of my people! [I]t well nigh consumeth me" (2 Nephi 26:7). What caused him such anguish, perhaps, was not the loss of his bloodline, but the loss of his posterity as a self-aware people of covenant Israel.

Zenos saw this, too, in the allegory passed on to us by Jacob. In a passage understood to refer to the Lehite branch, he said, "And the wild fruit of the last had overcome that part of the tree which brought forth good fruit, even that *the branch had withered away and died*" (Jacob 5:40 emphasis added). Lehi's bloodline descendants had not died out, but his branch of Israel had become a lost (i.e., unmindful, not self-aware) tribe, and in that sense this dry branch had become as dead as the dry bones in Ezekiel's vision.

Some Restoration teaching embraces this idea that the tribes "lost their identity and were assimilated into local populations. … They lost their remembrance of and concern for their Abrahamic origins."[46]

How thorough was the sifting and mixing of the bloodlines of Israel? As stated by one prominent Latter-day Saint scientist, Dr. Brian Shirts, MD/PhD, of the Department of Laboratory Medicine, University of Washington Medical School, based on modeling generally accepted in the scientific community, if one posits the factual existence of the man Abraham several thousand years ago, "it is expected that many individuals if not *everyone* alive today qualifies as a descendant of Abraham."[47] Nathan H. Lents, Ph.D., a professor of biology at John Jay College of the City University of New York, concurs:

> The fact is, if you go back far enough, each one of us has a shared ancestor with every other person on earth. Scientists estimate

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46. Browning, "Gathering Scattered Israel."

47. Brian H. Shirts, "Genetics and Gathering the House of Israel," unpublished paper in author's possession, 2, emphasis original. The author expresses deep appreciation to Dr. Shirts for his help in explaining the universality of Abraham's progeny, and for the ideas expressed herein on the relevance of Ezekiel 37 to the issues discussed in this paper.

that the most recent common ancestor of all humans lived just a few thousand years ago. Let that sink in for a minute. There was someone, a specific man or woman, who probably lived in either Egypt or Babylonia during the classical period, to whom we can all trace our ancestry.[48]

In 1998, Joseph T. Chang of Yale University wrote a paper addressed to the question, "How far back in time do we need to trace the full genealogy of mankind in order to find any individual who is a common ancestor of all present-day individuals?"[49] He concluded that "within about 1.77 lg n generations, a tiny amount of time, … everyone in the population is either a CA [Common Ancestor] of all present-day individuals or extinct." The meaning of the formula is detailed in his rather technical article, but as boiled down in an article in *The Atlantic*, it means that "the most recent common ancestor of all six billion people on earth today probably lived just a couple of thousand years ago."[50] That means Abraham could quite easily qualify as a common ancestor of all people on the planet today. To the same effect, see a *By Common Consent* blog post concluding that "If Ephraim had descendants that survived to today, then pretty much everyone on the planet is a descendant of Ephraim."[51]

Maybe these modern, scientific conclusions are hinted at in New Testament scripture: "And [God] hath made of one blood all nations of men for to dwell on all the face of the earth" (Acts 17:26).

In any event, the idea that everyone alive today is certainly (or at least probably) a descendant of Abraham and Ephraim has some interesting implications. First, it means that God kept his promise: Abraham's posterity *is* as numberless as the sands of the sea. Second, it means that to the extent patriarchal blessings are intended to declare a literal bloodline connection to Ephraim or another of the tribes, they are entirely accurate. In this way, we can be glad that the literal, blood lineage of Abraham survived and prospered.

Another implication is that if we accept the view that Abraham's blood lineage has survived and that his genealogical descendants now

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48. Nathan H. Lents, "The Meaning and Meaninglessness of Genealogy," *Psychology Today*, January 29, 2018, https://www.psychologytoday.com/us/blog/beastly-behavior/201801/the-meaning-and-meaninglessness-genealogy.

49. Joseph T. Chang, "Recent Common Ancestors of All Present-Day Individuals," *Advances in Applied Probability* 31, no. 4 (December 1999): 1003–1004.

50. Steve Olson, "The Royal We," *The Atlantic*, May 2000, https://www.theatlantic.com/magazine/archive/2002/05/the-royal-we/302497/.

51. See Barney, "Patriarchal Blessing Lineages."

include everyone in the world, then we need not see the lost tribes as isolated pockets of bloodline communities or scattered individuals.

But here is one more implication: A universal Abrahamic blood lineage means that viewed from our perspective rather than Abraham's, there is nothing particularly special about being in Abraham's literal family tree. Some scientists conclude that after thousands of years, there is little meaning in talking about literal, genealogical, Abrahamic bloodlines. An article in *BYU Studies* notes,

> Because of the continued halving at each generation, autosomal DNA testing for genealogical purposes is limited to investigating family relationships within the past five or six generations. Beyond that, the amount of shared inherited genetic segments becomes too small and is no longer feasible to use to trace it back to specific ancestors. This means that although we can be genealogically related to all of our ancestors, we carry genetic segments for only a few of them. In fact, it is estimated that individuals bear autosomal DNA from only about 20 percent of their 1,024 ancestors who lived at the tenth-generation level.[52]

In other words, after enough generations (usually given as fewer than 10), we literally inherit no DNA from our literal blood ancestors. Thus, I am able to connect to Abraham on a big enough pedigree chart, but so can everyone else, and I have none of his DNA.

And if all this is true, perhaps it is not helpful to perpetuate ideas of literal bloodlines in our thinking about patriarchal declarations of lineage, even if we agree with Elder Widtsoe that it makes no difference whether one is lineal or non-lineal. Armand Mauss certainly thinks so:

> I am distressed at the continuing evidence of racialist thinking among today's Mormons, especially in high places. Considering the wholesale conversions that have taken place for decades in parts of the world far outside the supposed concentrations of Israelite "blood" in northwestern Europe, it is sheer folklore to continue perpetuating ideas from 19th-century LDS leaders that were based upon the early but temporary success of our missionary work in the

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52. Ugo A. Perego, "Using Science to Answer Questions from Latter-day Saint History: The Case of Josephine Lyon's Paternity," *BYU Studies* 58, no. 4 (2019): 145, https://byustudies.byu.edu/article/using-science-to-answer-questions-from-latter-day-saint-history-the-case-of-josephine-lyons-paternity/.

UK and in Scandinavia. Also, once we recognize with Paul (to the Galatians) that conversion to Christ immediately renders irrelevant all questions of race, lineage, or "blood" in the convert's origins, then there is no reason to find (or even seek) any theological or doctrinal significance in one's origins, whether mortal or premortal. Even the mention of lineage in today's patriarchal blessings is less a claim about a person's literal ancestry than an "assignment" of lineage for future administrative purposes in the Lord's kingdom — or such is at least one recurring explanation that I have gotten from numerous stake patriarchs whom I have interviewed over the years. In short, the Church will be far better served by allowing all such racialist thinking to drift quietly into the dustbin of non-scriptural LDS folklore.[53]

Can There Be a Literal Gathering of Israel Without Concern for Literal Bloodlines?

I am convinced the answer is yes. The paradigm I propose we leave behind is that there are certain people on the planet who are literally of the favored genealogical lineage of Abraham, whom we must search out, and who will readily accept the gospel because of their believing blood. I also propose we leave behind the belief that there are other people *not* of the favored lineage who, if they accept the gospel at all, may at best become adopted members of the House of Israel.

The scriptures compellingly steer us away from emphasizing literal ancestry as a source of entitlement to personal blessings (either our own or those shared with others by the gathering of Israel). In the New Testament, Jesus outright rejected a boast of Abrahamic lineage: "They answered and said unto him, Abraham is our father. Jesus saith unto them, If ye were Abraham's children, ye would do the works of Abraham" (John 8:39). John the Baptist likewise did not seem much impressed by those attributing superiority to a literal Abrahamic bloodline, flatly stating that God, if He wanted to, could raise up that kind of seed to Abraham from stones (Luke 3:8).

As Paul labored to spread the gospel to all the world following Christ's mortal ministry, he spent considerable effort trying to convince his hearers that literal blood lineage was *not* important, something he would have found unnecessary if the notion of a privileged lineage

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53. Armand Mauss, in an online comment on Decoo, *"Blood of Israel."*

weren't still firmly rooted in their religious culture. After spending an entire chapter explaining that "there is no respect of persons with God" (Romans 2:11), and chiding any hypocritical Jew who "makest thy boast of God" (Romans 2:17) and is "confident that thou thyself art a guide of the blind" (Romans 2:19), Paul then asks a question critical to our analysis: "What advantage then hath the Jew? or what profit is there of circumcision?" (Romans 3:1). His answer: "Much every way: chiefly because that unto them were committed the oracles of God" (Romans 3:1). In other words, the advantage of being born in the house of Israel was having access to the teachings of the prophets, the oracles of God. But the fact of birth in the house of Israel gives no special rights or claims, as the Prophet Joseph Smith made clear in his rendition of these same verses: "What advantage then hath the Jew over the Gentile? or what profit of circumcision, who is not a Jew from the heart? But he who is a Jew from the heart, I say hath much every way" (JST Romans 3:1–2). Is not Joseph teaching that being Jewish "from the heart" is what matters, while being Jewish by birth is of no consequence?

In writing to the Galatians (3:16), Paul can be understood as saying that God's promise that the posterity of Abraham would bless all nations refers only to Christ, not to his entire blood lineage: "Now to Abraham and his seed were the promises made. He saith not, And to seeds, as of many, but as of one, And to thy seed, which is Christ." [It is possible that this scripture from the Book of Abraham should be read the same singular way: Abraham was told by God that the rights given him "shall continue in thee, and in thy seed after thee (that is to say, the literal seed, or the seed of the body)" (Abraham 2:11).]

In a further pushback against the idea that the blessings of the fathers were available as a matter of right to the literal, biological descendants of Abraham, Paul also told the Galatians, "[T]hey which are of faith, the same are the children of Abraham" (Galatians 3:7).

Perhaps seeing this difference between bloodlines and covenant belonging led Nephi to an understanding of seed and lineage that must have comforted him considerably. He came to be in full harmony with Paul's later teachings on the subject. He explained to his brothers that being Abraham's literal descendants entitles a people to nothing if they are not faithful: "Do ye suppose that our fathers would have been more choice than they [i.e., the indigenous people of Palestine driven out by the Israelites] if they had been righteous? I say unto you, Nay. Behold, the Lord esteemeth all flesh in one; he that is righteous is favored of God" (1 Nephi 17:34–35). Elsewhere he declared that "as many of the Gentiles as

will repent are the covenant people of the Lord; and as many of the Jews as will not repent shall be cast off; for the Lord covenanteth with none save it be with them that repent and believe in his Son, who is the Holy One of Israel" (2 Nephi 30:2). He firmly maintained that "all are alike unto God" (2 Nephi 26:33). Nephi pointed out that "at that [latter] day shall the remnant of our seed *know* that they are of the house of Israel, and that they are covenant people of the Lord" (1 Nephi 15:14, emphasis added). This would cause them to "be remembered again among the house of Israel; they shall be grafted in" (1 Nephi 16:16). These concepts of recovered *knowing* and *remembering*, taught Lehi, applied not just to his own seed, but to "all the house of Israel" (1 Nephi 15:18). It is interesting that Nephi used the term "grafted in" to refer to his own posterity, a people he knew were literal descendants of Israel and Abraham.

Looking at these passages, it does not appear that Nephi would have seen much value in the idea of a patriarchal declaration of lineage that speaks in terms of literal bloodlines.

I believe a non-literal approach to patriarchal declarations of lineage finds resonance with Abinadi's teaching about Jesus. "Who shall be [Christ's] seed?" Abinadi asked rhetorically. His answer: the faithful who have hearkened unto the prophets, believed that the Lord will redeem his people, and looked forward to a remission of their sins, "these are his seed" (Mosiah 15:11–12). Very much in harmony is the teaching of King Benjamin: "And now, because of the covenant which ye have made ye shall be called the children of Christ, his sons, and his daughters; for behold, this day he hath spiritually begotten you; for ye say that your hearts are changed through faith on his name; therefore, ye are born of him and have become his sons and his daughters" (Mosiah 5:7). This passage from the Doctrine and Covenants is also apt: "For whoso is faithful unto the obtaining these two priesthoods of which I have spoken, and the magnifying their calling, are sanctified by the Spirit unto the renewing of their bodies. They become the sons of Moses and of Aaron and the seed of Abraham, and the church and kingdom, and the elect of God" (D&C 84:33–34). And this passage is to the same effect: "For, verily I say that the rebellious are not of the blood of Ephraim, wherefore they shall be plucked out" (D&C 64:36).

A talk given by then Elder Dallin H. Oaks at the aforesaid 2005 training meeting for patriarchs is, I believe, hugely significant to this discussion:

> A declaration of lineage is not a scientific pronouncement or an identification of genetic inheritance. A declaration of

> lineage is representative of larger and more important things. … This declaration concerns the government of the kingdom of God, not the nature of the blood or the composition of the genes of the person being blessed.[54]

He may have had this same theme in mind when he taught as follows in a 2006 General Conference:

> The Book of Mormon promises that all who receive and act upon the Lord's invitation to "repent and believe in his Son" become "the covenant people of the Lord" (2 Ne. 30:2). This is a potent reminder that *neither riches nor lineage nor any other privileges of birth* should cause us to believe that we are "better one than another."[55]

I view these as most welcome and profound insights.

But how, in light of these omni-literal, omni-bloodline concepts, are we to understand our belief in the "literal gathering of Israel and in the restoration of the Ten Tribes" (Articles of Faith, 10)? Clearly, given Elder Oaks's teaching on the absence of any link between patriarchal declarations of lineage and literal bloodline concepts, something else is going on.

To discover what that is, let us return to Ezekiel's vision of the dry bones. I believe God made clear to Ezekiel just how the "lost" of Israel would be gathered into covenant Israel again. God told Ezekiel to "say unto them, O ye dry bones, *hear the word of the Lord*. Thus saith the Lord God unto these bones; Behold, I will cause breath to enter into you, and ye shall live" (Ezek. 37:4–5, emphasis added). Perhaps the Lord was telling Ezekiel of the day when covenant Israel, though dead, would live again; a day when there would once more be a people (in addition to Judah) who self-identified as the house of Israel, and who would look to Abraham as their father and to his God as their God. Note especially *how* the Lord made the bones live again: he commanded Ezekiel to teach them "the word of the Lord."

This is the work that Jacob foresaw for Joseph's posterity in the latter days: "For thou shalt be a light unto my people, to deliver them in the days of their captivity, from bondage; and to bring salvation unto them, when they are altogether bowed down under sin: (JST Genesis 48:11). How was this to be done? Joseph of Egypt was given to understand that

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54. See Oaks, "Patriarchal Blessings."

55. Dallin H. Oaks, "All Men Everywhere," *Ensign* 36, no. 5 (May 2006), https://www.churchofjesuschrist.org/study/ensign/2006/05/all-men-everywhere (emphasis added).

one of his seed, clearly referring to Joseph Smith, "shall bring them [i.e., the posterity of Jacob] to the knowledge of the covenants which I have made with thy fathers" (JST Genesis 50:28). We are assured all who are faithful in receiving the priesthood thereby "become the … seed of Abraham" (D&C 84:34). God made this clear to Abraham himself: "As many as receive this gospel shall be called after thy name, and shall be accounted thy seed … " (Abraham 2:10).

The paradigm I propose we move towards, then, is that while *all* people on the planet are probably of Abraham's literal blood lineage, only as we accept the gospel do we become *literally* a part of covenant Israel. All of *covenant* Israel would then be a people who are both literal descendants of Abraham *and* who worship God and look to Abraham as their spiritual father. We would be one both in bloodline and in covenant. And we would, hopefully, bless all nations of the earth.

Under this paradigm, our missionaries are not looking for a few, isolated remnants of literal, bloodline Israel when they take the gospel to *all* the world, to *every* creature, to *every* nation, kindred, tongue and people. They are searching among a world *full* of literal Abrahamic descendants for those who are spiritually willing to be gathered into covenant Israel. As in Ezekiel's vision, they are breathing life into once-dead covenant Israel as they teach people "the word of the Lord."

Perhaps, in this same sense, a patriarchal declaration of lineage is a way to breathe life into covenant Israel, another way of declaring the "word of the Lord" as per Ezekiel. As the author of Deuteronomy said, the gathering requires that "thou shalt *call them to mind* among all nations" (Deuteronomy 30:1, emphasis added). Taking the view that patriarchal declarations of lineage have nothing to do with literal bloodlines or genetic inheritances brings us into alignment with John the Baptist, Paul, Nephi, and President Oaks. Patriarchal declarations of lineage are one more way the Lord is fulfilling his promise to the house of covenant Israel that "ye shall know that I am the Lord, when I have opened your graves, O my people, and brought you up out of your graves, and shall put my spirit in you, and ye shall live" (Ezekiel 37:13–14). Elder Widtsoe taught as much: "The oft-asked question, 'Who are the children of Abraham?' is well answered in light of the revealed gospel. All who accept God's plan for his children on earth and who live it are the children of Abraham. Those who reject the gospel, whether children in the flesh, or others, forfeit the promises made to Abraham and are not children of Abraham."[56]

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56. Widtsoe, *Evidences and Reconciliations*, 400.

The bones of the house of covenant Israel in Ezekiel's vision were dry and dead, but the Lord is nevertheless able to restore and gather literal covenant Israel and "call them to mind." Missionaries, patriarchs, and all the rest of us are a part of the effort. Patriarchal declarations of lineage in the house of Israel inform the recipients that they have divine potential and confirm their capacity to become, by their choices, *literally* the Lord's people in *literal* covenant Israel. These declarations help plant in the hearts of the children the promises made to the fathers. They are part of the process by which, through the word of the Lord, life is breathed back into covenant Israel.

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Axes Mundi:
Ritual Complexes in Mesoamerica and the Book of Mormon

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Mark Alan Wright

Abstract: *An* axis mundi *refers to a sacred place that connects heaven and earth and is believed to be the center of the world. These places are sanctified through ritual consecration or through a divine manifestation that results in qualitatively detaching that space from the surrounding cosmos. Often expressed in architecture as a universal pillar, these* axes mundi *incorporate and put in communication three cosmic levels — earth, heaven, and the underworld. As Mark Alan Wright notes, Mesoamerican sacred architecture was designed according to cosmological principles and finds a modern analogy in Latter-day Saint temples. Also, among Mesoamerican civilizations and in the Book of Mormon, the temple, the* axis mundi*, served as a place where worshipers go to engage in sacred rituals that bridge the divide between heaven and earth and allow the worshiper entry into the divine presence.*

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See Mark Alan Wright, "*Axes Mundi*: Ritual Complexes in Mesoamerica and the Book of Mormon," in *Temple Insights: Proceedings of the Interpreter Matthew B. Brown Memorial Conference, "The Temple on Mount Zion," 22 September 2012,* ed. William J. Hamblin and David Rolph Seely (Orem, UT: The Interpreter Foundation; Salt Lake City: Eborn Books, 2014),

187–202. Further information at https://interpreterfoundation.org/books/temple-insights/.]

An *axis mundi* is a sacred place that connects heaven and earth and is believed to be the center of the world, even the cosmos. Mircea Eliade notes that such places are made sacred either through ritual consecration or through a manifestation of the divine known as *hierophany*, which "results in detaching a territory from the surrounding cosmic milieu and making it qualitatively different."[1] Countless cultures, ancient and modern, use *axes mundi* as ideological and ritual foci. Eliade explains:

> Where the break-through from plane to plane has been modified by a hierophany, there too an opening has been made, either upward (the divine world) or downward (the underworld, the world of the dead). The three cosmic levels — earth, heaven, underworld — have been put in communication … this communication is sometimes expressed through the image of a universal pillar, *axis mundi*, which at once connects and supports heaven and earth.[2]

The sacred architecture of Mesoamerica was designed according to cosmological principles, establishing specific locations within their polities as an *axis mundi*. Their pyramids, topped by temples, were man-made sacred mountains, representing the first mountain that rose from the primordial waters of creation. Mesoamerican scholar Julia Guernesy noted that even comparatively early Mesoamerican cities, such as Izapa, "created a dynamic environment in which primordial time and the present were seamlessly woven together, creating a veritable web of politics and cosmogenesis."[3] Concerning specific ritual *loci* [sacred places] established by such communities, Pamela L. Geller notes, "Fraught with liminal connotations, *axes mundi* mediate between past and present, natural and supernatural arenas."[4] The rulers and ritual specialists used a variety of complex rituals in an effort to bring the past into the present.

