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# Table of Contents

*Celebrating Exactitude, When It’s Appropriate*
  Daniel C. Peterson ........................................................................................................ vii

*Vox Populi and Vox Dei: Allusive Explorations of Biblical and Book of Mormon Politeias*
  Alan Goff ......................................................................................................................... 1

*Additional Janus Parallels in the Book of Mormon*
  Paul Y. Hoskisson ........................................................................................................... 81

*Latter-day Houses of the Lord: Developments in Their Design and Function*
  Richard O. Cowan ......................................................................................................... 91

*Book of Abraham Polemics: Dan Vogel’s Broad Critique of the Defense of the Book of Abraham*
  Jeff Lindsay ....................................................................................................................... 107

*The Good God Hermeneutic: A Reconsideration of Religious Vocabulary*
  Garrett R. Maxwell ......................................................................................................... 151

*The People of Canaan: A New Reading of Moses 7*
  Adam Stokes ...................................................................................................................... 159

*An Early Christian Context for the Book of Moses*
  David Calabro .................................................................................................................. 181

*Framing the Book of Abraham: Presumptions and Paradigms*
  Stephen O. Smoot ......................................................................................................... 263
Abstract: It’s almost always better to be right than to be wrong, to be exact than to be sloppy. In scholarship generally and serious scriptural study specifically, it’s important to work toward precision in both interpretation and explanation. However, the Lord is fully capable of reaching us where we are, despite our imperfect languages and our limited capacities. “These commandments are of me,” he says at D&C 1:24, “and were given unto my servants in their weakness, after the manner of their language, that they might come to understanding.”

Some of you are no doubt familiar with the venerable joke about the monk who, after decades of anticipation, finally has an opportunity to examine the document that has governed much of his long life. When at last he emerges from the archive in which he’s been permitted to study the original manuscript, tears of regret and sorrow are coursing down his face. When his waiting friends ask him why he’s so sad, he responds: “The word was celebrate!”

In such cases, it’s important to be precise, and to get the words right.

Many years ago, a friend who was a fellow classics major told me of a Sunday School class that he had just attended. It was apparently focused on the apocalyptic prophecies in Matthew 24.

To illustrate Matthew 24:12 (which, in the King James Version, reads, “And because iniquity shall abound, the love of many shall wax cold”), the dedicated teacher had come equipped with a wax candle and a box of matches. Several times, he lit the candle and, after a short interval,
blew it out each time, inviting members of the class to contemplate the significance of cooling wax.

But the verb *to wax* that is used in KJV Matthew 24:12 has absolutely nothing to do with the cooling of wax. It means, simply, “to grow,” and is an English cognate of the German verb *wachsen*, which carries exactly the same meaning. We say of the moon that it “waxes” and “wanes,” by which we mean that the size of the visible moon appears to cyclically increase (grow) and then decrease (shrink) in the sky. When some of us say that Senator Bunkum “waxed eloquent” or that a prose author suddenly “waxed poetic,” we’re not talking at all about beeswax or candle wax.

The verb and the noun are quite distinct in meaning and largely, if not wholly, distinct in their etymological histories. Our modern noun *wax* comes from Old English *weax* (which referred to a substance made by bees), which in turn comes from proto-Germanic *wahsan* and ultimately from the proto-Indo-European root *wokso-* (“wax”). By contrast, our modern verb *to wax* (in the sense of “to grow”) derives from Old English *weaxan*, “to increase, grow,” and, before that, from proto-Germanic *wahsan* and proto-Indo-European *weg-*.2

Thus, if staring at cooling candle wax delivered any actual insights into Matthew 24:12, such insights would occur only by sheer coincidence.

But the teacher wasn’t done yet. He or she then turned to Matthew 24:28, which, in the King James Version, reads, “For wheresoever the carcase is, there will the eagles be gathered together.”

What was the significance of eagles gathering around a carcass? As I recall, the class didn’t immediately see it, so the teacher gave class members a helpful hint: What country has an eagle as its symbol? That’s easy! The United States of America is symbolized by an eagle! So Matthew 24:28 points to the central role of the United States in the events of the latter days!

Unfortunately for that interpretation, though, numerous other countries have used eagles on their flags or otherwise as their symbols, including imperial Rome, modern Mexico, Austria, Achaemenid Persia, fascist Italy, and the Third Reich. Moreover, an eagle was the personal messenger of Zeus, the king of the Greek gods.

2. Also deriving from *weg-* is the Greek verb *auxo* (1st person singular) or *auxein* (infinitive form), which means “to grow, to increase.” Αὐξώ (Auxo or “Increaser”) was the Greek goddess of growth, the protector of fertility, and the personification of the growing season of Spring/Summer. Compare such English words as *augment* and *augmentation*. (Sorry; I enjoy such things.)
Worse still, the King James translation of ἀετοί (aetoi) as “eagles” is almost certainly wrong. (The base meaning of the word aetos is probably more like “large soaring bird of prey” than a zoologically precise “eagle.”) Remember that the “eagles” of Matthew 24:28 are gathered around a carcass. The most fitting translation would probably therefore be “vultures,” since they are far better known as carrion birds than are eagles.3

(I can think of quite a number of countries, both historically and today, that ought to be symbolized by vultures, but there are none that, mentioned here, would be germane to the point I wish to explore.) Thus, at a very minimum, my friend’s Sunday School teacher was, once again, putting far more weight on a dubious translation of a word than the original word could bear.

I thought of these stories while I was reading Royal Skousen’s recently posted “Update of the Pre-Print of a Discussion of the Book of Mormon Witnesses.” That particular article isn’t actually about getting the words precisely right, but reading it got me to thinking about Skousen’s Critical Text Project overall, a principal focus of which is to retrieve, to the extent that it’s humanly possible, the original text that Joseph Smith dictated, obviously including the exact original words.

This is important, of course. It makes a real difference whether 1 Nephi 12:18 is talking about “the sword of the justice of the Eternal God” or “the word of the justice of the Eternal God,” and whether 1 Nephi 13:32 envisions humanity in a state of “woundedness,” “blindedness,” or “wickedness.” 5 Are we to expect “the Sun of righteousness” or “the Son of righteousness” (2 Nephi 26:9; 3 Nephi 25:2; Ether 9:22)? Should we

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remember the “travels” of the Jews, or their “travails” (2 Nephi 29:4)? Will we one day meet before “the pleasing bar of God,” or before his “pleading bar” (Jacob 6:13; Moroni 10:34)? Was Abinadi’s skin “scoured…with fagots” or was it “scorched” (Mosiah 17:13)? Should Mosiah 19:24 read “ceremony” or “sermon?” Was the intent at Alma 17:31 to “reserve the flocks unto the king,” or to “preserve” them, or to “restore” them? According to Alma 39:13, should we “retain” the wrongs that we’ve done or should we “repair” them? Is this life a “preparatory state” or a “probationary state” (Alma 42:10)? At Alma 43:45 and 44:5, were the Nephites defending their “rites of worship” or their “rights of worship?”

Scholars, especially, will want to know whether Mosiah 21:28 should read “Benjamin” or “Mosiah,” and whether the name at Mosiah 25:2 should be spelled as Mulek, Mulok, or Muloch. Before proposing ancient etymologies for it, researchers will need to know whether the Nephite chief judge’s name at Alma 50:40 was Pahoran or Parhoron.6

It’s for this reason that I would encourage all who intend to do serious scholarly study of the Book of Mormon — which is to say, among other things, all who want to write something on the subject for submission to the Interpreter Foundation — to (at a minimum) consult Royal Skousen’s The Book of Mormon: The Earliest Text early and often in their research.

But I don’t want to overemphasize the importance of verbal precision. It is, or it can be, essential to scholarly analysis and it can obviously affect our interpretation or application of a given passage, but getting the words precisely right is plainly not essential to spreading the fundamental message of the Book of Mormon or gaining a spiritual witness of its truth. Any published version of the book is capable of “show[ing] unto the remnant of the house of Israel what great things the Lord hath done for their fathers,” helping them to “know the covenants of the Lord, that they are not cast off forever,” and “convincing … the Jew and Gentile that Jesus is the Christ, the Eternal God.”7 Hundreds of thousands of people, if not millions, have gained testimonies of the Book of Mormon from flawed editions of the book. And Royal Skousen himself is among them. In an article published in 2002, he reflects that

There has … been a spiritual dimension to this work, although my own testimony of the Book of Mormon is not based on my work on the critical text project, but rather on my own

6. The examples in this paragraph and the preceding one are drawn from Royal Skousen, ed., The Book of Mormon: The Earliest Text (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2002), 745–89.