A modern analogy might be drawn with Latter-day Saint temples. Prior to their dedication, they are merely beautiful buildings that can be entered by anyone during the "open house" period. Once they are dedicated through ritual action, however, they become an *axis mundi*. Ancient Maya temples similarly had dedicatory rituals for their temples. The most common was the "fire-entering" ritual, wherein incense was

burned inside of a sacred building to dedicate (or rededicate) it. Such rituals are recorded in the hieroglyphic texts as *och k'ak' ta-y-otot*, "the fire enters into his house."[5]

Many types of *axes mundi* existed in ancient Mesoamerica, both natural and man-made. The structural form of these supernaturally-charged locations was virtually irrelevant; what mattered was the symbolic function. Mountains, caves, temples, altars, performance platforms, the central hearth of a home, portable objects such as censers for burning incense, and even the human body (when adorned with sacred regalia) could all function as portals of communication between the human and divine realms. Likewise, in the Book of Mormon there are countless places where ritual activity was performed that opened the portal between earth and heaven. Some of these are obvious, such as temples, synagogues, and sanctuaries, but we also read of ritual activity at royal palaces, in mountains, the wilderness, fields, and even homes. Such ritual complexes are not limited to faithful Nephites; the Book of Mormon explicitly mentions them among other groups such as the Lamanites, Nehorites, Amalekites, and Zoramites (Alma 23:2; 26:29).[6]

The most conspicuous type of *axis mundi* in the Book of Mormon and ancient Mesoamerica is the temple. Nephi tells us that he built a temple "*after the manner* of the temple of Solomon," but is quick to qualify that statement by noting that "it could not be built *like unto* Solomon's temple" because they lacked "precious things" (2 Nephi 5:16).[7] What is the difference between "after the manner of" and "not … like unto"? In essence, it differed from Solomon's temple cosmetically but not cosmologically. We might draw an analogy between the temples in San Diego, California, and Provo, Utah. Stylistically, the two buildings are quite distinct, but functionally they are identical. The same might be said for comparing the temples described in the Book of Mormon with what is known of those found in ancient Mesoamerica. Although they were superficially different, they may have had similar functions. This study will explore the functions of temples and other ritual locations in both the Book of Mormon and Mesoamerica and draw comparisons between the ways these *axes mundi* were used. Methodologically, I will rely on epigraphic, iconographic, ethnographic, ethnohistoric, linguistic, and archaeological sources of data from Mesoamerica and compare them to relevant passages from the Book of Mormon.

John Welch's careful analysis of Nephite temple worship highlighted a number of functions that Nephite temples served.[8] In them, kings were crowned, religious teachings were dispensed, the plan of salvation

was taught, the people were exhorted to proper behavior, sacrifices symbolizing the atonement of Christ were performed, religious and legal covenants were made and renewed, and the resurrected Jesus appeared to His faithful people as their God. Though clearly not identical, I argue that Mesoamerican ritual loci — *axes mundi* — served functionally and ideologically similar purposes.

The Temple as a Place of Ritual

Temples were typically the most prominent and grandiose structures in Mesoamerican cities. Although the ancient term for them has thus far resisted translation, among modern Maya speakers they are referred to as *k'uh na*, or "god house."[9] At any given Maya city, temples and royal palaces anchor the site core. Maya scholars use the term *temple* in reference to buildings whose primary function is assumed to be religious, whereas *palaces* are structures that appear to have been loci of political activity. However, the religious and political realms are not necessarily distinguishable among the Classic period Maya ruins, so a strict delineation between them is an imposition of our own modern perspective. Admittedly, the precise function of these structures is not clearly understood; the epigraphic and iconographic records contain precious few clues as to their use. It is common for large sites to have multiple temples, even within a single site core, each of which may have served different religious or political purposes.[10]

There was a shift in the manner of temple construction from the Preclassic to the Classic periods in the Maya lowlands.[11] Preclassic temples typically were not intended to aggrandize individual rulers; rather, their architecture and iconography tended to highlight specific deities and reflect grand cosmologies.[12] Since the focus of Preclassic period temples was typically not on specific rulers, it is unsurprising that few of them have been shown to contain royal tombs.[13] Likewise, in the Book of Mormon the focus of temple rituals was on their deity rather than their rulers. King Benjamin seemed concerned that because of his exalted office his people might believe him to be more than a mortal man, perhaps even a divine king. Ironically, by informing his people that the words he was delivering to them were given to him by an angel who literally "stood before" him (Mosiah 3:2), he confirmed that he was in fact an intermediary between the human and supernatural realms, a defining characteristic of divine kings in the ancient world.

Figure 1: Flower Mountain, the paradise of creation, from the murals of San Bartolo, Guatemala (ca. 100 BC). (Drawing by Traci Wright after Heather Hurst from *The Murals of San Bartolo, El Petén, Guatemala Part 1: The North Wall,* 2005:8)

The Temple as a Place for Coronation

The most well-documented coronation in the Book of Mormon takes place at the temple in Zarahemla, when King Benjamin gathers his people together to declare that his son Mosiah was to be "a king and a ruler over" them (Mosiah 2:30). Benjamin ritually presents Mosiah with the royal paraphernalia: the plates of brass, the plates of Nephi, the sword of Laban, and the Liahona (Mosiah 1:16). The presentation of royal regalia was likewise an important aspect of accession among the Maya. On the murals of San Bartolo, Guatemala (ca. 100 BC)[14] we see an enthronement ceremony wherein the ruler sits upon a wooden tower or scaffold to receive the emblems of rulership.[15] The coronation and presentation of a new king to his subjects would have been an occasion of much pomp and circumstance. Maya temples form part of the site core, and were designed with public spectacle in mind.[16] They were typically the tallest building in the central precinct and always faced a large plaza that would accommodate thousands of people. The architectural layout of temple complexes effectively maximized acoustics, enabling speakers

atop a temple to be seen and heard clearly throughout the plaza.[17] Nephite temples may have had similar acoustic properties (cf. Mosiah 1:18; 2:1, 5-6; 7:17).

The Temple as a Place for Religious Instruction

Throughout the Book of Mormon we read of religious instruction being given at the temple: by Jacob, Benjamin, and even the Savior. Among the Maya, we turn again to the murals of San Bartolo for a comparison. The murals were likely didactic, meaning they were used for religious instruction. Elaborate imagery was used in lieu of writing to teach those who may have been illiterate, similar to the art that adorned Medieval churches.[18] The San Bartolo murals were found in a comparatively small room that juts out from the base of a much larger temple structure. The two entry doors are low — about four feet high — which would require those who enter to lower their heads and bow deeply in order to gain access. Once inside, the initiates would stand upright and find themselves surrounded by beautiful murals running along the upper portion of each of the walls, composed of elaborately painted mythological scenes. Questions remain as to where the visual narrative begins and ends, and some of the iconography remains difficult to interpret. Stephen Houston describes it as "a room of 'mysteries' for initiates, sequestered in an unusual location at the back of a temple."[19]

In the most general of terms, the murals of San Bartolo depict the moment of creation — the ordering of the cosmos, the establishment of the primordial *axis mundi*. It is followed by a paradisiacal scene, Flower Mountain, and the ensuing emergence of the first humans. Next are scenes of sacrifice, leading up to a scene of resurrection of the Maize God and his subsequent enthronement. The murals culminate with a human ruler being enthroned in the exact same manner as the Maize God — his accession to an earthly throne mimicking that of the Maize God's ascension to a heavenly throne.

In sum, the murals may depict a premortal existence; the ordering of the cosmos; a paradise of creation and the emergence of mankind; instruction on proper sacrifice; and the heavenly enthronement of the god of resurrection, culminating in a scene where a human accedes to a throne identical to the one used by the god of resurrection. It explains where humans came from (Flower Mountain); why they are here (to worship the gods), and where they are going (to the solar paradise of the sun where they will ultimately sit upon a celestial throne).
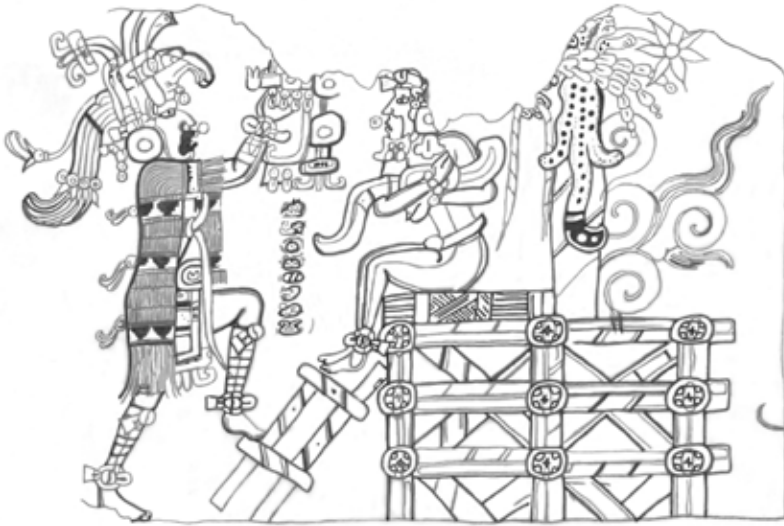
Figure 2: Early Classic Maya ruler being enthroned in emulation of the accession of the Maize God, from the murals of San Bartolo, Guatemala (ca. 100 BC) (Drawing by Traci Wright after Heather Hurst from *The Murals of San Bartolo, El Petén, Guatemala Part 2: The West Wall*, 2010:59)

When we refer to the "plan of salvation," we are essentially referring to the underlying mythology that answers our favorite questions as members of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints: Where did I come from? Why am I here? Where am I going? These answers are provided in the Book of Mormon and clearly center on Christ; that He was born, was crucified, and rose on the third day, enabling us to resurrect and return home to God the Father. How can we relate this to Mesoamerica? Here I wade into some extremely speculative waters. To be clear, I am not postulating that the Preclassic Maya of San Bartolo were Nephites or that they maintained a belief in the plan of salvation,[20] but I am suggesting that some of the underlying themes on the murals of San Bartolo may be an indication as to how the Preclassic Maya attempted to answer those same questions.

Temple as a Place of Sacrifice

Ancient Mesoamerican temples were the epicenter of royal sacrifice. Blood was the most sacred of substances, and Mesoamerican cultures engaged in both human and animal sacrifice. The typical method of

human sacrifice was to stretch the victim across a stone altar and have his hands and feet held down by four men. A priest would then make a large incision directly below the ribcage using a knife made out of razor-sharp flint or obsidian, and while the victim was yet alive the priest would thrust his hand into the cut and reach up under the ribcage and into the chest and rip out the victim's still-beating heart. Among the Aztec, the body of the victim would then be rolled down the precipitous front stairway of the temple. Accounts by the early Spanish conquerors who witnessed such events claimed that the Aztecs would do such sacrifices by the thousands and the bodies would literally pile up at the base of the temple. The numbers are likely exaggerated, and little evidence from the earlier Maya periods suggests that human sacrifice was performed on a grand scale, but the evidence is clear that it was in fact performed.[21]

The peoples of the Book of Mormon would have been familiar with the types of sacrifices being offered by their surrounding Mesoamerican neighbors, which often comprised burnt offerings of animals, such as deer or birds. The righteous would have interpreted such sacrifices as a means to point their souls to Christ (Jacob 4:5; Alma 34:14). Yet Amulek prophesied that "it is expedient that there should be a great and last sacrifice; yea, not a sacrifice of man, neither of beast, neither of any manner of fowl; for it shall not be a *human sacrifice*; but it must be an infinite and eternal sacrifice" (Alma 34:10). It is significant that the three things that Amulek is expressly telling the apostate Zoramites *not* to sacrifice are the three most common things that were offered by Mesoamerican worshipers: human, beast, and fowl. It stands to reason that the Zoramites, in rejecting Nephite religion, would embrace the cultural practices of the more dominant culture, as would be expected of an apostate group.[22]

The faithful in the Book of Mormon looked forward to the day when Christ would offer himself as sacrifice in their behalf. However, having no point of reference with regard to crucifixion in their own history, they may not have had a clear understanding of what such a death entailed. Nephi explained that the Lord speaks to us "according to our language, unto our understanding" (2 Nephi 31:3). Correspondingly, cultural context directly impacts the way people interpret manifestations of the divine.[23] Thus, when Christ appeared to the Nephites, he may have been communicating with them according to their cultural language when he invited them to come and feel for themselves the wounds in his flesh. He bade them first to thrust their hands into his side, and secondarily to feel the prints in his hands and feet (3 Nephi 11:14). This contrasts
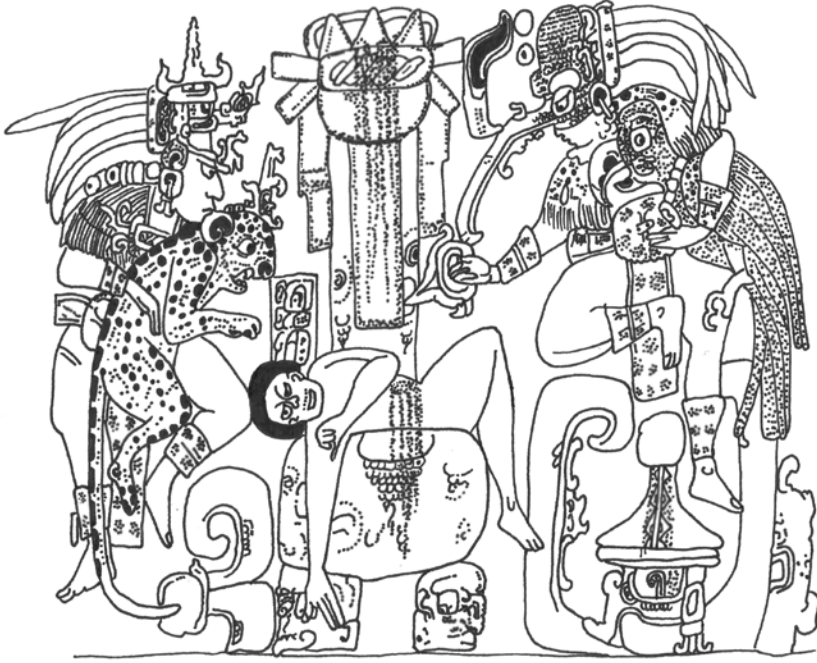
Figure 3: Classic Maya scene of sacrifice involving human, beast, and fowl. (Drawing by Traci Wright after Alexandre Tokovinine from *Reading Maya Art: A Hieroglyphic Guide to Ancient Maya Painting and Sculpture,* 2011:92)

with his appearance to his apostles in Jerusalem after his resurrection. Among them, he invited them to touch solely his hands and feet (Luke 24:39–40).[24] Why the difference? To a people steeped in Mesoamerican culture, the sign that a person had been ritually sacrificed would have been an incision on their side — suggesting they had had their hearts removed[25] — whereas for the people of Jerusalem in the first century, the wounds that would indicate someone had been sacrificed would have been in the hands and the feet — the marks of crucifixion.

Temple as a Place to Enter Divine Presence

In both Mesoamerica and the Book of Mormon, the temple is a place where worshipers go to enter into the presence of the divine. It was at the temple in Bountiful where Christ appeared in a grand theophany to the gathered Nephite survivors. The Maya believed they could evince the presence of gods and other supernatural beings within their sacred spaces through ritual activity. This was oftentimes done through incense or burnt offerings, wherein it was believed the billowing smoke

Figure 4. A Maya noblewoman conjures a supernatural being through a sacrificial burnt offering of her own blood. Lintel 25 from Yaxchilán (Photograph by William Hamblin).

effectually created a screen or portal through which supernatural beings could manifest themselves. On Lintel 25 from Yaxchilán, for example, a noblewoman named *Ix K'abal Xook* burns strips of paper that are soaked with her own blood.[26] From the smoke of the sacrificial bowl issues forth a vision serpent, out of whose jaws emerges a patron deity of her city.

Within their temples, the Maya placed effigies that they believed were physical manifestations of their gods. Iconographically, there are only a handful of depictions of such deity effigies — idols, as the authors of scripture would call them — that are housed within temples. Although no direct evidence survives from the Preclassic or even the Classic periods, in the Postclassic these effigies were carved by priests out of cedar, called *k'u che*, which literally means "god tree" or "holy tree."[27] The priests had to engage in rituals of purification in order to produce these effigies, and it was a fearful act. To be clear, these effigies were not merely representations of the gods, they *were* the gods. Once the priest finished carving one, it would be ritually activated and placed within the temple. In the Classic period, only Maya rulers and priests could enter into the inner sanctuary where these effigies were housed. To enter

into the room would literally be to enter into the presence of the god. Perhaps notably, the rooms that housed these effigies within the temples were typically covered with a curtain. Mesoamerican scholar Karl Taube notes, "Just as a covered household doorway could signal for privacy, the temple curtains probably were also used to indicate states of the god housed within."[28] This curtain may be conceptually similar to Latter-day Saint beliefs concerning the "veil" that separates humanity from the presence of the Lord in the celestial realm.

Other Ritual Locations

Temples were not the only places for ritual activity. Among the Maya, rituals and prayers were frequently performed in the forest, in *milpas* (cornfields), and in homes. The home is considered an especially sacred place, the center of which has a hearth comprising three stones at its center. As Taube explains,

> As the first central place, the simple three-stone hearth may well constitute the original construction of creation … According to Post-Classic Central Mexican thought, the old fire god *Xiuhtecuhtli-Huehueteotl* resides in a hearth at the world center. The *Anales de Cuauhtitlan* explicitly defines this place as three sacred hearthstones, each personified by a specific god (Bierhorst 1992:23).[29] The Florentine Codex describes this locus as the circular earth navel, or *tlalxicco*: "mother of the gods, father of the gods, who resideth in the navel of the earth, who is set in the turquoise enclosure, [enclosed] with the waters of the lovely cotinga, enclosed with clouds — Ueueteotl, he of Ayamictlan, Xiuhtecuhtli" (Sahagún 1969, Book 6: 88–89).[30] In this account, the earth navel is a place of duality, embodying both the male and female creative principles … This evocation of dualistic principles seems to describe the hearth as a place of creation. However, as the *axis mundi,* the hearth is also a conduit between the levels of earth, sky, and underworld.[31]

In the Book of Mormon, the Zoramite proletariat complained to Alma and Amulek that they had labored abundantly to build all of the synagogues in Antionum but were subsequently forbidden to worship there due to the coarseness of their apparel (Alma 32:5–9). They believed they could only worship in the synagogue and seemed genuinely distraught that they were being denied entry. Alma recited the words

of Zenos to them to assure them that they could worship anywhere and their petitions would be heard: wilderness or field, house or closet. In essence, they could connect heaven and earth wherever they worshipped in faith, effectively creating their own *axis mundi*.[32]

Cultural Diversity in Mesoamerica

A common misconception is that Mesoamerica was a relatively homogenous area, beginning with the Olmec in the Formative period, moving on to the Maya in the Classic period, and culminating with the Aztec during the Postclassic prior to the arrival of the Spanish. In actuality, there were scores of different cultures that inhabited Mesoamerica anciently, co-existing in space and time.[33] Cultures that modern scholars sometimes lump together were in fact quite distinct from each other. The hundreds of cities that we identify as Maya, for example, would not have identified themselves as belonging to the same culture. They were never unified under a single leader, such as the Pharaohs of Egypt. Rather, each city conceptualized themselves as a unique nation, with their own particular pantheon of gods and ritual complexes. Evidence from several major polities (such as Tikal, Caracol, and Naranjo) indicates that each city had its own distinctive triad of patron deities, along with a rich pantheon comprised of many other gods and supernatural beings.[34] There were even distinctions in the rituals each polity would perform. The accession rituals of kings, for example, varied from site to site in terms of the regalia that was worn and the specific ritual actions that were done to enthrone them.[35] The Mesoamerican landscape was extremely heterogeneous, both between and within cultures. Yet each had their unique *axes mundi* that made their cities sacred to them.

Without question, the specific rituals and sacred locations of righteous Nephites would have been different from those of their neighbors, but enough variation existed across the culturescape that the Nephites may have effectively fallen within the margin of acceptable diversity. But, as demonstrated above, the overlapping form and function of many of their rituals and sacred architecture may have enabled them to blend in better than we might suppose: temples and altars, sacrifices and burnt offerings, prayers and supplications, and belief in and emulation of a dying and resurrecting god. These rituals took place at their individual *axes mundi* — their own sacred centers of the world — and served to bridge the gap between the human and divine realms.

Notes

1   Mircea Eliade, *The Sacred and the Profane: The Nature of Religion* (New York: Houghton Mifflin Harcourt, 1959), 26.

2   Eliade, *The Sacred and the Profane*, 36.

3   Julia Guernsey, *Ritual & Power in Stone: The Performance of Rulership in Mesoamerican Izapan Style Art* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 2006), 120.

4   Pamela Gellar, "Maya Mortuary Spaces as Cosmological Metaphors," in E. C. Robertson, J. D. Seibert, D. C. Fernandez, and M. U. Zender, eds., *Space and Spatial Analysis in Archaeology* (Calgary: University of Calgary Press, 2006), 38.

5   David Stuart, "'The Fire Enters His House': Architecture and Ritual in Classic Maya Texts," in Stephen D. Houston, ed., *Function and Meaning in Classic Maya Architecture* (Washington, DC: Dumbarton Oaks Research Library and Collection, 1998): 373–425.

6   John W. Welch, "The Temple in the Book of Mormon: The Temples at the Cities of Nephi, Zarahemla, and Bountiful," in *Temples of the Ancient World*, ed. Donald W. Parry (Salt Lake City and Provo, UT: Deseret Book and FARMS, 1994), 348; William J. Adams, Jr., "Synagogues in the Book of Mormon," in *Journal of Book of Mormon Studies* 9/1 (2000): 4–13.