7. See the Title Page of the Book of Mormon.
personal witness that this book records events which really happened. About twenty-five years ago, as I was reading the Book of Mormon during a time of personal difficulty, I reread the account of Ammon, King Lamoni, and the queen in Alma 19, which records the moment when the servant woman Abish raises the queen from the ground:

Alma 19:29–30

and it came to pass that she went and took the queen by the hand
that perhaps she might raise her from the ground
and as soon as she touched her hand
she arose and stood upon her feet
and cried with a loud voice saying
O blessed Jesus who has saved me from an awful hell
O blessed God have mercy on this people
and when she had said this she clapped her hands
being filled with joy
speaking many words which were not understood

As I was reading this passage, the spirit personally witnessed to me, “This really happened.” I have always cherished this moment in my life, and have been grateful to the Lord for the sure knowledge that the Book of Mormon is the word of the Lord.  

Please note, though, that his personal witness came to him prior to his launch of the Critical Text Project, where exactitude is exemplified. The version of the text that he was reading read differently than the version he cites above, which is the result of his own text-critical work. In the standard edition currently used by The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, Alma 19:29–30 reads just a bit differently than the text for which Royal Skousen has made a scholarly argument:

And it came to pass that she went and took the queen by the hand, that perhaps she might raise her from the ground; and as soon as she touched her hand she arose and stood upon her feet, and cried with a loud voice, saying: O blessed Jesus, who

has saved me from an awful hell! O blessed God, have mercy on this people!

And when she had said this, she clasped her hands, being filled with joy, speaking many words which were not understood.

Notice that, in Royal Skousen’s Yale edition, the standard edition’s she clasped her hands reads, instead, she clapped her hands. But the change made no difference in Skousen’s ability to receive a spiritual confirmation of the truth of the Book of Mormon.

So, likewise, although we recognize the fallibility of our efforts at the Interpreter Foundation, we hope that they will not only provide interesting information and insights and answers to questions, but that they will be a means of strengthening and perhaps even of kindling testimonies, of solidifying the foundations of faith, of opening minds and hearts to the witness of the Spirit.

I’m grateful beyond expression to all those who make these efforts possible through 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. As everybody else in Interpreter’s leadership does, they volunteer their service without financial or other compensation. They are indispensable. But we can still use more help!

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Abstract: David Gore’s book The Voice of the People: Political Rhetoric in the Book of Mormon is a welcome reading of Book of Mormon passages which engage in conversation with the biblical politeia — those parts of the Hebrew Bible that explore the constituent parts of the Israelite governance under judges and kings. Gore asserts that the Book of Mormon politeia in Mosiah is in allusive dialogue not just with the Bible but also the Jaredite experience of kingship in Ether. This allusive (intertextual) feature is present not just in the Book of Mormon but any text (Dead Sea Scrolls, New Testament, Apocrypha, Pseudepigrapha, and other writings) in the biblical tradition. The textual connection is conveyed when the biblical Noah is a type and King Noah the anti-type. The same is true of the biblical Gideon, who is a narrative bridge between the period of the judges and the transformation to monarchy; the Book of Mormon Gideon serves a similar typological function, bridging the reign of kings to the period of judges. Our modern notions of federalism and democracy owe much to the biblical legacy of covenant and republicanism, and although the Book of Mormon political structures share some features with modern federalism, the roots of both go deep into the Hebrew Bible. The Book of Mormon politeia, also a branch of that biblical political legacy, requires that readers understand that filiation, and demands awareness of the dialogue between the Book of Mormon and the Bible on the subject, so such reading can enrich our understanding of both Hebraic scriptures.
There is then creative reading as well as creative writing. When the mind is braced by labor and invention, the page of whatever book we read becomes luminous with manifold allusion. Every sentence is doubly significant, and the sense of our author is as broad as the world.\(^1\)

—Ralph Waldo Emerson

Everything in the universe goes by indirection. There are no straight lines.\(^2\)

—Ralph Waldo Emerson

I come not to bury directness but to praise allusion and indirection, to exhume metalepsis and invigorate intertextuality in the practice of reading both the Book of Mormon and the Bible. To this end David Gore’s *The Voice of the People: Political Rhetoric in the Book of Mormon* participates in a salutary trend toward close exegesis of the theological-political elements of the Book of Mormon text. Along with Jim Faulconer’s brief theological introduction to Mosiah\(^3\) (Mosiah is the most politically weighted portion of the Book of Mormon) we are now getting readers who can read out of the text the political reverberations in the book of Mosiah (and other parts of the scripture) which continue and amplify the theological-political portions of the Hebrew Bible. Both Faulconer and Gore suggest that the book of Mosiah requires being read against the backdrop of the biblical politeia, the primary productive contribution in Gore’s and Faulconer’s analyses.\(^4\)

This trend of sensitive readers engaging the Book of Mormon with exegetical attention is a movement to be encouraged. The Mormon

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2. Ralph Waldo Emerson, *Society and Solitude* (Boston: Fields, Osgood, 1870), 162.
4. When I refer to the Bible or use the adjective biblical in this review, I mean the Hebrew Bible, what Christians refer to as the *Old Testament*. When the Nephite authors migrated from the old world to the new, they had before them something equivalent to the Hebrew Bible through the time of Jeremiah. When I refer to the entirety of the Christian canon, I’ll so state. I will sometimes refer to the *Old Testament* but usually because I am drawing from biblical critics who use such terminology in that context.
scripture itself insists that the Jewish and the Nephite scriptures must be read jointly, so it is praiseworthy to have readers engaging the texts, taking the text’s prior demand seriously that the Bible generally and Book of Mormon specifically be read for their rich intertextual layers. Nephi asserts in his tree of life discourse that the angelic guide said “these last records [the Nephite writings], which thou hast seen among the Gentiles, shall establish the truth of the first [the Hebrew and Christian scriptures], … wherefore they both shall be established in one” (1 Nephi 13:40, 41). Book of Mormon believers have a responsibility to read the two scriptures as unified in their prophetic and narrative designs; and Book of Mormon skeptics have a responsibility to analyze the scriptures’ prophetic and narrative claims with at least a modicum of depth and understanding.

I attempt four tasks in this book review: (1) write a review of Gore’s book so the reader understands its contents and import while occasionally disagreeing with Gore’s readings, (2) introduce the reader to the notion of intertextuality/allusion in Hebraic texts, which is an essential prerequisite to understanding the Bible and the Book of Mormon, (3) demonstrate how the book of Mosiah (and first few chapters of Alma) uses such allusion to connect to and elaborate on the biblical politeia (1 Samuel 8–12), the law of the king (Deuteronomy 17), and other relevant biblical passages, while building out the Hebrew Bible’s political theory (or perhaps theories), and (4) increase the reader’s appreciation of the complexity of Book of Mormon narrative and the principles by which it conveys its meaning.\footnote{Nephi asserts his writings are plain (2 Nephi 31:2; 2 Nephi 25:7–8), but plainness and complexity are not necessarily in conflict. I assert that the Book of Mormon is complex and sophisticated because of its plainness, because its plainness accumulates into something beyond simplicity, moving from a simplex to a complex.} I’ll draw upon a fair amount of biblical criticism in order to articulate a biblical politics, but my reader should be aware that I am barely digging the well to the upper stratum of the biblical criticism aquifer; much work needs yet to be done among the Saints to make use of the gift of biblical criticism to learn more about the Bible and the Book of Mormon so that the well of living water extends to the depth of that aquifer and not just to the upper reaches. Both the biblical and Book of Mormon texts are more sophisticated than we treat them, and we need to train our reading habits to follow in sophistication so we can make that living water plain and accessible for readers. I recognize that those four strands I attempt here to intertwine into a rope capable
of supporting my readings may be beyond my reach and capabilities, but I ask my reader’s indulgence as I venture, despite the sheerness of the cliff face and roughness of the trail ahead.