7   1 Kings 5:17 notes that Solomon's temple was built with "great stones, costly stones, and hewed stones." The "precious things" that were "not to be found upon the land" likely refer to the types of stones used in construction and other types of "precious stones" used to garnish the temple in 2 Chronicles 3:6.

8   Welch, "Temple in the Book of Mormon."

9   John S. Justeson, "Appendix B: Interpretations of Mayan Hieroglyphs (1984:351)," in John S. Justeson and Lyle Campbell, eds., *Phoneticism in Mayan Hieroglyphic Writing*. Publication 9 (Albany, NY: Institute for Mesoamerican Studies, State University of New York at Albany). While the term *k'uh nah* "god house" in modern Mayan language calls to mind the Hebrew *beit el* or *beit elohim*, we must be cautious in drawing analogies since the ancient Maya glyph for temple has not yet been deciphered phonetically

(although the conceptual meaning of the logograph is clearly understood to be a temple structure).

10 Lisa Lucero, "Classic Maya Temples, Politics, and the Voice of the People" *Latin American Antiquity* 18/4 (2007): 407–427, esp. 407.

11 Chronologically, the Book of Mormon falls roughly within the Late to Terminal Preclassic Maya eras (400 BC–AD 250), although the precise geography is still a matter of intense debate, even among those who hold to a limited Mesoamerican setting.

12 Linda Schele, "The Iconography of Maya Architectural Facades During the Late Classic Period," in *Function and Meaning in Classic Maya Architecture*, 479–517.

13 Richard Hansen, "Continuity and Disjunction: The Pre-Classic Antecedents of Classic Maya Architecture," in Function and Meaning, 89. Hansen cautions, however, that the scarcity of royal tombs that have been identified from the Preclassic period may simply be the result of inadequate testing in structures. Nonetheless, when Preclassic temples are adorned with stucco facades they consistently portray supernatural entities rather than historical rulers.

14 William A. Saturno, Karl Taube, and David E. Stuart, *The Murals of San Bartolo, El Petén, Guatemala: Part I: the North Wall* (Barnardsville, NC: Center for Ancient American Studies, 2005); Karl A. Taube, William Andrew Saturno, David Stuart, and Heather Hurst, *The Murals of San Bartolo, El Petén, Guatemala: The West Wall* (Barnardsville, NC: Boundary End Archaeology Research Center, 2010).

15 As it happens, the date of the San Bartolo murals falls squarely in the time of Mosiah II, who reigned from ca. 124–91 BC, and whose reign was pronounced upon a tower by his father Benjamin.

16 Takeshi Inomata, "Plazas, Performers, and Spectators," *Current Anthropology* 47/5 (2006): 805–42.

17 Although this seems obvious to modern visitors of Classic Maya sites, to date, there have been no serious academic studies concerning the acoustic properties of Maya plazas. See Stephen Houston and Karl Taube, "An Archaeology of the Senses: Perception and Cultural Expression in Ancient Mesoamerica," *Cambridge Archaeological Journal* 10/2 (2000): 280–81.

18 The 12th century Christian theologian Honorius of Autun declared that "Painting … is the literature of the laity" (*Gemma Animae*, chap. 132 [PL, 172, col. 586]).

19 Stephen Houston, "A Splendid Predicament: Young Men in Classic Maya Society," *Cambridge Archaeological Journal* 19/2 (2009): 171.

20 The Nephites, for that matter, had an incomplete understanding of the plan of salvation as well (cf. D&C 128:18).

21 Linda Schele, "Human Sacrifice among the Classic Maya," in *Ritual Human Sacrifice in Mesoamerica* (1984): 7 — 48; Carrie Anne Berryman, "Captive Sacrifice and Trophy Taking among the Ancient Maya," in *The Taking and Displaying of Human Body Parts as Trophies by Amerindians* (2007), 377–99.

22 Mark Alan Wright and Brant Gardner, "The Cultural Context of Nephite Apostasy," *Interpreter: A Journal of Mormon Scripture* 1 (2012): 25–55. http://www.mormoninterpreter.com/the-cultural-context-of-nephite-apostasy/ (accessed September 12, 2014).

23 Eliade, *The Sacred and the Profane*, 11.

24 In John 20:19–20, 26–27, Christ invites His apostles to touch His hands first and secondarily His side.

25 We might speculate that the expression broken heart may have had a much more literal connotation in their cultural context.

26 On Lintel 24 from Yaxchilan, Ix K'abal Xook is shown pulling a thorny rope through her tongue, and the ensuing blood drips onto the paper that she burns on Lintel 25.

27 Alfred M. Tozzer, *Landa's relación de las cosas de Yucatán*, *Papers of the Peabody Museum of American Archaeology and Ethnology* 18 (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University, 1941), 159–60.

28 Karl Taube, "The Jade Hearth: Centrality, Rulership, and the Classic Maya Temple," in *Function and Meaning*, 429.

29 John Bierhorst, *History and Mythology of the Aztecs: The Codex Chimalpopoca* (Tucson, AZ: University of Arizona Press,1992), 23.

30 Bernardino de Sahagún, *Florentine Codex: General History of the Things of New Spain*. 1555-79. Translated by Arthur J. O. Anderson and Charles E. Dibble. 12 Vols. (Santa Fe: School of American Research; Salt Lake City: University of Utah, 1950-82).

31 Taube, "Jade Hearth," 432–33.

32 Alma and Amulek were speaking from experience, as they had both had powerful hierophanic experiences in the form of angelic visitations while out journeying rather than in a structure dedicated to worship (Mosiah 27:11; Alma 10:7).

33 Mark Alan Wright, "The Cultural Tapestry of Mesoamerica," *Journal of the Book of Mormon and Other Restoration Scripture* 23/2 (2013): 4–21.

34 David Stuart, *The Inscriptions of Temple XIX at Palenque.* (San Francisco: Pre-Columbian Art Research Institute. 2005), 160.

35 Mark Alan Wright, *A Study of Classic Maya Rulership*, PhD diss. (University of California, Riverside, Department of Anthropology, 2011). Accessible at http://escholarship.org/uc/item/6pb5g8h2.

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Alma's Reality: Reading Alma as Sinful, Repentant, Traumatized, Questioning, and Righteous

Amanda Brown

Review of Kylie Nielson Turley, *Alma 1–29: A Brief Theological Introduction* (Provo, UT: The Neal A. Maxwell Institute for Religious Scholarship, 2020). 162 pages. $9.95 (paperback).

Abstract: *Kylie Nielson Turley delves deep into the conversion and ministry of Alma the Younger, reading new life into a well-known narrative. By analyzing Alma's story with the full weight of his humanity in mind, she breathes emotion into Alma's conversion and missionary efforts. Her efforts to read Alma without a veneer of superhumanity result in a highly relatable figure who has known wickedness, repentance, loss, depression, and righteousness.*

Kylie Nielson Turley accomplishes exactly what the Maxwell Institute's *Brief Theological Introductions* series seeks to do — namely, to "read a few Book of Mormon stories you have probably read before and see them in a new light."[1] She achieves this through careful analysis of the life of Alma the Younger (hereafter referred to as Alma) as reported by the Book of Alma's structural narrative. In re-analyzing familiar stories, Turley questions common (and assumed) tropes about Alma such as his age at the time of his conversion, the depths of his prior depravity, and the ramifications of personal trauma experienced during his missionary efforts. By allowing these stories the emotion all too often discarded in the standard "Sunday School answers," Turley restores power to Alma's

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1. Kylie Nielson Turley, *Alma 1-29: A Brief Theological Introduction* (Provo, UT: The Neal A. Maxwell Institute for Religious Scholarship, 2020), 2.

redemptive arch and asks the reader to acknowledge the Atonement's ability to overcome all.

The book begins by questioning the specific structure surrounding the events of Alma's life, noticing the specificity with which dates and ages of both Alma and his father are recorded. After careful analysis, Turley concludes that Alma is far older than a wayward teenager. This provokes a poignant reflection: "Is it easier to trust an adult leader who had some youthful indiscretions (and repented) — or one who spent decades trying to destroy the church as an adult (and repented)?"[2]

Reading Alma as a repentant adult alters his interactions with the apostate figures he continuously faces. Turley notes, "When readers view Alma as the very wicked and idolatrous unbeliever the narrator describes, they likely interpret the text differently."[3] She goes as far as to compare characterizations of Alma to those of Amalickiah, laying out a parallel structure in descriptions that substantiate the depths of Alma's former sinful lifestyle. And yet, Alma's death report specifically notes, "This we know, that he was a righteous man" (Alma 45:19), demonstrating the ability of Alma's repentance and conversion to overcome all previous sin, regardless of its severity.

Switching focus, the book discusses the trauma response of the Nephites to the destruction caused by a Lamanite attack upon the newly established Anti-Nephi-Lehis. The Nephites mourn and lament (Alma 28:4) the familial relationships lost in a battle where tens of thousands perish. In such circumstances, Turley proposes that Alma 29 is not a missionary anthem but a psalm of mourning and lament wherein Alma and the people ask "Why?"

Viewing this psalm as a trauma response to the battle and to the martyrdom of the believing women and children at Ammonihah, Turley emphasizes Alma's ability to plead for continued hope and understanding in Christ despite the recent chaos and trauma. She says, "Questioning God about why something happens demonstrates faith that he is there and hope that he has an answer. Moreover, underlying both questions is a plea for God to make sense of suffering. … To ask why is to ask for meaning, to ask God to make sense of suffering. Pain and suffering prompt the question, but it is meaninglessness that is unendurable."[4]

Throughout the work, Turley rereads stories readers are accustomed to perceiving one way so as to maximize comprehension of the ability

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2. Ibid., 15.
3. Ibid., 41.
4. Ibid., 106.

of Christ's Atonement to transcend apostasy, trauma, marginalization, and the heavens' seeming silence in the face of earth-shattering loss. Reading stories with the human nature of our scriptural heroes in mind is a demanding task. It asks us to forgo placing scriptural figures on pedestals and accept the need all have for Jesus Christ. As Turley so poignantly states, "We may lose a superhuman scripture hero, an idol untouched by doubt or despair and unaffected by circumstances. … But the stories of Alma 1–29 are not trite or slick or flimsy. They offer more than theological Band-Aids."[5] Alma's story indeed offers more than a theological Band-Aid. It offers belief in Christ, hope in the face of loss, and a path through self-inflicted and inescapable suffering alike.

Amanda Colleen Brown *holds an MA in Bible and the Ancient Near East from The Hebrew University at Jerusalem, where she focused on Akkadian, Modern Hebrew, and Israelite popular religion as it relates to women's narratives. She previously graduated from Brigham Young University with a bachelor's degree in Ancient Near Eastern Studies. She is also passionate about a variety of dance styles, literature, and travel.*

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5.   Ibid., 4.

Joseph Smith as a Book of Mormon Storyteller

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Brian C. Hales

Abstract: *For nearly 200 years, skeptics have promoted different naturalistic explanations to describe how Joseph Smith generated all the words of the Book of Mormon. The more popular theories include plagiarism (e.g. of the Solomon Spaulding manuscript), collaboration (with Oliver Cowdery, Sidney Rigdon, etc.), mental illness (bipolar, dissociative, or narcissistic personality disorders) and automatic writing, also called "spirit writing," "trance writing," or "channeling." A fifth and currently the most popular theory posits that Joseph Smith possessed all the intellectual abilities needed to complete the task. A variation on this last explanation proposes that he used the methods of professional storytellers. For millennia, bards and minstrels have entertained their audiences with tales that extended over many hours and over several days. This article explores their techniques to assess whether Joseph Smith might have adopted such methodologies during the three-month dictation of the Book of Mormon. Through extensive fieldwork and research, the secrets of the Serbo-Croatian storytellers' abilities to dictate polished stories in real time have been identified. Their technique, also found with modification among bards throughout the world, involves the memorization of formulaic language organized into formula systems in order to minimize the number of mental choices the tale-teller must make while wordsmithing each phrase. These formulas are evident in the meter, syntax, or lexical combinations employed in the storyteller's sentences. Professional bards train for many years to learn the patterns and commit them to memory. When compared to Joseph Smith and the Book of Mormon, the historical record fails to support that he had trained in the use of formula systems prior to 1829 or that his dictation employed a rhythmic delivery of the phrases. Neither are formula patterns detected in the printed 1830 Book of Mormon. Apparently, Smith did not adopt this traditional storyteller's methodology to dictate the Book of Mormon.*

The tavern's lights flicker across the faces of the male crowd who gather almost ceremoniously at the end of another Bosnian workday in July of 1935. As scattered greetings and gossiping rumble in subdued tones, a famous visiting bard, hoping to earn a dinar or two, takes his place on the makeshift stage in the corner of the room. After tuning his gusle, a one-stringed instrument he plays as he recites, Avdo Međedović begins a musical rendition of the renowned story *The Wedding of Meho, Son of Smail.* The lengthy tale of over 12,000 lines describes an imaginary Meho's ambition, betrayal, and ultimate victory. Međedović's melodic prose unfolds for hours until the crowd departs or sleeps.[1] On the morrow, they know Avdo will return to continue the tale, repeating this process day after day, until Meho triumphs and marries his bride.

Over a century earlier on the other side of the world in Harmony, Pennsylvania, a 23-year-old farmer named Joseph Smith places his head in a hat and recites a few thousand words each day that he represents as a translation of an ancient record. During the next three months, Smith joins Oliver Cowdery and other scribes who record streams of sentences that eventually become the Book of Mormon.

Both of these events involved the telling of lengthy stories to eager audiences over multiple days of oral performance. Such similarities spawn the question, *Could Joseph Smith have employed the same techniques in dictating the Book of Mormon as professional storytellers like Avdo Međedović used to enthrall their audiences with their lengthy tales?*

Questions of how Joseph Smith generated all the words of the Book of Mormon have been the focus of much conjecture by investigators in the past. Popular theories include plagiarism, collaboration, mental illness, automatic writing, and attributing the text purely to Joseph's intellect.[2] A variation on the fifth theory poses that Joseph developed storytelling skills to the point that he could generate the entire narrative as Međedović, Homer, Irish bards, or English minstrels of bygone ages have sung or performed their epic oral narratives.

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1. On May 23, 1950, Albert Lord returned to the Balkans to re-record Međedović telling "The Wedding of Meho, Son of Smail." At that time, the story was shorter at 8,488 lines.

2. See Brian C. Hales, "Naturalistic Explanations of the Origin of the Book of Mormon: A Longitudinal Study," *BYU Studies Quarterly* 58, no. 3 (2019): 105–48, https://byustudies.byu.edu/wp-content/uploads/2020/05/58 3halessecured.pdf.

Fawn Brodie wrote in 1945 that Joseph Smith's "talent, it is true, was not exceptional, for his book [the Book of Mormon] lacked subtlety, wit, and style. He was chiefly a tale-teller and preacher."[3] Nine years later Kimball Young agreed: "As a youth, [Joseph Smith] was a great spinner of tall yarns. It is more than likely that with the telling and retelling of these stories, he came to believe them to be true."[4]

In his book *Joseph Smith and the Origins of The Book of Mormon*, David Persuitte concurs: "[M]ost likely it was Joseph, with his storytelling ability, who welded everything together to make *The Book of Mormon* a cohesive whole."[5] According to Meredith Ray Sheets and Kendal Sheets: "By the time he reached his teens, Joseph Jr. was handsome and charismatic, a talented storyteller and persuasive speaker."[6] Dale Morgan similarly affirmed: "Mormons and non-Mormon accounts alike agree that the youthful Joseph Smith had a remarkable imagination and a well-developed talent as a teller of tales."[7]

In his 2016 PhD dissertation, William L. Davis expands this idea: "[T]he *Book of Mormon* stands as one of the longest recorded oral performances in the history of American culture. … [T]he fundamental oral techniques Smith employed were the same techniques common to storytellers, preachers, trance lecturers and other social and political orators in early nineteenth-century America."[8] Four years later in *Visions in a Seer Stone*, Davis further describes the Book of Mormon "as

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3. Fawn Brodie, *No Man Knows My History: The Life of Joseph Smith, the Mormon Prophet*, 2d ed. rev. (1945; repr. New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1971), 62.

4. Kimball Young, *Isn't One Wife Enough?* (New York: Henry Holt and Company, 1954), 82.

5. David Persuitte, *Joseph Smith and the Origins of The Book of Mormon*, 2nd ed. (Jefferson, NC: McFarland, 2000), 19.

6. Meredith Ray Sheets and Kendal Sheets, *The Book of Mormon: Book of Lies* (McLean, VA: 1811 Press, 2012), 15.

7. Dale Morgan, *Dale Morgan on the Mormons: Collected Works, Part 2, 1949–1970* (Norman, OK: University of Oklahoma, 2014), 192. It is unfortunate Morgan provided no documentation to support this statement.

8. William Davis, "Performing Revelation: Joseph Smith's Oral Performance of *The Book of Mormon*" (PhD dissertation, UCLA, 2016), 5, 24. Research shows that storytellers, orators (preachers), and trance lecturers produce their words with different methodologies. See Brian C. Hales, "Automatic Writing and the Book of Mormon: An Update," *Dialogue* 53, no. 2 (Summer 2019): 1–35, https://www.dialoguejournal.com/wp-content/uploads/sbi/articles/Dialogue_V52N02_1.pdf and Brian C. Hales, "Joseph Smith as a Book of Mormon Orator," forthcoming.

a script, or a transcript, of Smith's performative process — the artifact of a grander, multifaceted oratorical effort."[9]

This article evaluates the theory that Joseph Smith used storytelling methods to produce the Book of Mormon. The first section examines the discovery and design of the techniques used by accomplished bards. The remaining section explores and compares those techniques to historical descriptions of Joseph Smith's dictation of the Book of Mormon in 1829.[10]

The Storyteller's Techniques

Appreciating the popularity of storytelling over the past centuries may be difficult for people in literate and literary cultures today. Before the printing press was invented, when few could read and books were hand-scribed by quill and ink, oral messages were the only communications society could offer the average citizen.

"Just when the custom of reciting and chanting stories began it is impossible to determine," observes Ruth Crosby. "It is probably as old as humanity itself."[11]

> In ancient Greece and Rome, and in England of the early Middle Ages the custom of oral delivery was well established. … [T]he professional story-teller was one of the most popular characters in the Middle Ages. Before all classes of people and upon all occasions of festivity he entertained with his inexhaustible supply of gestes, romances, lays, saints' lives, and miracles of the Virgin. … The professional minstrel was often employed also merely to help some king or nobleman while away his leisure hours. Often, too, on journeys, whether on

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9. William L. Davis, *Visions in a Seer Stone: Joseph Smith and the Making of the Book of Mormon* (Chapel Hill, NC: University of North Carolina Press, 2020), 2. Davis has proposed multiple naturalistic methodologies for Joseph Smith including borrowing from John Bunyan's 1678 book, *The Pilgrim's Progress* (William L. Davis, "Who really wrote the Book of Mormon?," *Salon.com*, Nov. 1, 2012, http://www.salon.com/2012/10/31/who_really_wrote_the_book_of_mormon/), imitating frontier preachers by "laying down heads" (*Visions in a Seer Stone*), and automatic writing (William L. Davis, "The Book of Mormon and the Limits of Naturalistic Criteria: Comparing Joseph Smith and Andrew Jackson Davis," *Dialogue: A Journal of Mormon Thought* 53, no. 3 [Fall 2020]: 73–104).

10. See John W. Welch, ed., *Opening the Heavens: Accounts of Divine Manifestations 1820–1844*, 2nd ed. (Provo, UT: BYU Press, 2017), 126–227, https://byustudies.byu.edu/wp-content/uploads/2020/11/chp-welch-opening-2-sec2.pdf.

11. Ruth Crosby, "Oral Delivery in the Middle Ages," *Speculum*, 11, no. 1 (January 1936): 88.

horse-back or shipboard, the song or recitation of the minstrel was heard. Not only before the nobility but for the benefit of the common people in the streets the professional story-teller recited his tales and paused at interesting points to pass his hat for contributions. … [T]he popularity of the minstrel in the days when books and readers were few and when theaters offered no rival attractions, cannot be overestimated.[12]

Traditional stories of varying lengths have been perpetuated by storytellers in virtually all cultures.[13] Unfortunately, of the approximately 3000 languages spoken throughout the world, only a few dozen have preserved their stories through writing.[14] Oral telling and retelling has been the primary way to archive those narratives. Some of the more prominent oral stories that have been recorded from various traditions are listed in Table 1.