Mormon also asserts that the Book of Mormon and the Bible must be read jointly, except reversing the direction of knowledge and understanding between the Bible (that in the following passage) and the Book of Mormon (this) from the way we believers read (that is, we too often read biblical narrative as primary to understand — usually as a proof text — the Book of Mormon, neglecting to read the latter’s narrative for its illumination of biblical narrative): “For behold, this is written for the intent that ye may believe that; and if ye believe that ye will believe this also; and if ye believe this ye will know concerning your fathers, and also the marvelous works which were wrought by the power of God among them” (Mormon 7:9). Belief and comprehension of the Bible, Mormon asserts, is rounded out and elevated by belief and understanding of the Book of Mormon, and if we don’t grasp the ubiquitous intertextuality between the Book of Mormon and the Bible, we apprehend far too little of either sacred text. We modern readers must be taught to read anew with scriptures as our primer, to be as sophisticated in our reading as the biblical and Book of Mormon writers were in their writing.

Gore treats the book of Mosiah, the first few chapters of Alma, and chapter 6 of Ether as addressing the institution of kingship, bringing excellent insights and innovative readings of those passages. I have labeled Mosiah the Book of Mormon politeia in order to focus attention on the change in constitution narrated there as a political revolution from kingship to judgeship. The discussion of kingship in 1 Samuel 8–12 and 15–16 (and its companion text Deuteronomy 17:14–20) is frequently designated the biblical politeia because these chapters anticipate and narrate a political reversal of what happens in the Book of Mormon, as they show a shift from judgeship to kingship among the Israelites. Gore is right and insightful in reading the biblical politeia and the Book of Mormon politeia in dialogue with each other, and the message is a variation on the theme I have already articulated: God exhibits a sacred discontent with the works of fallen humanity’s hands, and our political and social arrangements and governmental constitutions are no different. God creates the cosmos and pronounces the work “very good” (Genesis 1:31); and in a fallen world when humans create societies and polities, some may be better than others for particular purposes. But God doesn’t say at the end of the foundation of the first city/civilization after the fall (Enoch, Genesis 4:17) and the first city after the flood (Babel,
Genesis 11:1–4, 9) “I approve this message.” That is, God is content to approve the pottery made by divine hands; but when humans continue the divine work of creation (even in imitation), the deity doesn’t endorse or take credit for the work of such fallible potters as we are: as with pottery, so with politics. Samuel resists the Israelites’ demand for a king, but God reluctantly gives the people what they want, knowing the people would be better off with the status quo than to implement monarchy. As late as the classical prophets in the Hebrew Bible, Hosea asserts that “they have set up kings, but not by me” (Hosea 8:4); God and the prophets resist the endorsement as much as political candidates imply or state that God is on their side.

When the “first” of an event happens in the biblical record (the first man and woman, the first murder, the first city, the first sacrifice by Adam, the first entry into a new land, the first king), that founding event is paradigmatic for all that follow, a pattern for good or evil that illuminates subsequent history; St. Augustine recognized the firstness of things to portend what ensues. The violence of Cain against Abel and Romulus against Remus demonstrated the violence upon which all cultures were built. The founding murder showed, the Church Fathers thought, that violence is the necessary mode of operation for the city of man. Gore notes that

the tragedy of human politics is not merely that all political regimes and economic systems tend toward corruption but that the corruption to which they tend goes beyond the political and economic realms. Whether corrupted by bad leaders from the top down or from cultural strife, contention, and violence from the ground up, the result is the corruption of human hearts, individually and collectively. (p. 12)

Gore astutely takes up the following material in the Book of Mormon in the following chapters.

Chapter 1: The Calling of Samuel and Mosiah: Mosiah’s Succession Crisis. Rightly, Gore reads the material in Mosiah 29 as an intertextual commentary on David’s calling and anointing in 1 Samuel 16, but more generally the chapter alludes to the transition from judges to kings in Judges and 1 Samuel (p. 33). Gore, in providing fresh insights to the discussion of political systems in the Book of Mormon, connects those passages to the institution of kingship among the Jaredites in Ether 6:19–27. By alluding to the Hebrew Bible’s political concerns, the Book of Mormon highlights wisdom and obtuseness in the biblical text’s characters: “The openness of the Book of Mormon to the Bible means
not only that we can bring the two works into fruitful conversation with each other, but also that it is difficult to predict where the conversation will lead” (p. 31). This relationship between the two scriptural works isn’t one of “enthrallment” or “subservience,” as weak underreaders often assert, but instead shows how the Nephite scripture “reinforces the Bible’s relevance while at the same time refusing to accept what the Bible says as the last word about what the Bible means” (p. 30). Gore ably notes the correspondences between the biblical and Book of Mormon politeias and draws out keen insights in the allusive comparisons.

Chapter 2: Monarchical Succession in the Book of Ether. Gore notes the internal repetitions between the offer of kingship to Mosiah’s sons and the sons of Jared and his brother in Ether. Pointing to what I have here labeled allusion or intertextuality, Gore notes that “the Book of Mormon is engaging in serious dialogue with the Bible, showing that the biblical stories are by no means finished or complete” (p. 61). Gore not only shows the narrative similarities between the two stories about dynastic kingship but, more importantly, provides a plausible reason why they are connected. Just before initiating a structural transformation from kingship to judgeship, Mosiah had translated the Jaredite record, so the lessons from endorsing kingship were conspicuous not just from the Nephites’ own experience with King Noah but also fortified from the Jaredite example. “By bringing Mosiah 29 into dialogue with the book of Ether and Judges-Samuel, Mormon draws attention to the weight of the phrase ‘the voice of the people’ to emphasize the responsibility of the people to express their desires and to bear the burdens — whether of kingly oppression or the shared responsibility of governing” (p. 62). Gore doesn’t often misfire in reading the relevant texts, but he does here. He cites Mosiah 25:12 to the effect that after the reunification of the three branches of Nephites (King Mosiah’s Nephites and Mulekites, Alma’s group of Zeniffites, and Limhi’s Zeniffite company), each group telling their story, “The people emerged from this assembly with a desire for greater unity. They no longer wanted to be recognized by their separate political identities because they ‘were displeased with the conduct of their fathers’ (25:12)” (pp. 71–72). But this action refers not to the Nephite assembly as a whole, or even the Limhi portion of it. It was the much narrower group — specifically the children of the priests of Noah — who were displeased with their fathers. These fathers had abandoned their wives and children to take wives of kidnapped Lamanite girls, and were absorbed into the Lamanite tradition. It was the much narrower group of Nephites who wanted no such patrimony, but preferred only to be known as Nephites. This fits with Gore’s theme of unity, for after
this group disavowed their birth fathers and became Nephites, “all the people of Zarahemla were numbered with the Nephites” (Mosiah 25:13).

**Chapter 3: Mosiah’s New Constitution.** Gore notes that King Mosiah’s pitch to convert the Nephite governing structure from kingship to judgeship is “based on quasi-democratic principles” but was fragile from its inception, although it lasted for nearly 1,200 years (p. 99) (with a period of tribal interregnum around the meridian of time). No apology should be made for referring to the system as democratic (that may not look like republican, presidential, or parliamentary democracy as we know it today; see p. 117), for democracy broadly defined is neither a modern nor an Athenian invention (as I will demonstrate in this review). The Nephite experience with bad monarchy (King Noah) prompts Mosiah2 to urge constitutional change. Mosiah2 midwifes change toward a more egalitarian system. But the reader must understand that equality means something different to Mosiah2 than the way we define the word today. For the Book of Mormon the emphasis isn’t on equivalence of rights or results but on equivalence of duty, each person carrying the burden of governance and civic obligation rather than a king (righteous or unrighteous) shouldering a larger share of the burden. “Mosiah saw inequality as one of the greatest harms to the people, and, as indicated above, he is no longer convinced that the sins of the people should be answered on the heads of their leaders” (p. 120). This equality means, additionally, that each person should labor to provide for him or herself and family (p. 121). I would add that each person should not live off public taxation or contribution, for such is priestcraft or kingcraft.