Origin	Title	Approx. Word Count
Joseph Smith	Book of Mormon	269,320
Greek (Homer)	*Iliad*	148,045
Iceland	*The Story of Burnt Njal*	144,000
Greek (Homer)	*Odyssey*	134,560
Finnish	*The Kalevala*	130,430
Italy-Latin (Virgil)	*The Aeneid*	108,170
Middle East	*Arabian Nights*	81,000
Serbo-Croatian	*The Marriage of Meho*	80,000
Iceland	*The Eddas of the Norse Mythology*	80,000
Tonga	*The Banished Child*	43,000
Sudan	*The Epic of Son-Jara*	40,000
Congo	*Mwindo Epics*	<30,000
[multiple]	*Gilgamesh: Man's First Story*	25,500
Spanish	*El Romancero*	25,000
French	*La Chanson de Roland*	25,000
Mali	*Sundiata: An Epic of Old Mali*	24,000
Old English	*Beowulf*	22,000

12. Ibid., 91–93.

13. See Norma J. Livo and Sandra A. Reitz, *Storytelling: Process and Practice* (Littleton, CO: Libraries Unlimited, 1986), 81; Daniel Biebuyck, Mateene Kahombo, and Kahombo C. Mateene, eds., *The Mwindo Epic from the Banyanga (Zaire)* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1969); Daniel P. Biebuyck, *Hero and Chief: Epic Literature from the Banyanga, Zaire Republic* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1978), 127–271.

14. Walter J. Ong, *Orality and Literacy: The Technologizing of the Word*

Origin	Title	Approx. Word Count
Spanish	*El Cid*	15,000
Byzantine	*The Lament of the Virgin*	12,000
Turkish	*The Book of Dede Korkut* (longest story)	11,000
Arabia	*Taghribat Bani Hilal*	8,700
Old English	*Bede's Story of Caedmon*	5,000
Turkish	*Kokotoy's Memorial Feast*	751

Table 1. Prominent oral texts.

Learning how lengthy stories were produced and reproduced during past centuries and even millennia has become part of an academic discipline solely devoted to understanding this genre of oral performance.[15]

Fieldwork in Yugoslavia

During the summer of 1933 and from June 1934 to September 1935, Professor Milman Parry of the Department of the Classics at Harvard University visited Yugoslavia, where with the help of Harvard student Albert Lord, he archived the tales recited by dozens of storytellers. Many of the stories were recorded on 3,500 double-sided aluminum discs, each with a playing time of about four minutes. Other stories were transcribed into over 800 notebooks.[16] Together, over 12,500 individual texts were preserved in some form for future study.[17]

Parry and Lord discovered that "[m]ost Yugoslav epics are shorter than the Homeric poems [Iliad and the Odyssey]. … Twelve thousand lines is the approximate length of the longest of songs."[18] But, unlike Homer (and Virgil, and the Nordics), the Serbo-Croatian storytellers were available for scholarly research. We cannot know if Homer or

(New York: Routledge, 2002), 7, https://monoskop.org/images/d/db/Ong_Walter_J_Orality_and_Literacy_2nd_ed.pdf.

15. See John Miles Foley, *Oral-Formulaic Theory and Research: An Introduction and Annotated Bibliography* (New York: Garland Publishing, 1985). Foley spent "thirteen years of scouring libraries through the United States and Europe" to acquire "the annotation of more than 1800 entries" (xiii). Since that year, hundreds additional publications have appeared on the subject.

16. "Milman Parry Collection," Harvard University, https://chs.harvard.edu/milman-parry-collection/.

17. See Matthew W. Kay, *The Index of the Milman Parry Collection, 1933–1935: Heroic Songs, Conversations, and Stories* (New York: Garland Publishing, 1995).

18. Albert B. Lord, *The Singer of Tales* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1960), 45–46

Virgil recounted their long narratives verbally without notes,[19] but in the 1930s, Serbo-Croatian storytellers of tales over 80,000 words could be recorded and even filmed, as they performed their massive oral works. Transcripts of their performances were also made available to study.

The databases created through this fieldwork allows researchers to investigate the mental workings of the bards as they recite. Noam Chomsky, who has been called "the father of modern linguistics," explains: "[L]inguistic theory is mentalistic, since it is concerned with discovering a mental reality underlying actual behavior." He adds: "The problem for the linguist … is to determine from the data of performance the underlying system of rules that has been mastered by the speaker-hearer and that he puts to use in actual performance."[20]

The *performance* data of the Serbo-Croatian storytellers obtained by Parry and Lord provides helpful responses to the following questions:

- Where do the stories come from?
- How are the stories remembered?
- How are polished sentences generated in the moment?

Researching both modern and ancient storytelling may not discover all the techniques employed in the past, but it can identify prominent methodologies, which can be used for comparison.

Avdo Međedović and *The Marriage of Smailagić Meho*
Among the many storytellers that Parry and Lord encountered in Yugoslavia, perhaps the best documented is the story-singer Avdo Međedović (1875–1953).[21] Between June 28 and August 11, 1935, Parry recorded nine (44,902 lines) and transcribed four (33,653 lines) out of 58 of Avdo's most popular epic poems, all in his native tongue.[22]

Fortunately for researchers today, one of Međedović's longest stories was subsequently translated into English and published by Harvard

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19. William L. Davis acknowledges: "The *Iliad* and *Odyssey* … developed over centuries within a vibrant oral tradition in which performers produced an endless number of variations (multiforms) of the epics. How much of Homer's texts actually belong to the poet Homer (some scholars question if he ever existed), or to generations of poets who may have refined his work, is unknown" (Davis, "Performing Revelation," 5n11).

20. Noam Chomsky, *Aspects of the Theory of Syntax* (Cambridge, MA: The MIT Press, 1965), 4.

21. See Albert B. Lord and David E. Bynum, *Serbo-Croatian Heroic Songs: The Wedding of Smailagić Meho*, vol. 3, (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1974).

22. Ibid., 3:6–7. See also Davis, "Performing Revelation," 246.

University Press in 1974. *The Marriage of Smailagić Meho* contains 12,331 lines of script with approximately 6.5 words per line, topping more than 80,000 words.[23] With recordings of his original audio and Croatian and English transcriptions, *The Marriage of Smailagić Meho* became a case study into the methodology of at least one form of epic storytelling.

Concerning Yugoslavian storytellers like Međedović, Albert Lord, who became a Professor of Slavic and Comparative Literature at Harvard, commented:

> If we are fully aware that the singer is composing as he sings, the most striking element in the performance itself is the speed with which he proceeds. It is not unusual for a Yugoslav bard to sing at the rate of from ten to twenty ten-syllable lines a minute [65 to 130 words per minute]. Since, as we shall see, he has not memorized his song, we must conclude either that he is a phenomenal virtuoso or that he has a special technique of composition outside our own field of experience. We must rule out the first of these alternatives because there are too many singers; so many geniuses simply cannot appear in a single generation or continue to appear inexorably from one age to another. The answer of course lies in the second alternative, namely, a special technique of composition.[24]

The Spectrum of "Techniques of Composition"

Lord refers to "a special technique of composition" that allow Serbian storytellers like Avdo Međedović to rapidly recite a story of more than 80,000 words to an audience without using written notes. The potential methodologies that would endow a storyteller with this ability exist on a spectrum as shown in Figure 1. At one end are polished sentences extracted completely from memory. At the other end, nothing is memorized, and the storylines and wording are all newly created in the moment. An interim position on the continuum describes the

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23. Međedović's "longest song on records" ["Osmanbeg Delibegovic and Pavicevic Luke"] contains 13,331 lines [approximately 86,000 words] and fills 199 record sides, or 100 12-inch discs recorded on both sides. If one reckons five minutes of singing on one side of a record, then this song represents over 16 hours of singing time." Lord and Bynum, *Serbo-Croatian Heroic Songs: The Wedding of Smailagić Meho*, vol. 3, 7. Unfortunately, "Osmanbeg Delibegovic and Pavicevic Luke" has not been translated into English.

24. Lord, *The Singer of Tales*, 17.

memorization of ideas and outlines ahead of time that simply need to be clothed in language during the performance.
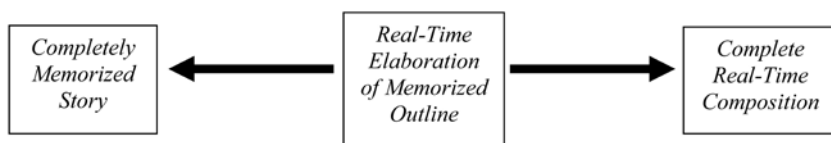

Figure 1. "Techniques of Composition" spectrum.

A Completely Memorized Story

Totally memorizing lengthy narratives has been reported and verified historically. For example, Muslim followers have committed the entire Qur'an (around 70,000 words in English) to memory. However, as a general approach to professional storytelling, the enormous pre-performance commitment of time and mental effort would create obstacles. The story itself would need to be fully composed and polished prior to memorization. Writing such narratives would require literacy, an ability seldom possessed by early minstrels and bards.

Remembering each word and word-order would demand multiple repetitions of the material. How many repetitions would depend upon the memory ability of the bard, but for lengthy stories, the effort would undoubtedly require the investment of a substantial amount of time.

Committing thousands of words to memory might be possible for a few gifted individuals, but probably not many. Most would find that memorization limits the number of stories in their repertoires to unacceptably low levels. Reciting a memorized narration also leaves the bard less responsive to audience reactions and other surrounding factors. This lack of reactivity could render the performances stiffer and possibly less interesting.

Memorization does have its advantages. During the performance, remembering words previously memorized would require relatively little on-the-spot cognitive activity. A well-memorized story may flow without much mental processing.

Complete Real-Time Composition

At the other end of the spectrum is a hypothetical method wherein bards would create everything, the storylines and wording, in the moment of the recital. Nothing flowing from the bard's mouth would be memorized — it would all be new. The sentences, and even the ideas behind those sentences, would be created completely extemporaneously.

This theoretical technique would be intellectually difficult. Making up the plotlines, characters, geographies, conversations, and other details off the top of the storyteller's head in real-time would be challenging. But even more formidable would be mentally constructing a continuous stream of coherent final-draft sentences extemporaneously.

The Cognitive Demands of Creating a Story Extemporaneously

Of all the challenges confronting a professional storyteller, choosing the right word and syntax for the next sentence in their unfolding story may be the most cognitively demanding.

The Demands of Wordsmithing a *Written* Message

To illustrate, consider an example of the decisions confronting George Orwell[25] as he wrote his popular 27,695-word *Animal Farm*. Orwell described his approach: "A scrupulous writer, in every sentence that he writes, will ask himself at least four questions, thus: What am I trying to say? What words will express it? What image or idiom will make it clearer? Is this image fresh enough to have an effect?"[26]

At the moment Orwell composed the first sentence of *Animal Farm*, he had several choices to make. The published version reads: "Mr. Jones, of the Manor Farm, had locked the hen-houses for the night, but was too drunk to remember to shut the popholes." Tables 2 and 3 identify some of the word choices Orwell might have considered along with obviously unusable possibilities (cross-outs). Several of the alternate wordsmithing options that Orwell might have chosen while building the first sentence were more eloquent than others.

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25. Orwell's real name was Eric Arthur Blair.

26. George Orwell, *A Collection of Essays* (San Diego: Harvest/HBJ Book, 1946), 165.

First Line of *Animal Farm*	"Mr. Jones,	of the Manor Farm,	had locked	the hen	houses
Alternative Words	Mr. Smith	of the McGregor Farm	~~had bolted~~	the chicken	coops
	Mr. Brown	of the McDonald Farm	had secured	~~the chicks~~	~~homes~~
	Mr. Farmer	of the Jones' Farm	had closed	~~the birds~~	pens
	Mr. Orwell	~~of Manor village~~	~~had padlocked~~	~~the egg-layers~~	cages
Story Considerations	Whatever name is chosen must be used throughout.	Whatever name is chosen must be used throughout.	What type of locks were common in this time period?	What about locking up the pigs or other animals' cages?	

Table 2. Wordsmithing options (first half of sentence).

First Line of *Animal Farm*	for the night	but was too drunk	to remember	to shut	the popholes."
Alternative Words	for the evening	~~but was too tipsy~~	to recall	to close	the small door allowing chickens to access the outside:
	for the day	but was too intoxicated	~~to recollect~~	to lock	
	~~for the daytime~~	~~but was too plastered~~	~~to think about~~	~~to seal~~	
	at twilight	but was too inebriated	to know	~~to fasten~~	
Story Considerations	Is darkness a factor at this point in the story?	Need to explain why he was already drunk.	Was this his daily routine or was this a special occasion?		Will readers know what this is?

Table 3. Wordsmithing options (second half of sentence).

Obtaining a high level of textual refinement generally necessitates rewriting of multiple drafts prior to the final composition. Anne Lamott, author of *Bird by Bird: Some Instructions on Writing and Life*, explains the challenge: "I know some very great writers, writers you love who write beautifully and have made a great deal of money, and not *one* of them sits down routinely feeling wildly enthusiastic and confident. Not one of them writes elegant first drafts." Bernard Malamud, [27]one of the best known American Jewish authors of the 20th century agrees: "First

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27. Anne Lamott, *Bird by Bird: Some Instructions on Writing and Life* (New York: Random House, 1994) 20–21; emphasis in original.

drafts are for learning what your novel or story is about. Revision is working with that knowledge to enlarge and enhance an idea, to re-form it."[28] Betty Mattix Dietsch, author of *Reasoning & Writing Well*, concurs: "Some inexperienced writers seem to think they have hit the jackpot on their first draft. They evade the fact that every exploratory draft needs more work."[29]

Orwell once lamented: "Writing a book is a horrible, exhausting struggle, like a long bout of some painful illness."[30] He knew the first sentence of his book would never have created itself without his deliberate intellectual effort, neither the second nor the third. He was solely in charge of crafting every polished phrase. No author including Orwell can outsource word-choices to someone else's brain or to an unconscious portion of their own.[31]

The Demands of Wordsmithing an *Oral* Message

Bards who tell incoherent tales or whose lines reek with poorly constructed sentences will not be popular, so their situation is more critical and unforgiving. Any of the wording of a story that is not committed to memory requires nearly the same level of wordsmithing and revising as a written narrative, except it must be done mentally on-the-spot as the phrases are being articulated. Telling a lucid tale involves the simultaneous mental processing of multiple levels of story content during the oral performance:

1. Context
    a. Timeline: current setting in contrast to past and future events.
    b. Characters on center stage and their interpersonal relationships.

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28. Alan Cheuse and Nicholas Delbanco, eds., *Talking Horse: Bernard Malamud on Life and Work* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1996), 177.

29. Betty Mattix Dietsch, *Reasoning & Writing Well: A Rhetoric, Research Guide, Reader, and Handbook*, 4th ed. (Boston: McGraw-Hill, 2006), 62.

30. Orwell, *A Collection of Essays*, 316.

31. The "automatic writing" theory used to explain the origin of the Book of Mormon assumes that Joseph Smith entered an alternate state or trance state where word-choices became automated in some unconscious part of his brain. Such a mental state that is capable of high-level cognitive function without conscious participation has never been shown to exist. See Brian C. Hales, "Automatic Writing and the Book of Mormon: An Update," *Dialogue* 53, no. 2 (Summer 2019): 1–35, https://www.dialoguejournal.com/wp-content/uploads/sbi/articles/Dialogue_V52N02_1.pdf.

    c. Locations of activities and consistency of geography and ecology.

    d. Correlation with previous content, editorial promises, section headings, flashbacks, and embedded sub-stories.

2. Message or plot

    a. Story actions: design, purposes, and plausibility.

    b. Dialogues and orations: delivery, clarity, and implications.

    c. Ongoing invention and imagination.

3. Wordsmithing

    a. Vocabulary: words to convey the intended meaning.

    b. Grammar: the relationship of subjects, verbs, nouns, adjectives, adverbs, and prepositions in forming phrases.

    c. Syntax: the order of words and phrases in the sentences.

4. Finalization

    a. Editing, revising, and proofreading.

    b. Critical analysis of content.

5. Accurate verbal expression of final draft

All of the mental processing of these story features (and possibly others — depending on the genre of narrative) must be compressed into the moment of dictation within the bard's mind. There, imagination converges with multiple sources of data stored in long and short term memory, split-second decisions are made, and a word stream produced.

The storyteller's accomplishments are even more impressive in light of scientific studies regarding human cognitive abilities. In a landmark 1956 article entitled "The Magical Number Seven, Plus or Minus Two: Some Limits on our Capacity for Processing Information," George A. Miller, a Professor of Psychology at Harvard, described research data showing that the human brain cannot simultaneously process limitless "chunks" of data. When the brain's cerebral "channel capacity" exceeds its maximum boundary, confusion and errors will result: "The span of absolute judgment and the span of immediate memory impose severe limitations on the amount of information that we are able to receive, process, and remember. … There seems to be some limitation built into us either by learning or by the design of our nervous

systems, a limit that keeps our channel capacities in this general range" of five to nine data chunks at one time.[32]

While dozens of additional studies have examined Miller's conclusions, his primary observation that the human mind has limited abilities to process information has been repeatedly corroborated.[33] Addressing this reality, Albert Lord asks: "How does the oral poet meet the need of the requirements of rapid composition without the aid of writing and without memorizing a fixed form?"[34] The answer involves several specific storytelling strategies.

Sources of Storytellers' Stories

Part of the response to Lord's question is for bards to borrow storylines or compose them ahead of time. Portrayals of professional storytellers rising to their feet and creating lengthy stories on-the-spot are generally inaccurate.[35] Undoubtedly some experienced bards occasionally recited tales they created off-the-top-of-their-heads, but such offerings would have been limited in duration and in their scope of originality. Milman Parry realized: "Even though the poet has an unusual memory, he cannot, without paper, make of his own words a poem of any length."[36]

Historically, creating extemporaneous stories was not a primary focus of the village storyteller. Saint Louis University Professor Walter Ong explains, "The oral epic (and by hypothetical extension other forms of narrative in oral cultures) has nothing to do with creative imagination in the modern sense of this term."[37] Albert Lord noted that the storyteller's primary focus is properly voicing the story, not dazzling the audience with a new tale: "Expression is his business, not originality, which, indeed, is a concept quite foreign to him and one that he would avoid."[38]

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32. George A. Miller, "The Magical Number Seven, Plus or Minus Two: Some Limits on our Capacity for Processing Information," *Psychological Review* 63, no. 2 (March 1956): 86, 95. Sentence order reversed.

33. See Alan Baddeley, "The Magical Number Seven: Still Magic After All These Years?" *Psychological Review* 101, no. 2 (1994) 353–56; Koenraad Kuiper, "On the Linguistic Properties of Formulaic Speech" *Oral Tradition* 15, no. 2 (2000): 281.

34. Lord, *The Singer of Tales*, 22.

35. Norma J. Livo and Sandra A. Reitz, *Storytelling: Process and Practice* (Littleton, CO: Libraries Unlimited, 1986), 8, 29, 33.

36. Milman Parry, "Studies in the Epic Technique of Oral Verse-Making. I. Homer and Homeric Style," *Harvard Studies in Classical Philology* 41 (1930): 77.

37. Ong, *Orality and Literacy*, 143.

38. Lord, *The Singer of Tales*, 44–45.

By borrowing or creating a story ahead of time, a portion of the mental burden of the oral presentation is removed. The need to conjure up all the plotlines of the tale is moved to pre-performance, rather than being required during the recital.

Formulas: "Thinking in Mnemonic Patterns"

Once a storyteller identifies a tale to add to his repertoire, what is the next step? How does the bard internalize the story to make retelling possible in the future? In *Orality and Literacy*, Walter Ong explains:

> How could you ever call back to mind what you had so laboriously worked out? The only answer is: Think memorable thoughts. In a primary oral culture, to solve effectively the problem of retaining and retrieving carefully articulated thought, you have to do your thinking in mnemonic patterns, shaped for ready oral recurrence. Your thought must come into being in heavily rhythmic, balanced patterns, in repetitions or antitheses, in alliterations and assonances, in epithetic and other formulary expressions. … Serious thought is intertwined with memory systems. … *Formulas* help implement rhythmic discourse and also act as mnemonic aids in their own right.[39]

In other words, to present prolonged tales and recount them with precision when desired, storytellers learn them systematically as "formulas." What is a formula? Milman Parry described a formula as "a group of words which is regularly employed under the same metrical conditions to express a given essential idea."[40] More specifically, English medievalist Ronald Waldron defines formulas as "'empty' rhythmical-syntactical 'molds,' ready to be filled with meaning."[41]

Ulrich Marzolph clarifies: "Formulas contain complex references in a comparatively simple form, and in compositional practice serve as mnemonic devices in order to construct powerful images that help the audience understand a variety of underlying notions on a shared cultural

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39. Ong, *Orality and Literacy*, 34; emphasis added.

40. Parry, "Studies in the Epic Technique of Oral Verse-Making. I. Homer and Homeric Style," 80.

41. Ronald A. Waldron, "Oral-Formulaic Technique and Middle English Alliterative Poetry," *Speculum* 32, no. 4 (October 1957), 798n14. "Mold" in original spelled "mould."

platform."[42] They are phrases and sentences that reflect "the same meter and syntax" as the surrounding phrases and sentences, thus allowing them to be spoken or sung to the same rhythm or pattern.[43]

Formulas shift the mental activity of the bard away from wordsmithing to reciting formulaic language, which is memorized and can be recalled almost automatically. For example, imagine attending a birthday gathering and you are to offer a salutation. You could say:

- I wish [person's name] glad tidings on his birthday.

- May [person's name's] birthday bring joy and delight.

- I hope the anniversary of [person's name's] birth is joyful and content.

Alternatively, you could choose a formula you already know and sing:

"Happy birthday to you.
"Happy birthday to you.
"Happy birthday dear [person's name],
"Happy birthday to you."

In the first examples, each of the seven to eleven-word sentences required wordsmithing. That is, mental decisions of syntax and choice of words like "glad tidings," "joy," "delight," or "content" were required to convey the celebratory feelings. In the second, sixteen words were chosen by remembering the formulaic language of the birthday song (previously memorized) and substituting only one word — the name — where needed.

By memorizing formulas and substituting words here and there, storytellers relate their tale while significantly reducing the amount of intellectual processing required to tell it. "In the interest of efficiency, some formulas can be considered default or preferred formulas. The defaults and preference hierarchies minimize the processing load, so that the poet can attend to planning ahead."[44] During performances, formulas simplify the number of word choices that are required in

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42. Ulrich Marzolph, "A Treasury of Formulaic Narrative: The Persian Popular Romance Hosein-e Kord," *Oral Tradition* 14, no. 2 (1999): 298.

43. Anita Riedinger, "The Old English Formula in Context," *Speculum* 60, no. 2 (April 1985): 305.

44. Marjorie Windelberg and D. Gary Miller, "How (Not) to Define the Epic Formula," *Olifant* 8, no. 1 (Fall 1980): 49.

the presentation and free up mental bandwidth to anticipate the next formula and the subsequent story element to be recited.

Alfred Lord further explicates: "The singer has not had to learn a large number of separate formulas. The commonest ones that he first uses set a basic pattern, and once he has the basic pattern firmly in his grasp, he needs only to substitute another word for the key one."[45]

The Serbo-Croatian Decasyllable Formula

Seeking to understand whether Serbo-Croatian storytellers used formulas, Albert Lord isolated 12,000 lines of text from a single bard and after analysis wrote: "It became clear that almost all, if not all, the lines in the sample passage were formulas" due to the fact that the lines followed "basic patterns of rhythm and syntax."[46] Within these patterns were constant metered phrases of precisely 10 syllables.[47] This decasyllable isosyllabism "is practically invariable."[48]

When performed by Yugoslav bards, these formulaic phrases could be "chanted, recited, or read" or even formally sung.[49] At times, "music may act as a constraint to fix a verbatim oral narrative,"[50] but always implementing lines with ten syllables, with a predictable pause after the fourth (see Figure 2).

Formula Patterns Survive Translation

*A*n example from one of the South Slavic epics from the Parry Collection gathered in 1935 demonstrates a formula pattern that is detectable in the original Serbian and the translated English:

Počeše se falit' kraješnici,	The Borderers began to boast,
Šta je koji bolje učinijo,	What each had done better,
Ko je više dobijo mejdana,	Who had won more duels,
Ko l' njemačkog roba porobijo,	Who had taken a German captive,

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45. Lord, *The Singer of Tales*, 36.

46. Ibid., 47.

47. See Stavro Skendi, "The South Slavic Decasyllable in Albanian Oral Epic Poetry," *Word* 9, no.4 (1953): 339–48.

48. Lord, *The Singer of Tales*, 282.

49. Crosby, "Oral Delivery in the Middle Ages," 94.

50. Walter J. Ong, *Orality and Literacy: The Technologizing of the Word* (New York: Routledge, 2002), 62.

Ko l' je carski hudut raširijo;	Who had broadened the imperial Border;
Ko l' je boljeg konja podhranijo,	Who had reared the better horse,
Ko l' je boljeg sina podnivijo,	Who had nurtured the better son,
Ko l' je bolju ćerku podgojijo.	Who had raised the better daughter,
Egleniše šta ko begeniše.	Each said what he wished to.
Neko sebe, neko konja fali,	One praises himself, another his horse,
Neko sina, a neko sinovca.	One his son, and another his nephew.
Neko fali svoju milu šćerku,	One praises his dear daughter,
Neko šćerku, neko milu seku.	One his daughter, another his dear sister.
Neko fali od brata devojku.	One praises his brother's girl.
E, sve age fale na izredu.	E, All the nobles boast in turn.[51]

Each Slavic phrase contains 10 syllables with predictable pauses. Formulaic language is also evident with patterned repetitions in both versions.[52] There is of course, variety among the singers. Their stock of formulas and thematic material may vary, and more experienced singers may focus less on learning the formulas and more on the process of substituting other words into the formulas. "There is no 'checklist' or 'handbook' of formulas that all singers follow."[53]

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51. Albert Lord, *Epic Singers and Oral Tradition*, trans. Albert Lord (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University, 1991), 50–51, https://chs.harvard.edu/book/lord-albert-bates-epic-singers-and-oral-tradition/.

52. Ibid.

53. Lord, *The Singer of Tales*, 49.

Figure 2. A musical score transcribed from three lines recorded by Parry in 1935 showing each line contains ten syllables. The storyteller would actually sing the lines (top melody) accompanied by a stringed musical instrument called a "gusle" (bottom melody).

Popular Formulas

Experienced storytellers memorize hundreds of "similarly functioning metrical formulas that could fit into his varying metrical needs almost any situation, person, thing, or action."[54] "The most stable formulas," noted Albert Lord speaking of Serbo-Croation storytelling, "will be those for the most common ideas of the poetry. They will express the names of the actors, the main actions, time, and place. … The most frequent actions in the story, the verbs, are often complete formulas in

54. Ong, *Orality and Literacy*, 57.

themselves. … A third common set of formulas indicates time when the action occurs."[55]

Lord had noted that the story tellers develop many phrases over generations to express common ideas in poetry according to several rhythmic patterns.[56] However, later when he visited Yugoslavia in 1950 and 1951, he noted that the traditional singers seemed unable to deal with new social-political themes related to Marxism, apparently because "they lacked formulas necessary to express these new ideas in just measures of verse."[57]

Systems in Other Storytelling Traditions

Further research demonstrates that most professional storytellers in other cultures employ formulas in their retellings. But, "the formula is entirely different in every tradition," explains author Alexandra Hennessey Olsen, "because of the varying demands of meter and syntax."[58]

Lord's discovery of repeated formulaic patterns in Croatian poetic performances was no surprise. Decades earlier Parry had made a similar discovery concerning Homer's epics, recognizing that the Greeks used a six-syllable pattern called the "hexameter," instead of the decasyllable.[59] A hexameter is a line of six metrical units that follow a consistent repetitive pattern of stressed (long) and unstressed (short) syllables. The second position in the first four metric units may be either a single long syllable or two short syllables. Simplified it looks like what is shown in Figure 3.

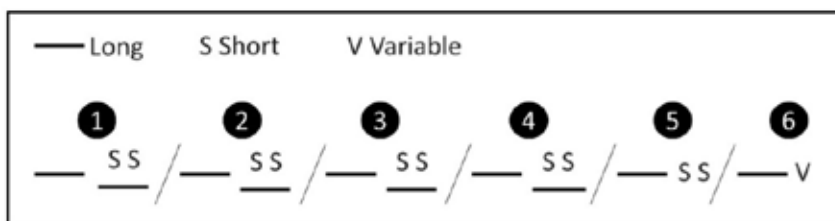Figure 3. A hexameter illustrating stressed (long) and unstressed (short) syllables.

55. Lord, *The Singer of Tales*, 34–35.
56. Ibid., 22.
57. Francis P. Magoun, Jr., "The Oral-Formulaic Character of Anglo-Saxon Narrative Poetry," *Speculum* 28, no. 3 (July 1953): 455.
58. Alexandra Hennessey Olsen, "Oral-Formulaic Research in Old English Studies: I," *Oral Tradition* 1, no. 3 (1986): 566–67.
59. Ibid.

Similar formula-based storytelling has been found in almost every culture. In the 1950s, Daniel P. Biebuyck's research in the Congo, Africa, documented their storytellers use patterns "based on semantically discrete word groups of 7 and 9 syllables."[60] In his book, *The Earliest English Poems*, Michael Alexander describes how "The number of syllables in an Anglo-Saxon line may vary between eight and about twenty," but "the half-line — a verbal and musical phrase containing two stresses — is the basic unit of Old English metric."[61] Formulaic patterns have also been found in Spanish ballads,[62] traditional Anglo-Saxon narrative poetry,[63] Old French epic songs,[64] the Bible,[65] Kazakh epic verse,[66] classic Arabic poetry,[67] and even in the sermons of early American folk preachers.[68]

Formulas Allow Performance Flexibility

An important benefit of formulas is that they allow storylines to be easily contracted or expanded according to the specific needs of the performance and audience. "The mediaeval poet," wrote Ruth Crosby, "was not in the least averse to padding. Thus we have a whole group

60. Daniel Biebuyck "Stylistic Techniques and Formulary Devices in the Mwindo Epic," *Cultures et développement* 11, no. 4 (1979): 587.

61. Michael Alexander trans., *The Earliest English Poems*, 2nd ed. (New York: Penguin Books, 1966), 15–18; see also Alexandra Hennessey Olsen, "Oral-Formulaic Research in Old English Studies: I," *Oral Tradition* 1, no. 3 (1986): 548–606; "Oral—Formulaic Research in Old English Studies: II," *Oral Tradition* 3, nos. 1–2 (1988): 138–90.

62. See Ruth Webber, *Formulistic Diction in the Spanish Ballad* (Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1951).

63. See Magoun, "The Oral-Formulaic Character of Anglo-Saxon Narrative Poetry," 446–67.

64. See Joseph J. Duggan, *The Song of Roland: Formulaic Style and Poetic Craft* (Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1973).

65. See Robert C. Culley, "Oral Tradition and Biblical Studies," *Oral Tradition* 1, no. 1 (1986): 30–65.

66. Karl Reichl, "Formulaic Diction in Kazakh Epic Poetry," *Oral Tradition* 4, no. 3 (1989): 363.

67. See Michael J. Zwettler, *The Oral Tradition of Classical Arabic Poetry* (Columbus: Ohio State University, 1972).

68. Bruce Rosenberg notes: "In the chanted sermon, the verses are preponderantly formulaic (in the Parry-Lord sense) … The verbal skill of the preacher can be judge by his ability to compose formulas and the craft with which he manipulates them." Bruce A. Rosenberg, *The Art of the American Folk Preacher* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1970), 10, 42.

of commonly repeated expletives or phrases used apparently for the primary purpose of helping out the meter."[69]

Albert Lord recognized that singers "habitually 'ornamented' their songs by richness of description … [and] by the addition of detail and fullness of narrative."[70]

While the formulas remain relatively stable, different words may be substituted with each telling resulting in distinct versions every time. "A poem is never repeated in exactly the same words even by the same man; and in the course of years changes may be introduced which apparently render it almost unrecognisable. Cases are known of minstrels who have doubled and even trebled the length of poems which they had heard.[71]" "Different versions of a story may be the result of distinct elements of information becoming conflated or confused if they are closely associated in stored knowledge."[72]

Besides adding additional phrases to expand a performance, oral presenters included adjectives and adverbs that writers might reject. Walter Ong notes that "oral folk prefer … not the soldier, but the brave soldier; not the princess, but the beautiful princess; not the oak, but the sturdy oak. Oral expression thus carries a load of epithets and other formulary baggage which high literacy rejects as cumbersome and tiresomely redundant because of its aggregative weight."[73]

What Formula Systems are Not

Since formula systems were developed to specifically enhance memory and to minimize the amount of mental wordsmithing required while reciting, they should not be confused with isolated formulaic language, repeated phraseology, parallelistic structures, borrowed verbiage, or dialectically similar wording, which do not perform these functions.

A formula system is not formulaic language occurring randomly in a narrative. While a storyteller could employ formulaic language unsystematically throughout a narration, its benefits would be minimal

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69. Crosby, "Oral Delivery in the Middle Ages," 104.

70. Lord and Bynum, *Serbo-Croatian Heroic Songs: The Wedding of Smailagic Meho*, 3:9–10.

71. H. J. Chaytor, *From Script to Print: An Introduction to Medieval Vernacular Literature* (Cambridge: Heifer, 1945), 119.

72. Marjorie Windelberg and D. Gary Miller, "How (Not) to Define the Epic Formula," *Olifant* 8, no. 1 (Fall 1980): 49.

73. Ong, *Orality and Literacy*, 38.

because of the need to wordsmith all the phrases in between the formulaic language.

A formula system is not simply repeated phrases that occur often in a story. John Foley stressed: "The formula is to be distinguished from simple repetition [of] … ready-made phraseology."[74] Since formula systems employ repetition, duplicated phrases have the potential to be part of a formula system, but only if they conform to the narrative's overarching formula pattern. There is a difference, explains Michael J. Zwettler, "between phrases repeated wholly or almost wholly verbatim and those related structurally," the structure being the syntax and meter of the pre-existing formula system.[75]

Parallelisms like chiasmus are not a formula system. The Bible, Book of Mormon, and many other texts include parallelisms like chiasmus,[76] which, according to John W. Welch, may "conveniently afford inherent mnemonic capacities."[77] John Breck explains that anciently, students without convenient access to writing materials could memorize more effectively with the aid of parallelism, especially chiasmus.[78]

While parallelisms can aid memory, they generally fail as formulas because their construction does not conform to a consistent repetitive meter and/or syntax. A few exceptions might exist, but the patterns of formula systems are not reliably present in most parallelisms.

Borrowed phrases from other sources would not constitute formula systems. Common clichés or verbiage borrowed from other publications, like the Bible, the Qur'an, or other popular titles, would not of themselves constitute formula systems. While similar phrases may be easily identified, their existence alone is not evidence of a formula system unless they comply with the meter of a pre-existing patterns.

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74. John Miles Foley, "Formula," *The Princeton Encyclopedia of Poetry and Poetics*, 4th ed., eds. Stephen Cushman *et al.* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2012), 502.

75. Zwettler, *The Oral Tradition of Classical Arabic Poetry*, 46.

76. John W. Welch and Donald W. Parry, introduction to *Chiasmus: The State of the Art* (Provo, UT: BYU Studies, 2020), 5.

77. John W. Welch, "Narrating Homicide Chiastically," in *Chiasmus: The State of the Art*, 173.

78. John Breck, *The Shape of Biblical Language: Chiasmus in the Scriptures and Beyond*, 2nd ed. (Crestwood, NY: St. Vladimir's Seminary Press, 2008), 53–54; see also Boris Wiseman and Anthony Paul, "Chiasm in the Drama of Life," in *Chiasmus and Culture* (New York: Berghahn Books, 2014), 2.

Dialect is not a formula system. Employing a specific dialect, like Old English, the Queen's English, or other vernaculars, consistently or intermittently in a narration does not constitute a formula system.

Practice and Apprenticeships

Through prolonged training and rehearsal, bard apprentices ingrain the formulas into their minds. "Depending on rank" notes Anne Pellowski in *The World of Storytelling*, "the training [of bards] lasted seven, ten, or twelve years and consisted of learning many sagas, the composition and recitation of all types of poetry, and oral lore of all kinds. … To learn the massive body of oral material is an arduous and painstaking task. The young pupils learn to drum and to recite narratives and genealogies."[79]

As a rule, accomplished bards win their reputations through repeated performances that consistently expose few identifiable flaws as they deliver their lines to their audiences.

Summary of Storytelling Techniques

Through extensive sleuthing and field reconnaissance, the predominant methodology of professional storytellers has been shown to require the memorization of formulaic language organized into formula systems. Formulas and their systems minimize the number of mental choices the tale-teller must make while wordsmithing each phrase. These formulas are evident in the meter, syntax, or lexical combinations employed in the storyteller's sentences. Professional bards train for many years to learn the patterns and commit them to memory.

Joseph Smith's Techniques

Few, if any, village storytellers travelled the New England countryside in the early eighteenth century. The storytelling tradition that predominated the Old World for millennia never gained traction among the early settlers or those that followed in colonial America. Generations of Native Americans perpetuated their histories and cultural narratives through verbal storytelling. However, John P. McWilliams, Jr., author of *The American Epic: Transforming a Genre, 1770–1860*, noted: "It is probable that no antebellum white author could have had the knowledge

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79. Anne Pellowski, *The World of Storytelling* (New York: H. W. Wilson and Company, 1990), 204.

of Indian oral tradition, the means to record it, and the poetic ability to translate it."[80]

So if we ask, "Where are the great American epics?" we find a "void in oral epic legend" that is filled with *written* sagas rather than those passed down through a rich storytelling custom.[81] The increased literacy of local inhabitants apparently diminished their need for strictly oral communications.

Joseph Smith's father had worked as a school teacher and all of the Smith family were literate to some extent, so they were not solely dependent upon verbal exchanges for enlightenment.[82] Orsamus Turner, who knew the Smith family in Manchester recalled: "Once a week he [Joseph Smith Junior] would stroll into the office of the old *Palmyra Register*, for his father's paper."[83] Published between 1817 and 1821, the *Palmyra Register* would likely have included information more current and perhaps more interesting than a bards' full repertoire of stories.

Generating the Words of the Book of Mormon

The historical record is rich in eyewitness accounts of the Book of Mormon dictation.[84] Many secondhand references are also available. They describe Joseph Smith dictating the entire Book of Mormon while viewing a seer stone placed in the bottom of a hat to shield it from outside light. Other details provide a fuller picture:

- The entire dictation required fewer than 85 days and possibly as few as 57.[85]
- The number of words produced would have varied between about 2700 and 4700 a day.

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80. John P. McWilliams, Jr., *The American Epic: Transforming a Genre, 1770–1860* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1989), 152.

81. Ibid., 138.

82. Lucy Smith, *Biographical Sketches of Joseph Smith the Prophet and His Progenitors for Many* Generations (London: S.W. Richards, 1853), 56; William Smith, "Notes Written on `Chamber's Life of Joseph Smith'" (unpublished manuscript, circa 1875).

83. Orsamus Turner, *History of the Pioneer Settlement of Phelps and Gorham's Purchase, and Morris' Reserve* (Rochester, NY: Erastus Darrow, 1851), 214; emphasis added.

84. See the collection of 206 historical accounts referring to the translation compiled by Welch, *Opening the Heavens*, 126–227.

85. John W. Welch, "Timing the Translation of the Book of Mormon: 'Days [and Hours] Never to Be Forgotten,'" *BYU Studies Quarterly* 57, no. 4 (2019): 16–30.

- The number of words in the dictated blocks typically involved at least 20 to 30.[86]
- Joseph Smith and his scribes checked the accuracy of the recorded text.[87]
- Some proper names were spelled out.[88]
- According to eyewitnesses, no preexisting manuscripts or books were used.[89]
- Many onlookers (followers and skeptics) were permitted to view Joseph Smith as he dictated to his scribes.[90]
- After breaks, Joseph would start where he left off without reading back the previous portion.[91]
- Multiple scribes (followers and skeptics) participated.[92]
- After dictation, none of the sentences were re-sequenced prior to publication.

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86. Royal Skousen, "Translating the Book of Mormon: Evidence from the Original Manuscript," in *Book of Mormon Authorship Revisited: The Evidence for Ancient Origins,* ed. Noel B. Reynolds (Provo, UT: FARMS, 1997), 71, https://archive.bookofmormoncentral.org/content/translating-book-mormon-evidence-original-manuscript.

87. Martin Harris, "The Three Witnesses," in *Historical Record* 6, ed. Andrew Jenson (May 1887): 216–17; David Whitmer, *An Address to All Believers in Christ: By a Witness to the Divine Authenticity of the Book of Mormon* (Richmond, MO: by the author, 1887), 12.

88. Royal Skousen, "Translating the Book of Mormon: Evidence from the Original Manuscript," 75.

89. Emma Smith quoted by Joseph Smith III to James T. Cobb (unpublished manuscript, February 14, 1879), cited in Dan Vogel, *Early Mormon Documents* (Salt Lake City: Signature Books, 1996–2003), 1:544; "Last Testimony of Sister Emma," *Saints' Herald* 26, no. 19 (1 October 1879): 290. David Whitmer quoted in *Chicago Times* (17 October 1881), cited in Lyndon W. Cook, ed., *David Whitmer Interviews: A Restoration Witness* (Orem, UT: Grandin Book, 1991), 76; David Whitmer quoted in *St. Louis* Republican (16 July 1884), cited in Cook, *David Whitmer Interviews*, 139–40.

90. David Whitmer in "The Book of Mormon," *Chicago Tribune,* December 17, 1885, 3, cited in Welch, *Opening the Heavens*, 172.

91. Joseph Smith III, "Last Testimony of Sister Emma," *Saints' Herald* 26 (October 1, 1879): 289–90.

92. Joseph Smith's scribes during the translation can be divided into three groups: those who wrote exclusively in Harmony (Martin Harris, Reuben Hale, Alva Hale, and Samuel Smith), exclusively in Fayette (Christian and John Whitmer), and both localities (Oliver Cowdery and possibly Emma Smith). All were believers except for Reuben and Alva Hale.

- The three-month project produced a lengthy complex text (see Table 4).