**Chapter 4: Nehor Exploits Equality.** As soon as Mosiah2 persuades the people to adopt judgeship and enact democratic — as opposed to dynastic — leadership, the system faces a challenge of legitimacy. Nehor emerges, stress-testing the commitment to equality, the basis of the new judgeship polity. Gore provides a summary of Emmanuel Levinas’s notions of ethical systems and applies them not just to the Nephite experience but to all human praxis. Mosiah2’s notion of equality is founded on the commitment to being-with-and-for-others, while Nehor’s proposed alternative ethic is founded on being-in-and-for-oneself (p. 134); and a second principle that each person should labor for her or his own support rather than being supported by the people. This may just be a philosophical restatement of the dialectic of selfishness versus selflessness, but Gore’s articulation is useful. The order of Nehor will be a long-lasting obstacle to Nephite cohesion and the government by judges: “The order of Nehor is an order of opposition rooted in
being-in-and-for-oneself, and it lasts throughout the rest of the reign of the judges as a counterpoint to the regime established by Mosiah” (p. 135). Gideon is the narrative bridge between kingship and judgeship narratives. When Nehor is challenged by an aged Gideon, Nehor kills the sage. But remember that this same Gideon led a rebellion against King Noah’s misrule, and Nehor’s doctrine is just a systematic articulation of King Noah’s governing ethos. Gore notes the story’s intertextual character when he points out that this Gideon is intended to remind us of the biblical Gideon in the book of Judges, the charismatic leader who led the Israelites out of bondage to the Midianites. Both were charismatic military leaders from the tribe of Manasseh who emerged in a time of crisis to free the people from bondage. “One quite obvious clue that the book of Mosiah is open to and seeks to engage the biblical book of Judges is the presence of a character named Gideon” (p. 144).

The Book of Mormon Gideon challenges wicked King Noah, while the biblical Gideon declines the Israelite offer of kingship. I will engage the two Gideons and Gore’s discussion of them, but I postpone until I leave behind my summary stage for an analytical one; I don’t think Gore gets the allusive comparisons quite right. After being tried and convicted of murdering Gideon, Nehor is executed, but his doctrine outlives him:

The order of the Nehors is a theological-political faction opposed to the work of Kings Mosiah1, Benjamin, and Mosiah, as well as both Alma1 and Alma the Younger, after his conversion, and during his time as high priest and chief judge. The doctrine of Nehor disrupts the possibility of establishing a regime of equality and the sharing of public burdens by sowing the seeds of inequality and idolatry. (p. 154)

The doctrine of Nehor also intensifies the rivalry between Nephites and Lamanites.

Chapter 5: Amlici’s Rebellion and a Heap of Bones. The theme chronicling the transition from kingship to judgeship continues in Alma 2 because verse 1 of that chapter ensures that the reader gets the connection by stating that Amlici is of the order of Nehor. Leading the Nehor dissidents, Amlici attempts to overthrow the new constitution, which prompts a referendum to revert to monarchy (with no intermedial Electoral College the “king-men” might use to manipulate and overthrow the will of the people expressed in an election). Amlici intensifies his attempt to negate constitutional governance through an attempted coup d’état. Led by Alma2, the narrative circles back to kingship. After the first day of battle between what the book of Alma will later call king-men
and freemen (Amlici’s name has that Hebrew root for king — m-l-k — as do other Book of Mormon would-be or sometime kings such as Amalickiah) in the Nephites’ camp in the valley of Gideon. “As if it was not already obvious, the name of the valley where the battle breaks out is emphasized to show that Alma is defending the same cause for which Gideon opposed Nehor” (p. 179), and King Noah, by the way.

**Conclusion: Awake to Mournfulness.** While Gore recognizes the need for people of good will to be involved in politics, he rightly notes that we ought to recognize the limits of any political philosophy. “Politics is tragic to the extent that we exercise faith in political solutions to what are in reality religious problems” (p. 192). If we elevate the stakes of politics to a win-at-any-cost competition, then we haven’t understood the Book of Mormon’s take, which “depicts a politics of tragedy by showing us the worst that can happen when we take the stakes of politics too seriously” (p. 193). The consequences of sin can be ameliorated and souls converted, but not by political parties, and one ought not to treat soulless parties or factions as we do religious congregations. Nor should we consider congregations as extensions of political parties. “Politics cannot save us because of its fundamentally tragic character of overpromising on solutions to problems it cannot comprehend” (p. 193).

Gore’s reading accurately puts the Book of Mormon politeia (largely the book of Mosiah and the first few chapters of Alma) in persistent dialogue with the biblical politeia (1 Samuel and Judges, and more generally the entire Deuteronomistic History [Joshua-2 Kings with Deuteronomy also thrown into the description by some]); and such an effort ought to be rewarded with a wide readership. Josephus was the first writer in the Jewish and Hellenistic tradition not only to refer to the biblical politeia (a politeia is an analysis of the governing order in a society and its relationship to the governed; it is often translated constitution, and that is the way Josephus meant it); but also to argue that the Mosaic constitution was on par with those governmental structures analyzed by Aristotle and the broader Greek and Roman tradition. Gore provides keen and subtle insight both into the relationship between the two politeias but also into reading the Book of Mormon on its own.