Characteristic	Quality/Quantity
Word count	269,320
Number of sentences	6,852
Average sentence length	39.3
Reading level	8th grade
Dialect	Early English
Punctuation	none
Unique words	5,903
College-level vocabulary words (not in Bible)	dozens
Original proper nouns	170
Parallel phraseology— chiasms	367
Parallel phraseology — alternates	400
Poetic literary forms (other)	911
Stylometric consistencies	at least 4 unique authors
Bible intertextuality	hundreds of phrases and integrations
Named characters	208
Socio-geographic groups	45
Geographical locations (Promised Land)	over 150
Geographical references (Promised Land)	over 400
Ecological references	2,065
Monetary system weights	12 distinct values
Chronological references	over 100
Storylines	77 major; additional minor
Flashbacks and embedded storylines	5
Sermons	68 major; additional minor
Sermon topics	dozens
Sermon commentary	often intricate and multifaceted
Formal headings to chapters and books	21
Editorial promises	121
Internal historical sources quoted	at least 24
Subjects discussed with precision	at least 3 (e.g. biblical law, olive tree husbandry, and warfare tactics)

Table 4. Literary characteristics of the 1830 Book of Mormon.

In his dissertation William L. Davis describes Joseph Smith using the same form of "oral-formulaic composition" methods as Avdo Međedović, but using them less effectively:

> [A] comparison of Smith's and Međedović's dictated works provides a more accurate view of their respective rates of

output. Based on an estimated number of working days against the total amount of material, Smith produced the *Book of Mormon* at the rate of some 3,500–4,000 words per day. By comparison, Međedović dictated five epic songs, all at a faster pace. … The production of the *Book of Mormon* within a three-month span of time is truly a remarkable feat. Nevertheless, given the rapid efficiency of oral-formulaic composition, the question that needs to be asked is not how Smith accomplished the task so quickly, but why it took him so long.[93]

Davis also acknowledges that it "hardly seems fair" to compare "Međedović, a seasoned professional," to "Smith, a neophyte."[94] But Davis also fails to investigate important historical findings that could support or contradict his assertion, including:

1. Evidence of Joseph Smith's pre-1829 training to build storytelling skills?

2. Reports of rhythmic delivery of Smith's words to his scribes while dictating the Book of Mormon?

3. Signs of formula systems in the recorded manuscript?

4. Smith's subsequent use of the Book of Mormon text.

Evidence of Joseph Smith's Pre-1829 Training?

Multiple historical sources show that in the 1830s and 1840s, Joseph Smith would sometimes employ stories while teaching the Saints. Scott A. Hales, a writer and editor for *Saints: The Story of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints*, explains: "The Prophet was an informal storyteller, who sometimes incorporated anecdotes into his everyday conversations and sermons." Yet, Hales also notes: "The stories Joseph told in his daily life never reached the same level of complexity as the Book of Mormon narrative."[95]

Joseph Smith's formal education would have included few, if any, lessons designed to enhance storytelling skills. Course work in district

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93. Davis, "Performing Revelation," 247–48.

94. Ibid.

95. Scott A. Hales, "'In Truth and Righteousness': Joseph Smith as Storyteller," in *Know Brother Joseph: New Perspectives on Joseph Smith's Life and Character*, eds. R. Eric Smith, Matthew C. Godfrey, and Matthew J. Grow (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 2021), 127.

schools in upstate New York did not include composition in part due to the lack of writing instruments and writing surfaces.[96] Dennis A. Wright and Geoffrey A. Wright explain: "Schools in the nineteenth century provided students with few if any school supplies and rarely had blackboards. Slates were not introduced in the classroom until about 1820, and lead pencils were not used until several years later. … In the early 1800s, paper was very costly because of its scarcity."[97]

While rote repetition and reading aloud were commonplace, students "on the frontier had little formal education and even less training in formal rhetoric or public speaking."[98] If Joseph developed extraordinary oratory skills, he would have done so largely independent of his formal schooling.[99]

Lucy Mack Smith's Report of "Amusing Recitals"

One report from Lucy Mack Smith, Joseph's mother, describes his storytelling inclinations around 1823 when he was in his 18th year:

> During our evening conversations, Joseph would occasionally give us some of the most amusing recitals that could be imagined. He would describe the ancient inhabitants of this continent, their dress, mode of travelling, and the animals upon which they rode; their cities, their buildings, with every particular; their mode of warfare; and also their religious

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96. R. Freeman Butts and Lawrence A. Cremin, *A History of Education in American Culture* (New York: Henry Holt, 1953), 269–70. See also Clifton Johnson, *Old-Time Schools and School Books* (London: MacMillan, 1904), 133; Timothy Dwight, *Travels in New-England and New-York* (London: William Baynes and Son, 1823), 4:461, 490.

97. Dennis A. Wright and Geoffrey A. Wright, "The New England Common School Experience of Joseph Smith Jr, 1810–1816," in *The New England States, Regional Studies in Latter-day Saint Church History*, eds. Donald Q. Cannon, Arnold K. Garr, and Bruce A. Van Orden (Provo, UT: Brigham Young University, 2004), 250.

98. Rosenberg, *The Art of the American Folk Preacher*, 17.

99. Proponents of the storyteller theory may quote an 1867 statement from Thomas Davies Burrall that declares that "Joe Smith" was "a wood-cutter on my farm" and that "at night, around a huge fire, he and his companions would gather, ten or a dozen at a time, to tell hard stories, and sing songs and drink cheap whisky, (two shillings per gallons), and although there were some hard cases among them, Joe could beat them all for tough stories and impracticable adventures" (*Louisville Daily Courier* 36, no. 81 [October 5, 1867]: 1). Dan Vogel describes chronological problems and concludes: "Burrall obviously employed a much older man named 'Joe Smith' and confused him with the Mormon prophet" (Dan Vogel, *Early Mormon Documents* [Salt Lake City: Signature Books, 2000], 3:363).

worship. This he would do with as much ease, seemingly, as if he had spent his whole life with them.[100]

This very late quotation refers to details of "dress, mode of traveling, and the animals upon which they rode," none of which occur in the Book of Mormon, raising questions about the reliability of the recollection. These "amusing recitals" were placed in the context of Joseph receiving instructions from the angel regarding the soon-to-be translated ancient record. Nowhere does she hint that Joseph possessed the skills to author such a book or that his imaginative storytelling in the family setting was a harbinger of a fuller fiction that he was developing.

Beyond Lucy's declaration, none of Joseph's other family members or acquaintances described him engaged in behaviors that might be interpreted as rehearsals or public speaking performances. It seems if he had practiced oratory performing, someone in the area might have been aware. In 1834, Eber D. Howe published statements from twenty-two local residents along with two "group statements" from the inhabitants of Palmyra and Manchester.[101] In July 1880 newspaperman Frederick G. Mather compiled written recollections from twelve citizens of Susquehanna, Broome, and Chenango Counties, Pennsylvania.[102] In 1888, Arthur Deming printed accounts from fourteen individuals in two volumes of *Naked Truths about Mormonism*.[103] Many of these persons

100. Lucy Mack Smith, *Biographical Sketches of Joseph Smith the Prophet and His Progenitors for Many Generations* (Liverpool, UK: S.W. Richards, 1853), 85. See also *Wandle Mace autobiography, circa 1890* (unpublished manuscript, 1890), 44, https://catalog.churchofjesuschrist.org/assets?id=bdd8f2f5-fbd2-4e83-b4b3-ceea5fcc70d0&crate=0&index=0.

101. E.D. Howe, *Mormonism Unvailed: or, A Faithful Account of That Singular Imposition and Delusion, from Its Rise to the Present Time* (Painesville, OH: E.D. Howe, 1834). Statements were from Alva Hale, Abigail Harris, Barton Stafford, David Stafford, G. W. Stoddard, Henry Harris, Hezekiah Mckune, Isaac Hale, Joseph Capron, Joshua Mckune, Joshua Stafford, Levi Lewis, Lucy Harris, Nathaniel Lewis, Parley Chase, Peter Ingersoll, Roswell Nichols, Sophia Lewis, Willard Chase, and William Stafford.

102. See [Frederick G. Mather], "The Early Mormons. Joe Smith Operates at Susquehanna," *Binghamton Republican*, 29 July 1880. Frederick G. Mather, "The Early Days of Mormonism," *Lippincott's Magazine* (Philadelphia) 26 (August 1880): 198–206, 211. Interviewees included Sally McKune, Mehetable Doolittle, Elizabeth Squires, Jacob I. Skinner, Samuel Brush, Orlando Saunders, William Van Camp, John H. Gilbert, George Collington, Smith Baker, Harriet Marsh, and Rebecca Nurse.

103. Arthur Deming, ed., *Naked Truths about Mormonism,* 2 vols. (Oakland, CA.: Deming & Co., 1888). Statements were from Caroline Rockwell, Isaac Butts,

knew Joseph Smith Jr. personally, but none pronounced him engaged in the activities of a village storyteller or trying to entertain spectators with his sagas. Journalist James Gordon Bennett visited the Palmyra area in August of 1831 and recorded that Joseph Smith's father was a "great story teller," but wrote nothing similar concerning the younger Joseph.[104]

The "Juvenile Debate Club" and Methodist "Exhorting"

At least one reminiscence spoke of Joseph Smith's early involvement with a local debating club. Expanding and countering arguments in a debate school environment could have tutored him in memory and oratory. In 1851, Orsamus Turner remembered:

> Joseph had a little ambition; and some very laudable aspirations; the mother's intellect occasionally shone out in him feebly, especially when he used to help us solve some portentous questions of moral or political ethics, in our juvenile debating club, which we moved down to the old red school house on Durfee street.[105]

Turner also reported that Joseph Smith "was a very passable exhorter" at Methodist camp meetings even though Smith never joined the Methodists. This probably referred to activities during the latter part of 1824 and the first months of 1825.[106] Despite these references, Turner was not overly impressed with Joseph's abilities, declaring him to be "possessed of less than ordinary intellect."[107]

Turner's statement echoes other eyewitnesses like Isaac Hale who remembered in 1834: "I first became acquainted with Joseph Smith Jr. in November, 1825. … His appearance at this time, was that of a careless young man — not very well educated."[108] Prior to his baptism into the

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Joseph Rogers, K. E. Bell, Lorenzo Saunders, Reuben P. Harmon, S.F. Anderick, Sylvia Walker, W. A. Lillie, William R. Hine, Christopher M. Stafford, Cornelius R. Stafford, G. J. Keen, and Henry A. Sayer.

104. James Gordon Bennett, Diary (unpublished manuscript, August 1831), 7–8; and [James Gordon Bennett], "Mormonism — Religious Fanaticism — Church and State Party," Part I, *Morning Courier and Enquirer*, 31 August 1831 cited in "James Gordon Bennett's 1831 Report on 'The Mormonites,'" Leonard J. Arrington, *BYU Studies* 10, no. 3 (July 1970): 2.

105. Orasmus Turner, *History of the Pioneer Settlement of Phelps and Gorham's Purchase, and Morris' Reserve* (Rochester, NY: Erastus Darrow, 1851), 214.

106. Ibid., 214.

107. Ibid., 213–14.

108. Isaac Hale quoted in Howe, *Mormonism Unvailed*, 262–63.

Church, W. W. Phelps wrote on January 15, 1831 affirming "Joseph Smith is a person of very limited abilities in common learning."[109]

Beyond the family recitals mentioned by Lucy Smith and Orsamus Turner's brief references, little evidence supports that young Joseph used the decade before 1829 to hone storytelling skills that would have facilitated his Book of Mormon dictation. If he engaged in such preparations, the absence of data is ironic, since developing storytelling abilities generally requires audiences, but no such audiences are identified. Richard Bushman reports: "He [Joseph Smith] is not known to have preached a sermon before the Church is organized in 1830. He had no reputation as a preacher."[110]

The lack of documentation cannot prove that intense secret preparations did not occur. However, Smith-the-storyteller theories would benefit from additional corroborative historical evidences beyond assumptions derived from reverse engineering the complexity of the dictated text.

Rhythmic Delivery of Smith's Words to His Scribes?

If Joseph Smith imitated professional storytellers, the cadence and meter of the process would probably have been evident to observers during the dictation. The three-month process of dictation and scribing was witnessed by multiple individuals.[111] David Whitmer described how other unidentified persons in Fayette were "present and not actively engaged in the work [who] seated themselves around the room."[112]

Emma Smith mentioned her role: "I frequently wrote day after day, often sitting at the table close by him, he sitting with his face buried in his hat, with the stone in it, and dictating hour after hour."[113] Oliver Cowdery described it with less detail and a little more drama:

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109. Howe, *Mormonism Unvailed*, 273.

110. Richard L. Bushman, "A Historian's Perspective of Joseph Smith," on *Joseph Smith's Relationship with God* (Salt Lake City: Covenant Communications, 2007), CD2, track 8.

111. Included were Emma Smith, Martin Harris, David Whitmer, William Smith, Samuel Smith, Isaac Hale, Joseph Knight Sr., Alva Hale, John Whitmer, Christian Whitmer, Reuben Hale, Elizabeth Whitmer Cowdery, and Michael Morse. Additional contemporaries who left reports of what happened include Joseph Lewis and Thurlow Weed.

112. David Whitmer in "'The Book of Mormon,'" *Chicago Tribune,* Dec. 17, 1885, 3 cited in *Opening the Heavens*, Welch, 172.

113. Joseph Smith III, "Last Testimony of Sister Emma," *Saints' Herald* 26 (October 1, 1879): 289–90.

"Day after day I continued, uninterrupted, to write from his mouth, as he translated, with the *Urim* and *Thummim,* or, as the Nephites would have said, 'Interpreters' the history, or record, called the 'The book of Mormon?'"[114] Reuben Hale, Emma's brother and unbelieving skeptic, also scribed for Joseph and reportedly stated: "Smith's hat was a very large one, and what is commonly called a 'stove-pipe.' The hat was on the table by the window and the [seer] stone in the bottom or rather in the top of the hat. Smith would bend over the hat with his face buried in it so that no light could enter it, and thus dictate to the scribe what he should write."[115]

Table 5 compiles the various words used by eyewitnesses to describe Joseph Smith's articulation or vocalization of the Book of Mormon text.[116]

Witness	Words Used
Emma Smith	dictate, dictating, spelled them out
Martin Harris	repeat aloud, given, read, from the mouth, translated or spelled the words, dictated, spelled the words out
Oliver Cowdery	from his mouth, told, words fell from the lips
David Whitmer	read off, read, uttered, dictate, dictating, pronounce, spoken, dictated, spell the words out, reading, spell out
Joseph Smith Sr.	Read
William Smith	reading off
Isaac Hale	read and interpret
Joseph Knight Sr.	tell

Table 5. Witnesses and their descriptions of Joseph's vocalizations.

It would appear that none of those watching Joseph Smith's recitations detected any regularization of the phrases in his dictation or if they did, they failed to mention it. Similarly, no reports of musical instruments, singing, or melodic dictations are discussed. No evidence of such a phenomenon has been noted, as far as we know, in either witness statements, in the published text, or in the recorded dictation in the original manuscript of the Book of Mormon.

114.   Oliver Cowdery to W. W. Phelps, September 7, 1834 [Letter I], *Messenger and Advocate* 1 (October 1834): 14.

115.   Rhamanthus M. Stocker, *Centennial History of Susquehanna County, Pennsylvania* (Philadelphia: R. T. Peck and Co., 1887), 555–56.

116.   See Welch, *Opening the Heavens*, 126–227.

Signs of Formula Systems in the Dictated Manuscript?

When Albert Lord sought to understand how Serbo-Croatian singers could recite lengthy stories, he examined written versions of those narratives. Within them he found the answer he was looking for — formulaic language organized into patterns called formula systems. Lord discovered that bards use these systems to remember their stories and to create performance-level recitals that their audiences would appreciate.

The 269,320 words[117] that Joseph Smith spoke to his scribes were immediately recorded and sent without modification to the typesetter. The 1830 Book of Mormon printing (ignoring the punctuation that was added later) constitutes an essentially verbatim record of his "oral performance." Formulas systems (or vestiges of them) should be detectable in the 1830 printing of the Book of Mormon if they existed in the original dictation. The quest is not to identify scattered formulaic language or occasional parallelistic phraseology. If Joseph used traditional storytelling methods as he spoke, the entire dictated language would have been formatted into formula patterns involving predictable meter, rhythm, syntax, or isosyllabism.[118]

Three authors, Donald W. Parry, Grant Hardy, and Royal Skousen have published editions of the Book of Mormon where every phrase, clause, and sentence was examined for literary characteristics and reformatted according to those features. If formula systems existed in the text, their efforts might have discovered them.

Donald W. Parry published *The Book of Mormon Text Reformatted According to Parallelistic Patterns* in 2006. There he defined poetic parallelism "as words, phrases, or sentences which correspond, compare, or contrast one with another, or are found to be in repetition one with another."[119] With this generous classification, he identified parallelistic phrases tucked between lines of prose on nearly every one of the 490

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117. On February 18, 2019, Book of Mormon scholar Stanford Carmack wrote: "The 1830 first edition has 6,852 full stops in 269,318 words … if we count the first instance of 'me thought' as two words (18, 41; the second is spelled as one word) and the second instance of 'for/asmuch' as two words (111, 32; no hyphen; the first is spelled as one word), then we get 269,320 words." Stanford Carmack, comment on Brian C. Hales, "Curiously Unique: Joseph Smith as Author of the Book of Mormon," *Interpreter: A Journal of Latter-day Saint Faith and Scholarship* 31 (2019): 151–90, https://journal.interpreterfoundation.org/curiously-unique-joseph-smith-as-author-of-the-book-of-mormon/.

118. See Lord, *The Singer of Tales*, 282n8.

119. Donald W. Parry, *The Book of Mormon Text Reformatted According to Parallelistic Patterns* (Provo, UT: Neal A Maxwell Institute, 2006), xiv.

reformatted pages. By typesetting the text to highlight these lines, word-patterns based upon meter or other literary characteristics became easier to detect on a single page or span of pages.

In his 2003 *The Book of Mormon: A Reader's Edition*, Grant Hardy sought to "highlight the literary qualities and complex internal structure of the text."[120] He explains: "When I encountered passages that exhibit heightened emotion, repetition, and parallel phrases that were both grammatically uncomplicated and relatively short, I set them into poetic lines."[121] Such poetic lines are found on 189 of the 625 pages reformatted by Hardy. Reviewing the poetic sections shows:

- 57 of the pages are quoting poetic lines from the Bible. Subtracting those leaves 132 of 573 pages with poetic structures attributable to Joseph Smith's creativity.
- Few poetic lines involve all the words on the entire page. Most are interspersed within prose-style paragraphs.
- Poetic sections do not reflect a consistent metrical cadence or rhythmic consistency.
- At least 436 pages are prose, devoid of any apparent poetic structure.

Royal Skousen used his linguistic background and his familiarity with the Original and Printer's manuscripts to create his 2009 *The Book of Mormon: The Earliest Text*.[122] He explains that his work "constitutes a scholarly effort to present to the reader a dictated rather than a written text."[123] To facilitate this approach, Skousen adopted a "sense-line format." "Sense-lines can assist readers in differentiating phrases and clauses, identifying constituent grammatical units, and keeping track of subjects, main verbs, and modifiers." According to Skousen, "The first verbalization of the text would have sounded something like the result of reading the sense-lines out loud."[124] Skousen notes that "nonstandard syntax" and "Hebrew-like syntax," are found throughout the text.[125]

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120. Grant Hardy, *The Book of Mormon: A Reader's Edition* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2003), xxi.

121. Ibid., 663.

122. Royal Skousen, *The Book of Mormon: The Earliest Text* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2009), https://bookofmormoncentral.org/content/book-mormon-earliest-text.

123. Ibid., xlii.

124. Skousen, *The Book of Mormon: The Earliest Text*, xlii–xliii.

125. Ibid., xliv, xlv.

While these three authors worked on different priorities, their linguistic research to determine how to reformat the Book of Mormon text constituted (in several ways) an exhaustive search for evidence of formula systems. All three authors would probably have notice the presence of syntactic, lexical, or rhythmic patterns within the sentences if they were present. Evidence of some other form of mnemonic devices might also have emerged from their analyses. Were any such data discovered? The answer appears to be no. The reformatting reflects no metered patterns; nor is meter mentioned as a literary element used for formatting purposes. If any such systemization of the text was found, it is likely they would have mentioned it and contextualized it with similar features found in the Bible.[126]

To date, millions of readers and scholars have studied the Book of Mormon without mentioning the presence of regularized phraseology resembling formula systems. This could be because no one has been looking specifically for them, but several detailed projects dealing with the nearly 7000 sentences would likely have uncovered their existence if they were present.

Smith's Subsequent Use of the Book of Mormon Text

If Joseph Smith viewed the Book of Mormon as the culmination of years of storytelling preparations, retelling its stories and quoting from its wisdom would have come naturally in the following years due to his familiarity with it. Most storytellers relish the opportunities to share their hard-learned tales with audiences, but after his single dictation of the manuscript, Joseph Smith seldom referred to its contents and stories. BYU Professor Casey Paul Griffiths observed: "An examination of the Nauvoo discourses of Joseph Smith revealed allusions to 451 different biblical passages given by the Prophet, compared to just 22 references to the Book of Mormon, or a 21:1 ratio."[127]

Similarly, little fanfare accompanied its printing and availability. Biographer Richard Bushman explains: "For all the effort and trouble he put into the translation, Joseph made little of the book's appearance. … It was an unusually spare production, wholly lacking in signs of

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126. See Robert C. Culley, "Oral Tradition and Biblical Studies," *Oral Tradition* 1, no. 1 (1986): 30–65.

127. Casey Paul Griffiths, "5 Things You Might Not Know About the Coming Forth of the Book of Mormon," *LDS Living*, March 18, 2017, http://www.ldsliving.com/5-Things-You-Might-Not-Have-Known-About-the-Coming-Forth-of-the-Book-of-Mormon/s/84830.

self-promotion. Joseph presented his handiwork to the public and moved on."[128]

Summary

For hundreds of years bards and storytellers throughout the world have captivated their audiences with tales, some of which could extend for many hours and even over several daily sessions. The polish of their recitations delivered in real-time without notes or manuscripts demonstrated a highly impressive skill set of either memory or the ability imagine storylines and wordsmith refined sentences on-the-fly during their performances — or some combination of the two.

To date, extended research into storytelling techniques from multiples times and cultures support a predominant methodology. The Bards use formulaic language organized into patterns — called formula systems — to enhance memory and diminish the intellectual burden of wordsmithing the sentences they recite. The formulas in each system are memorized and lack only a few descriptive words that the storyteller recalls by using natural memory. Bards commit a set of these formulas to memory so during performances, the word-choices are mostly automatic and the number of word substitutions that must be cognitively chosen are minimized.

It is possible that yet-to-be-studied storytellers use some other form of memory devices to recall and wordsmith their stories during their oral performances. Nonetheless, the presence of metrically consistent patterns of rhythm, syntax, or lexical qualities in the delivered lines seems universal. Years of practice and training are required to learn the formulas and develop the ability to recite lengthy tales according to the appropriate rhythms.

The historical record indicates Joseph Smith shared stories within the family circle in the early 1820s, but none of those who knew him claimed his intellectual abilities were sufficient to create the Book of Mormon.[129] His education included no formal instruction in composition, rhetoric, or storytelling.

Multiple analyses of the Book of Mormon have identified scattered poetic lines, repeated phrases, predictive lexical patterns, specific word

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128. Richard Lyman Bushman, *Joseph Smith: Rough Stone Rolling* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 2005), 83.

129. See Brian C. Hales, "'Proving to the World': The Unique Declaration in Doctrine and Covenants Section 20," *FAIR* (blog), March 1, 2021, https://www.fairlatterdaysaints.org/blog/2021/03/01/come-follow-me-week-9-doctrine-and-covenants-20-22.

recurrences, and formulaic language distributed throughout the text. However, consistent metrical or rhythmic systemizations are absent. No literary devices in the Book of Mormon text have been found that could have provided wordsmithing benefits similar to the formula systems used by professional storytellers during their presentations.

In the past, theories involving the Spaulding manuscript, collaborators, mental illness, and automatic writing have been largely discarded by a majority of skeptics attempting to explain the origin of the Book of Mormon. Similarly, the data presented here fails to identify any significant parallels between Joseph Smith's Book of Mormon dictation and traditional storytellers reciting their tales. However, approaching the translation as an oral performance is largely an unexplored field of study. Additional research is justified to further investigate the question, "Where did all the words come from?"

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Mormon, Moses, and the Representation of Reality

Richard L. Bushman

Abstract: *In this essay, Richard Bushman borrows a critical perspective from Erich Auerbach's* Mimesis: The Representation of Reality in Western Literature. *He analyzes the representation of antiquity in two of Joseph Smith's striking translations, the Book of Mormon and the Book of Moses. The two texts, produced within a few years of one another, created distinctive stages on which to dramatize the human-God relationship. The question is: What can we learn from this comparison about God, prophets, and human destiny?*

[**Editor's Note:** Part of our book chapter reprint series, this article is reprinted here as a service to the Latter-day Saint community. Original pagination and page numbers have necessarily changed, otherwise the reprint has the same content as the original.

See Richard L. Bushman, "Mormon, Moses, and the Representation of Reality," in *Tracing Ancient Threads in the Book of Moses: Inspired Origins, Temple Contexts, and Literary Qualities*, edited by Jeffrey M. Bradshaw, David R. Seely, John W. Welch and Scott Gordon (Orem, UT: The Interpreter Foundation; Springville, UT: Book of Mormon Central; Redding, CA: FAIR; Tooele, UT: Eborn Books, 2021), 51–74. Further information at https://interpreterfoundation.org/books/ancient-threads-in-the-book-of-moses/.]

I have long had a great affection for the Book of Moses, particularly for Moses's vision of the cosmos in chapter one. The beauty and richness of that text is testimony to me of Joseph Smith's inspiration. I have

felt the power and strangeness of the book so strongly. I have asked a number of scholars how they would classify Moses 1 in world literature. Peter Brown, the Princeton historian, dismissed it as a pitiful fraud, which was disappointing, although he is a person I otherwise admire. Anthony Grafton, another Princeton historian, said it reminded him of the books of Esdras in the Apocrypha because of Moses's interrogation of God. A scholar at the Huntington Library thought it resonated with pseudepigraphic texts. After Richard Fox, an American intellectual historian and biographer of Reinhold Niebuhr, read it, he said he was surprised at how beautiful Moses 1 was.

Two things have struck me about the Book of Moses. My first observation is how unlikely it is that Joseph Smith could write such a piece at age 24 with so little training as a writer. Moses 1 intensifies the classic prophet puzzle. The Smiths' neighbors saw no intellectual or moral force in the young Joseph Smith. He was a ne'er-do-well treasure-seeker, notable chiefly for his pretended gift of locating caches of money. Then suddenly, out of a somewhat disreputable life, springs the author who composes the Book of Mormon followed immediately by the Book of Moses. That sequence seems to strain the explanatory power of historicist interpretations to the breaking point. A passage in *Rough Stone Rolling* sums up my feeling:

> We can hardly recognize Joe Smith, the ignoramus and schemer of the Palmyra neighbors, in the writings of Joseph Smith, the Prophet and Seer. The writings and the person seem to have lived in separate worlds. In the neighbors' reports, he was a plain rural visionary with little talent save a gift for seeing in a stone. No flashes of intelligence, ambition, or faith distinguish him. Even his family members, who thought he was virtuous, had no premonition of his powers. They could not envision him writing about Moses' epic encounter with God or telling of God's sorrow over humanity's iniquity in Enoch. In his inspired writings, Joseph entered into other worlds and looked across time and space. Strange and marvelous narratives come from his mouth. No one, friend or foe, expected any of that.

> The second marvel, in my opinion, is the difference between the Book of Moses and the Book of Mormon. These two long narratives were completed within a year of one another, and yet they seem to come from different worlds. The translation of the Book of Mormon immersed Joseph in a strongly evoked

history, which is maintained with remarkable consistency throughout the text. And then to open another narrative so sharply different in style and conception so soon after strikes me as a feat straining the capacity of the most adept writers and beyond imagining for one so unpracticed as Joseph Smith.[1]

The aim of my article is to explore this second marvel. I wish to delineate the world in which Mormon's narrative takes place and then compare that world to the stage on which the Book of Moses occurs. Both transpire in antiquity; therefore, to honor the theme of the conference, I present my thoughts as a study in comparative antiquities. These representations should not be thought of as objectively real in the sense that anyone who lived them would experience them the way I describe. They are two worlds as two authors have chosen to represent them. They are not reality itself but representations of reality.

I draw inspiration from Erich Auerbach's *Mimesis: The Representation of Reality in Western Literature,* the classic study of Western literature beginning with *The Odyssey* and Genesis.[2] I make no pretense to Auerbach's immense erudition or his sensitive analysis of rhetorical stances. I would, however, like to emulate his method of humanistic analysis that Edward Said, in an introduction to *Mimesis,* sums up as "living the author's reality, undergoing the kind of life experiences intrinsic to his or her life."[3] I like the phrase "representation of reality." How is the world presented or represented in a work of literature? How does it compare to the realities found in the literary work of other authors?

The most famous example from *Mimesis* comes in the opening chapter, "Odysseus's Scar." This chapter compares the great hero's experience on returning home to Abraham's decision to sacrifice Isaac to Jehovah. In *The Odyssey*, the much-traveled and weather-beaten Odysseus hides his identity on his return home to avoid being murdered by his wife's many suitors. His old nurse, however, recognizes him when she notices a familiar scar on his neck while bathing him.

The essence of the difference between Homer and the Bible in Auerbach's reading is that in Homer, everything is on the surface, while much is hidden and left unsaid in the Bible. In Homer, everything is out in the open and on a level plane. Homeric language is "externalized." It "uniformly illuminates phenomena, at a definite time and in a definite place, connected together without lacunae in a perpetual foreground .

. . thoughts and feelings completely expressed; events taking place in a leisurely fashion and with very little suspense."

In Genesis, by contrast, "overwhelming suspense is present." Speech "does not serve, as does speech in Homer, to manifest, to externalize thoughts — on the contrary, it serves to indicate thoughts which remain unexpressed." There is an "externalization of only so much of the phenomena as is necessary for the purpose of the narrative, all else left in obscurity.[4]

I will pay less attention to style than Auerbach does; Grant Hardy has taken us a long way in that direction in his book *Understanding the Book of Mormon: A Reader's Guide*.[5] Instead of examining the language, I will look at landscape or stage. How is the place where the action takes place conceived? What is its geography? How does time function? Who occupies this territory? What are the characteristic plots?[6] I would like to understand how two texts depict the world: the first in the Book of Mormon running from Mosiah to Moroni, and the second in the Book of Moses chapters 1 through 7. I speculate a little on the life of Mormon, but I am most interested not in him as an individual but in the nature of existence as defined in his text. In the case of Moses, I do not speculate at all on Moses's life but focus entirely on the world found within the first seven chapters of the book.

Mormon

My view of Mormon's text is that it is preoccupied with the preservation of society. As an author, Mormon senses the danger of conflict and wickedness leading to self-destruction. The prophets in the Book of Mormon are, of course, concerned about salvation and the kingdom of God, but Mormon also tells stories of societies listening to God's prophets and flourishing or of the hardening of their hearts and descent into contention and misery. To stage these dramas of survival and decay, Mormon presents us with the mundane world in which they take place. His mind is fixed on evoking the space and circumstances in which societies rise and fall, repent or deny God.

We can imagine why Mormon was preoccupied by preservation. He spent his life as a Nephite general attempting to preserve his own society. He failed, and he knew why. His people would not repent and come unto God. They failed to recognize that only submission to God and renunciation of sin would enable them to triumph over their enemies. Without God, the moral foundations of society crumbled. Whatever Mormon's skill as a general or how ardently he pled, he could not protect

his people from destruction if they turned against heaven. Mormon's writings present tale after tale of prophets preaching this message. Perhaps as a result of his concern for social righteousness, Mormon had a preternatural sense for the moral conditions of people. He was forever estimating whether the people were living righteously or descending into contention and rebellion. He developed an expertise in assessing the righteousness and wickedness of the people because their lives, as well as their prosperity, depended on it.

His concern for social well-being and preservation led to a rich depiction of the Nephite social order. By instinct or interest, he went to great lengths to create the stage for the Nephite drama. The afterlife, of course, figures into his practical theology: people are to repent so that they may enter into the kingdom of God. But the world beyond is never delineated in detail. Through the account of Alma, Mormon shows an interest in the state of spirits after death, but according to his record of Amulek, the same spirit that possessed people in this life will continue in the immediate afterlife. Things there will be pretty much as they are here on earth. The point of both Alma's and Amulek's sermons is to repent *now*, because circumstances will not be that different in the world to come.

When it comes to this world, on the other hand, Mormon has lots to say. He is keenly aware of government: Who is ruling? Are they worthy kings or judges? Is their reign challenged? Of course, with the mind of a general, he must talk about battles and tactics. He tells us about the organization and growth of the church. The institutions framing human life are all in the forefront of his thinking.

Mormon is interested in sociology. He has three categories for analyzing social structure. The first is tribes or clans, which he seems to think of as the most basic structure, perhaps, as Don Bradley has argued, because the Nephites borrowed the thinking of the Palestinian Jews concerning tribes.[7] He primarily uses the big categories Nephite and Lamanite, but he is conscious of other "ites," which he leaves out for the sake of simplicity. When Nephite society disintegrates on the eve of Christ's coming, all other forms of government collapse, and the population returns to tribal organization, the most elemental of all.

The second sociological category is rich and poor, a rather crude but powerful grouping. Much of the sin of society arises from the tension between rich and poor. The rich not only neglect the poor but they also disdain them. It is that neglect and exclusion that foreshadows trouble. God cannot tolerate this evil. Eventually, the society that exists after

Christ's visit dissolves this difference, as the rich share generously with the poor.

The third social category is location. People are shaped by the city where they live. Alma visits the various cities to test their righteousness and gauge the state of the nation. He never knows what he will find until he gets there. City populations have distinctive qualities. Traveling the countryside, prophets have varying receptions city by city.

Mormon is preoccupied with geography. Modern geographers struggle to map Mormon's geography onto current knowledge of American space, but it is not for lack of information. There are scores of cities and features like rivers, mountains, or coastlines throughout the Book of Mormon. There are mentions of the wilderness, lands such as Bountiful or Desolation, and routes from place to place. We always know where the battles are taking place. A detailed geographical description is entered almost gratuitously in the story of a royal conversion seemingly as an indulgence of Mormon's obsession with the contours of space (see Alma 22:27–35). Onto this physical geography, he maps the people who occupy each place. Mormon finds all this to be a necessary backdrop for the pursuit of the central plot, the preservation of society.

Mormon is nearly as concerned with time as he is with space. His chronology is almost as insistent as his geography. He is forever marking the year with reference to the reign of the judges or the sign of Christ's birth. When he finds nothing in the large plates worth adding to his record, he merely notes the year to indicate time passing. He is also aware of the deep past and the distant future. He knows he is writing for the future more than for the present. No one around him will read his record save Moroni; all his readers are hundreds of years away, and he often speaks directly to this remote audience. Conceiving time in its broadest frame, Mormon also knows that history proceeds from the creation and fall to Christ, to the recovery of the Book of Mormon in Joseph Smith's time, and on to Christ's Second Coming. He is deeply concerned for the future recovery of his people. So besides working with a year-to-year timeline, Mormon operates within the great framework of God's plan for the earth.

But Mormon is not conscious of one dimension of time that is commonplace today: he is not aware that he lives in antiquity. He has no sense of the old and the new. Today, people have a sense of the progress of civilization from the primitive to the ancient, to the middle ages, to modernity. Throughout the course of history, human society becomes more sophisticated and more competent, if not always more happy.

Mormon has no sense of that kind of change. He approaches Joseph Smith's world as if it faces the same issues that he and Moroni deal with. Time is uniform, not marked by progress; it only repeats the cycle of prosperity and decline. He has a strong sense of before and after but not of old and new. Mormon shares the Christian view of the world working toward the birth of Christ and His Second Coming, but he does not have the Protestant sense of improving the world in preparation for Christ, nor the Hegelian sense of a historical dialectic that moved humanity through stages toward a world governed by reason. For Mormon, there is no fundamental change in the conditions of human life. The issue is always faith in Christ and repentance from sin, versus rejection and decline.

Mormon leaves out a lot of detail from his depiction of Nephite society. There is little about domestic life. Family has a powerful influence: the tribes originate from family conflicts, and we have fathers lamenting their sons' iniquities and mothers raising their sons to be valiant. But this is family life as it impinges on public affairs. There is almost nothing about courtship, the family economy, housing, marital relations, childrearing, or women's status. By the same token, life in the sense of cultural achievements has no place: there is nothing about art, music, libraries, museums, or scientific achievements. Education is totally neglected save for the tutelage of royal offspring in the language of the plates. Schools may have existed, but Mormon does not share any insight about them.

Despite these omissions, social life is well fleshed out. Mormon creates a worldly stage on which the battle for preservation can be fought. His history is earthly in the sense of being staged on this earth and seeking heavily to protect life on the earth.

In this world, God is primarily a judge. He judges whether or not to protect societies according to their righteousness. When we meet him, he will judge us. Have we fulfilled the requirements of the Gospel? If we have, all will be well. If we have not, we will be punished. The Atonement of Jesus Christ serves to protect us from punishment. It is a legal negotiation, according to Amulek, where mercy means we are not subject to the demands of justice. God will help us prosper and rear our children, but the big question is how to escape punishment and achieve forgiveness. As Alma summed up his point to Corianton, "it is requisite with the justice of God that men should be judged according to their works; and if their works were good in this life, and the desires of their

hearts were good, that they should also, at the last day, be restored unto that which is good" (Alma 41:3).

Beyond his functions as a judge, God has no personality in Mormon's writings. During his visit to the Nephites, Christ expressed very strong feelings. He exhibited what I am calling personality. Remaining in heaven in Mormon's telling, God the Father comes across as remote and confined in his forms of expression. I may overstate the case here, but it seems to me that in Mormon's writings, God the Father rarely expresses feelings. He is the governor of history—whether societies flourish or breakdown—and the dispenser of justice and mercy, but he has no expressed desires, hopes, or plans. (There are, of course, exceptions to this rule.)

Mormon delights above all in stories of conversion. The key moments occur when a society turns from sin toward the Lord. Repentance in the sense of turning is the goal of prophetic action. Mormon enjoys telling the successes of the sons of Mosiah and the repentance of the Lamanites in the decades before Christ's visitation. At those times, destruction of the people is averted and society is set on the path toward prosperity and safety. The prophets speak to deaf ears in many instances. They threaten God's wrath and the end of society to no avail. In the end, nothing works, and entire peoples are wiped away.

Moses

A year after the completion of the Book of Mormon, Joseph Smith began dictating the Book of Moses, the early pages of his translation of the Bible. The differences between the two books are breathtaking. Mormon's feet are firmly fixed on the earth; he is aware of the world around him, of earthly time, of societies struggling for survival, of contention and iniquity. Although he speaks for God, Mormon is of the earth. The Book of Moses is elevated to a sphere so ethereal that we can hardly encompass it. The text tells us that Moses was caught up to an exceedingly high mountain—as high as was possible to go from the surface of the earth— but even then, his feet may not have remained on the mountain top. A few verses later, he "fell unto the earth," as if he might have been lifted above the mountain (Moses 1:9). Moses's feet are definitely not planted on the earth. He is suspended in the cosmos.

In the sphere to which he is elevated in Moses 1, there are no tribes, no kings or judges, no chronology of years, none of the forms or institutions of human society. There are humans, there is geography, there is a kind of time, but all are located in cosmic space occupied by cosmic characters.

In the text, Moses does not tramp about the earth with his father as Mormon did, learning the cities and the tribes; Moses looks at the earth from some place outside of it. He does not behold it person by person or city by city as Mormon would have on his trip south. Moses sees every particle of it all at once, all the inhabitants in one view (Moses 1:8, 27, 28). In Moses 1, there is no government and no social structure, only humankind. He sees humanity from a cosmic stand point, viewing the earth comprehensively. He is anything but earthbound.

The cosmos in Moses's vision is divided into great compartments — or realms, as I will call them — each organized around beings. The nature of the spaces into which the universe is divided is based on the nature of the person or persons who dwell in that space. There is the realm of God, where he dwells in glory. The glory is so overpowering that Moses cannot enter this realm without being transfigured (Moses 1:14). To see God, he must acquire spiritual eyes (Moses 1:1). From this realm, Moses can look upon God's workmanship and see the earth in its entirety (Moses 1:27–28).

Then there is the realm of Satan, a realm of no glory. Moses does not have to be transfigured to see Satan. Moses can see Satan's dark realm as a natural man with his natural eyes (Moses 1:15). The cosmos contains these two realms, each with its dominant being but coexisting in their own places. Strangely, God's immense power and glory does not extinguish Satan's realm. Though they have battled, the two coexist. In this cosmos, there is room for variety.

One can scarcely call this a geography, but there is differentiation. To these two realms, we can add the realm of the earths and their heavens. In Moses 1, heaven is not a name for the realm of God. Adam does not meet God in heaven. Heavens are created along with the earths and go out of existence along with their earths (Moses 1:38). As a note, it is possible that "world" is the term used for earths and heavens combined (Moses 1:35). Earth is removed from, perhaps a bit alienated from, the realm of God. Adam must be removed from the earth and transfigured to encounter God in His glory. There is no enmity between earth and God as there is between God and Satan. But humans cannot bear the glory of the godly realm without transfiguration. Moses even remarks that if the transfiguration goes too far, if he enters too much into the realm of glory, he will be unfit to return to earth (Moses 1:5). The two realms are somewhat incompatible.

The great dramas of existence move forward in these three realms: God's, Satan's, and the earth-heavens occupied by humans. In the

telling of Moses 1, the actors on this stage come across as characters. Compared to the somewhat hidden deity in Mormon's abridgement, Moses's leading figures have personalities. Mormon's God administers justice, blesses His people, makes pronouncements, and punishes the unrepentant, but He does not emerge as a distinct person with whom one can interact. By contrast, Moses enters into conversation with God. Like Esdras, as Anthony Grafton noted, Moses asks questions and negotiates. He presses God to explain why there are all these earths and creations. God rebuffs him by saying never mind, but then He relents and gives the famous answer: "to bring to pass the immortality and eternal life of man." God reveals his heart's desire to Moses: "This is my work and my glory" (Moses 1:39). Glorious and mighty as God is in these pages, he is a person that can be talked to.

Moses talks to Satan too, and, not surprisingly, Satan is the most sharply etched character in Moses's cosmic drama. He displays a whole range of emotions. He is demanding: "Moses, son of man, worship me." He is petulant: "Satan cried with a loud voice, and ranted upon the earth, and commanded, saying: I am the Only Begotten, worship me." Wrath overcomes him: "Satan cried with a loud voice, with weeping, and wailing, and gnashing of teeth" (Moses 1:12, 19, 22). There is a play of cosmic forces in this scene, but they are channeled through personalities. Moses is caught up in an argument with a being who has feelings and human reactions. The battle is waged through conversation. The great issues of the universe are worked out by people talking to one another.

Moses holds his own in these encounters with titans. He does not timidly observe the great cosmic personalities in action; he engages them rather boldly. He faces down Satan with the cutting remark that compared to God, Satan is nothing. Moses had to be transfigured to see God; with Satan, "I can look upon thee in the natural man," ending with a little sarcastic tweak: "Is it not so surely?" (Moses 1:14). Not to be put down by this puny mortal, Satan ramps up his game so that Moses begins to "fear exceedingly" and sees "the bitterness of hell" (Moses 1:20). Moses holds on through this tirade and receives strength until Satan, defeated, disappears.

The brave Moses is bold with God too. Impressed but not overwhelmed by his vision of all the souls on earth, Moses ventures to inquire, "Tell me, I pray thee, why these things are so, and by what thou madest them?" (Moses 1:30). The colloquial opening "tell me, I pray thee" sounds like an inquiry one might make of an English gentleman who had shown you his garden. God at first rebuffs Moses's question: "For mine own

purpose have I made these things. Here is wisdom and it remaineth in me" (Moses 1:31). But Moses will not give up. The question is too urgent. "Be merciful unto thy servant, O God, and tell me concerning this earth, and the inhabitants thereof, and also the heavens." Knowing he is being brassy, Moses adds, "then thy servant will be content" (Moses 1:36).

The chapters that follow Moses 1 take place on earth, yet the cosmic personalities of the first chapter continue to color the narrative. The earthly and cosmic realms intermingle. While Mormon's history is fixed on the earth and surrounded by places, people, and institutions, the narrative of the Book of Moses is raised above the earth. The Book of Moses looks down most of the time, but it frequently turns its gaze up into the heavens. In the book as a whole, the narrator has access to both earth and heaven, moving easily from one to the other. The narrator's position is foreshadowed in the Lord's early comment, "Behold, I reveal unto you concerning this heaven, and this earth" (Moses 2:1). The narrator seems to dwell in both realms at once, moving the storyline from heaven to earth without a jolt. Perhaps because of this middling position between heaven and earth, the human figures are abstracted from mundane reality. By the same token, the narrator can hear voices in heaven as well as on earth. It does not require a special transformation to quote God at length. Humans converse with supernatural characters as if they were easily accessible. God and Satan enter into the flow of the narrative without any fanfare, as if they were characters in the story.

Moses 1 serves as an introduction to the Genesis story because in the Bible, Genesis 1 comes closest to the cosmic familiarity of Moses 1. In Genesis 1, God also speaks freely and expresses his desires as a character in the story. The Genesis God is not quite as familiar as his equivalent in Moses. God's statements in Genesis begin with "God said"; in Moses 2, they begin with "And I, God, said," in the Moses version of creation, we not only hear a report of what God said but we are also right there, listening to his voice. The story is told in first person singular. Moreover, celestial beings come and go in the earth sphere in the regular flow of events. Humans talk to God and Satan, ask questions, and receive their ministration.

Because the Moses narrator occupies a middle position between heaven and earth, he can insert stories of heaven into the account of Adam in the garden without a rupture. At the moment when Satan is about to enter the picture, God goes back into his own realm to tell of the pre-earth conflict with Satan. Readers effortlessly leave the earth for a time and learn of Satan's offer to be God's son and redeem mankind

(Moses 4:1–4). The interjection does not seem like an invasion because the narrator has moved into God's realm before. That interplay of realms can be easily managed from the middle position the narrator assumes throughout the book of Moses.

In Moses's narrative, the appearance of Satan as a serpent and the subsequent arrival of God in the garden in the cool of day seems perfectly natural. Of course God will speak about one's errors while dismissing the serpent for his deceit. If one is naked, the Lord God will see to the manufacture of clothing (Moses 4:27). This is God as a character in a story, a personality, who can move between heaven and earth without ceremony. This portrayal of God is quite different from the one in Mormon's world, where God delivers pronouncements from heaven and remains aloof while people dwell in a mundane world.

I hope that the distinction between the worlds of Moses and Mormon is becoming clear. One is so mundane, so aware of earthly society with its geography and chronology, and only occasionally do voices from heaven deliver pronouncements. In the other, the details of human society are vague and slightly blurred while supernatural figures come and go. The differences extend to the representation of God. Mormon's God is primarily a judge who delivers laws and requires repentance but otherwise remains obscured. The God of Moses is a creator who comes to earth and converses with his people. He is majestic but also a mentor and a coach, trying to bring people along.

Enoch's story, of course, is an extreme example of this free interplay between heaven and earth. His origins are vague, not really anchored in a place. Enoch, the son of Jared, "journeyed in the land, among the people" (Moses 6:26). What land, what people, we do not know. This is nothing like Alma's journey from Zarahemla, "over upon the east of the river Sidon, into the valley of Gideon, there having been a city built, which was called the city of Gideon, which was in the valley that was called Gideon, being called after the man who was slain by the hand of Nehor with the sword" (Alma 6:7). And then Alma went from Gideon back home for a rest and then "over into the land of Melek, on the west of the river Sidon, on the west by the borders of the wilderness" (Alma 8:3). All that specificity, those journeys from one known city to another in certain valleys along certain borders, is Mormon's standard form of explanation. In Enoch's story, geography almost disappears, emerging only vaguely as a journey "from the land of Cainan, by the sea east" (Moses 6:42).

A comparison of two narratives from Mormon and Moses—Benjamin's farewell sermon in Mosiah 3 and Enoch's first sermon to the people in Moses 6—highlights the differences. Both sermons are based on divine communication (from an angel to Benjamin and the words of God to Enoch), but the stages on which the sermons are given take entirely different forms. We are loaded with details about Benjamin's circumstances: he is retiring as king and turning the kingdom over to his son; he orders his people to gather so they can hear his final counsel; they sit as families in front of their tents; Benjamin builds a tower so they can hear; and when they still are out of distance, he orders his words written and distributed. We see the scene in great detail. There is nothing so specific in Enoch's story. After receiving a call to prophecy among the people, Enoch "went forth in the land, among the people, standing upon the hills and the high places" (Moses 6:27, 37). That is all. Enoch seems to rise above ordinary reality into surreal space. One hearer says of him, "there is a strange thing in the land; a wild man hath come among us" (Moses 6:38). We know little about the circumstances of Enoch's preachment save the strange business that the hearers who came to listen told the tent-keepers to "tarry ye here and keep the tents, while we go yonder to behold the seer" (Moses 6:38). When asked to tell plainly who he is, Enoch explains that he "came out from the land of Cainan, the land of my fathers . . . And it came to pass, as I journeyed from the land of Cainan, by the sea east, I beheld a vision; and lo, the heavens I saw, and the Lord spake with me, and gave me commandment" (Moses 6:40–42). A land of origin and a vision of God: those details and no more identify Enoch, nothing like Benjamin's well-defined position on the tower and his listeners in their seats before their tents.

From then on, Enoch's sermon drifts from his words to the words of God, to the words of Adam interrogating God and back to God himself for a long explication of baptism. Enoch, God, and Adam are all intertwined in one protracted discourse (Moses 6:51–63). Such words float about in a world where Enoch can take hold of them as he chooses. Adam floats about too. At the end of the explanation of baptism, the Spirit catches Adam up and carries him away to be baptized (Moses 6:64). This is a dream world where time and space impose no restrictions. All sorts of words, all sorts of movements, are available in this surreal space, far different from Benjamin's world where he stands on a tower to deliver a specific angel's words to people, sitting in front of their tents, everyone firmly fixed on the earth.

In Moses 7, Enoch climbs Mount Simeon, the heavens are opened to him, and he is clothed with glory and talks to the Lord face to face (Moses 7:3–4). The vision shown to him has more specificity than Moses's view in the first chapter. Enoch sees specific people and specific lands, but like Moses, he sees them in one grand sweep (Moses 7:6–9). He does not travel to these lands as Mormon did; he sees them from on high.

It is no surprise when Enoch's city is taken up into heaven. That sort of transit between heaven and earth is commonplace in the Book of Moses. Space and time are easily overcome. From the mid-point where the narrator has situated himself, it is easy to observe this kind of transfer. Moses can also see Satan with a great chain when he looks up and laughs (Moses 7:26). He also sees angels descending out of heaven, bearing testimony of the Father and Son. It is also not surprising when Enoch catches God weeping. Nowhere in scripture, to my knowledge, is there a more intimate picture of God than in Enoch's exchange with a sorrowful deity. Nowhere do we find God's character—his feelings, yearnings, and regrets—so fully revealed. This is far from Mormon's stern judge delivering His pronouncements. This is a God in anguish, perhaps the most personal God in all of scripture.

We have in Moses an antiquity of a different order than that found in Mormon's history. First, Mormon's mundane specificities—the detailed geography, the strict time-keeping, the social order, the government— give way in Moses to cosmic scenes, to unfettered movements through space and time, and to divine concourse. Moses introduces us to other worlds and shows little interest in the details of earthly existence that so absorb Mormon. Second, the interaction between the two spheres is of greatest interest to Moses. He pays no attention to the details of politics or the struggles of nations, which are central themes in Mormon's writings. Moses scarcely mentions the preservation of society. He attends, rather, to the mingling of the heavenly and the earthly, to the visits of supernatural beings, and to conversations with God. Moses is absorbed in cosmic conflicts between God and Satan and the struggles of God to make the earth work, not the wars of Nephites and Lamanites. Third, Mormon's God is a remote God, often a judge, not forthcoming about himself; while in Moses's world, heavenly persons freely converse. They are personalities, characters in the story. They bare their souls.

Both antiquities are the legacy bestowed on us by Joseph Smith's writings in 1829 and 1830. I can't begin to understand how both worlds could come out of this young man's mind in that brief period. But the two of them profoundly shape our culture. We have the Church that is

rooted in the earth. It builds cities, sells lands, organizes city councils, flees from persecution, marks a path camp by camp across the continent. "Come, Come Ye Saints" is its hymn. It organizes wards, ordains people to the priesthood, sends people on missions, constructs chapels, takes care of the poor. It is definitely the Lord's church through the eyes of Mormon. Our aim is to establish a society based on righteousness, faithful to God, believers in Christ, repentant always, producing strong and generous men and women to do the Lord's bidding. We seek a Zion society that will endure. Mormon would understand what we have begun and loved it.

But we are also the Lord's church through the eyes of Moses. We believe in the angels who came to Joseph Smith. We believe in seer stones, the gold plates, and the Liahona. We gladly received the priesthood from Christ's disciples coming down from heaven. We tell our children about pre-mortal life and the three degrees of glory. Its characteristic song is "The Spirit of God." Our temples take us into Moses's realm. When we sit in ordinance rooms, Adam and Eve are there, Satan appears, Peter conducts the meeting, and in the end we meet God face to face. The pioneers who, in Mormon's fashion, faced down the wilderness were empowered by their congress with beings from Moses's cosmos.

I think this combination is peculiarly Latter-day Saint. We are what we are because we dwell both with Mormon and Moses. It is the hard-nosed practicalities of Mormon that make us tough. It is Moses's exultant conversations with God that give us hope and endurance. We can manage impossible tasks because we have angels on our side. One can ask where the balance lies at the present moment. In individual lives, the balance differs, no doubt, but as a people, both Mormon and Moses speak to us.

Discussion

Matthew J. Grow:

In your introduction, you speak about how the Book of Moses has long resonated with you—the words it uses, the power, beauty, richness, strangeness—and part of that, you say, is because of how it speaks to this prophet puzzle, this kind of contrast between the Book of Mormon and the Book of Moses. I wonder if you might speak a little bit more: what is it about the Book of Moses that has resonated so strongly with you?

Richard L. Bushman:

When I was growing up, I loved the mysteries of God. One great appeal of the Latter-day Saint gospel was its cosmic excursions. As missionaries, we debated these at great length because they were so enthralling. I think that's still true for lots of young Latter-day Saints, particularly intellectuals. In that frame of mind, the Book of Moses was meat and drink. The orders of heaven, Kolob, and other such matters were immensely appealing. Some of this kind of doctrine appears in sections 84 and 88 of the Doctrine and Covenants, but its richest source, as Terryl Givens has pointed out, is the Pearl of Great Price, especially the Books of Moses and Abraham.

Matt:

So, have you become less of a Moses and more of a Mormon as the years have gone on, Richard? You're saying that in your early years, cosmology captivated you and was the meat and drink?

Richard:

As you grow up and take on Church assignments, the practicalities of making an organization work and helping people through the struggles of life bring you down to earth. But now I'm working on a book about the gold plates, so I find myself drifting back to the world of Latter-day Saint marvels. I think they are a valuable part of our heritage. We are focused so much on practicalities, finding comfort, solving our problems, that we may lose sight of the cosmos. I hope that doesn't happen.

Matt:

Yes, let's hope not. So it was so interesting to me, this idea of how this contrast between Moses and Mormon helps create Latter-day Saint culture. And you say that combination is so peculiarly Latter-day Saint. I was trying to think that through, because on the one hand, it would seem that most religious cultures have this tension between this worldly and the other worldly, or the mundane and the ethereal. What is it particularly about that combination, Richard, that you see as so uniquely Latter-day Saint?

Richard:

I think that we have more dramas. We have people and characters and scenes in heaven. We take the war in heaven seriously. We see a version of

it reenacted in our own temples. These events are part of our sacramental life, as well as our intellectual and scriptural life. If you ask a Mormon, "What's the purpose of life?" you soon find yourself in the pre-existence. The mysteries are much more dramatized and explicit in Latter-day Saint teachings than in most other religions.

Matt:

Thanks. That makes sense. Another thing I was curious about, Richard, was the contrast between Mormon and Moses. I think it was laid out so persuasively in your essay: the contrasts in their viewpoint, their approach, the way they thought, the way they approached society. And I was curious about the similarities as well. If you were to be pushed, what are the similarities? What unifies Mormon and Moses?

Richard:

They're all oriented around God. He is the source of power and authority, the source of joy and salvation. Through all the scriptures, the overarching question is this: How can humans live peacefully and joyously with God and each other? Mormon talks a lot about salvation in the afterlife, but he is also very much aware of salvation on earth and how to avoid contention and flourish. In the Book of Moses, the good society leaves the earth. Not until the very end of the book is there any hope that human society can be redeemed. But the goal is the same. With different emphases, both texts are concerned about trying to find a society that can be peaceful and godlike.

Matt:

Thank you. That's great. You mentioned Abraham earlier, and it sounds like you would place Abraham's viewpoint much closer to the Moses viewpoint or the Moses approach. I was wondering if you might say a little bit more about that.

Richard:

The third chapter of Abraham has as much cosmology in it as any scripture. It is probably our richest source of cosmology. At the end, the statements about councils creating the earth open a view of heaven that's quite different from anything elsewhere. Abraham is probably our most radical book. It's the one that contrasts the most with standard Christian theology.

Matt:

Thanks. I've got a couple of questions now from the audience, Richard, that I'm going to read. The first keeps us on this connection between Mormon and Moses. And it says, "Might we have a connection between Mormon and Moses through Moroni and the brother of Jared?"

Richard:

Absolutely. But Mormon doesn't write about the brother of Jared. That's Moroni. The book of Ether is very much in the Moses tradition. God touching the stones resonates deeply with the Book of Moses. My analysis dealt with the books from Benjamin to the final letters of Mormon in the Book of Moroni.

Matt:

Yes. Now we have a question that takes you off of Mormon and Moses, if you'll entertain it. We have an audience member who wants to know, "If you were to write *Rough Stone Rolling* today, what would you change?" Is that a fair question in this conference?

Richard:

I am glad I don't have to write *Rough Stone Rolling* today. The Joseph Smith papers make the sources readily available, but it would be a lot of work to go through them all. I wish John Turner luck as he starts his biography of Joseph Smith. The greatest addition to *Rough Stone Rolling* would be more on women. I should have named every one of Joseph Smith's wives, given them at least that much. I knew it was a problem, but I just couldn't think fast enough to give women their fair due in the book.

Matt:

Okay. Thanks for those reflections. One more question has come in about the Book of Moses: "Does the Book of Moses influence our understanding of the documentary hypothesis?"

Richard:

I am very interested in the documentary hypothesis, which posits that the biblical text we know is a blend of many texts pulled together by various editors. As we all know, the Book of Mormon has a lot to say about the documentary hypothesis as we watch Mormon editing all

those texts—documents—to produce his summary. In the same vein, it is notable that the Book of Moses is much more elaborate than the Book of Genesis. That implies that there are various accounts of Moses's adventures with God, which in turn suggests that the Bible is an edited version of what was known about Moses. All that information offers support to the idea that the Bible is the result of later editors working with a variety of texts to produce a synthesis.

Matt:

Thank you, Richard, for the thought that you've put into this topic over many, many years, and the way that you encapsulated this really crucial contrast between Mormon and Moses.

Mark Ashurst-McGee:

Your comment earlier about your young years of marvel makes me think of a tension in the current church, where we have overcome some of our more simplistic and mythological understandings of some events in early church history, which is good. But how do we learn and mature without losing our sense of awe and marvel and wonder and reverence?

Richard:

Mark, I am with you one hundred percent in those sentiments. I think the magical side of our belief is a precious heritage we must never abandon. One of my aims in writing about the plates is to revive interest in an object that invokes the marvelous. We are so eager for cosmopolitan sophistication that we are tempted to cast such things aside or consider them irrelevant. One of Joseph's effects was to slow or reverse the disenchantment of the world. I think we want to join him in holding on to angels, interpreters, Liahonas, and visions. We must continue to explore the cosmos with Moses and Abraham. That sense of being part of a divine drama and enveloped in heavenly power has energized Mormonism from the beginning. We don't want to give it up now.

I think the magical frees and emboldens us. It promises help in escaping the limits of human life. Think of Lois Lane flying through the sky in the arms of Superman. She was liberated by his great powers. With him, anything was possible. Joseph's view of heavenly powers does something like that for us.

Mark:

Thank you, Richard, for this response. I can't wait to see how your work on the golden plates invokes the marvelous.

I've been teaching a section of "Foundations of the Restoration," and one of the ways I've been trying to connect historical scholarship with marvelous wonder is by using Google Earth and series of geographical images to take the students from a map of the US to the state to the county to the township to the property to the building to the room, et cetera, and trying to firmly ground the precise setting of a foundational event in the minds of the students. This is a bit tedious, but the built-up sense of spatial grounding pays off (I think) when this now-familiar setting is then suddenly irrupted by the First Vision or Moroni or the plates or Elijah, et cetera.

Richard Bushman was born in Salt Lake City in 1931 and brought up in Portland, Oregon. He received his undergraduate and graduate degrees from Harvard University and taught at Brigham Young University, Boston University, and the University of Delaware. He retired as Gouverneur Morris Professor of History at Columbia University in 2001 and was visiting Howard W. Hunter Chair of Mormon Studies at Claremont Graduate University from 2008 to 2011. He is the author of a number of books including Joseph Smith: Rough Stone Rolling. He served as Co-General Editor of the Joseph Smith Papers until 2012 and in 1997 founded the Mormon Scholars Foundation that fosters the development of young Latter-day Saint scholars. He is now co-director of the Center for Latter-day Saint Arts in New York City. With his wife, Claudia Bushman, he is the father of six children and twenty grandchildren. He has served as a bishop and stake president and currently is patriarch of the New York Young Single Adult Stake.

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Notes

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1. Richard Lyman Bushman, *Joseph Smith: Rough Stone Rolling* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 2005), 142–43.

2. Erich Auerbach, *Mimesis: The Representation of Reality in Western Literature*, trans. Willard R Trask (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2013 [orig. pub. 1953]).

3. Edward Said, "Introduction to the Fiftieth Anniversary Edition," in Auerbach, *Mimesis*, xiii.

4. Said, "Introduction," xviii–xix.

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

6. My aim has also been voiced by James Kugel in *The God of Old*. He says in his preface that an author's text can reveal "something crucial about how that person saw and understood things." See James L. Kugel, *The God of Old: Inside the Lost World of the Bible* (New York: Free Press, 2003), 1.

7. Don Bradley, *The Lost 116 Pages: Reconstructing the Book of Mormon's Missing Stories* (Salt Lake City: Greg Kofford Press, 2019).