**The Ends and Means of a Scriptural Politics**

In our fallen world — so far from God, so near to partisan politics — we humans fashion a matching lone and dreary political philosophy. Never should we make the mistake of asserting that our personal, party, or national politics are also God’s. That doesn’t mean that all politics
are equally good or bad, just that we have to work through all political platforms while attempting to exorcise the evil and cruel elements and bolstering the good and moral; the moral and religious principles can be enacted in various ways by differing platforms. Like all aspects of the post-lapsarian world, the tares are yet interwoven with the wheat (in the primordial garden, apparently, weeds did not exist). Gore notes that “the larger narrative arc of the Book of Mormon is a critique not just of those in power, but of power itself” (p. 12). Most of us live compartmentalized lives in which our involvement in matters political aren’t sufficiently informed by matters religious. We feel good — perhaps even morally superior — in inventing or repeating lies we know are false in order to gain political advantage, insisting on supremacist notions regarding our own tribe or ethnic group, using our access to the levers of power to advance our private interests while declaring them to be in the public interest, or demonizing those who disagree with us as unpatriotic or ungodly while our own commitments resemble a highly selective patriotism.

The God of the Bible and the Book of Mormon is neither Republican nor Democratic (nor conservative nor liberal), and the Christ of the testaments advances a politics, but not one of this world. Gore notes that “sometimes we are tempted to use scripture to justify a partisan position or moralize against the opposing position” (p. 8). I am attempting to walk a fine line here: I agree with Gore, if I don’t misrepresent his position, that God is not a partisan when it comes to human politics, but we still must be able to criticize political positions based on their human qualities from within our own commitments, which include religious principles and practices. The scripture warns that political parties, political individuals, economic advocates, and economic positions are liable to deception and corruption. Citizens should trust but verify, and not even trust too much, for “whether corrupted by bad leaders from the top down or from cultural strife, contention, and violence from the ground up, the result is the corruption of human hearts, individually and collectively” (p. 12). The tendency to become partisans or advocates of parties or positions tends to make people forget the purpose of both big and small pictures: service to others. The institutions humans build are fallible and fallen, prone to error and cruelty, and we ought to improve beyond the limits of what politics can do, supplementing with moral and religious action.

A major divide between political opponents is over fundamental commitments toward individuals and social groups: should the
happiness and fulfillment of the individual take priority over the good of social groups the individual inhabits, such as families, neighborhoods, nations, employers, religious congregations, and others? We would be more generous and charitable toward those who disagree with us if we recognize that major divide between those whose basic orientation is to empower individuals to self-actualize their possibilities, and those who elevate dedication to family, religious congregation, and other social units over individualism (or more likely, that sometimes the same person might favor individualistic commitments, and other times prioritize communal obligations, because our practice and principles need to be worked out in the mangle of life experienced through improvisation).

Gore refers to Levinas, a Jewish philosopher, whose philosophy takes seriously the obligation to tend to the other, which position is opposed to the worldly tendency symbolized by Cain, the founder of the first city in human history, according to the Bible, to be “in-and for-oneself.” Cain thought the answer to his question “am I my brother’s keeper?” was so obvious that even God should know it. The Bible portrays Cain not only as the first murderer but important as the founder of all civilizations, because all originate in violence, as Cain’s city did. God curses Cain to be a vagabond, but immediately after the cursing (Genesis 4:15), he goes out and establishes the first urban center (Genesis 4:17). The Cain syndrome of being-in-and-for-oneself is opposed to being-with-and-for-others, a true dichotomy of the two basic orientations people can embrace toward social life (p. 13). Like the Bible, “the Book of Mormon reiterates the biblical call to being-for-others, which is a radical politics acknowledging one’s own temptations toward freedom from responsibility as well as welcoming all the trials, troubles, and travails associated with bearing the burdens of the community (see Mosiah 29:33)” (p. 13). Politics tends to lose sight of being-for-others in favor of being-for-oneself or being-for-party, being-for-nation, being-for-my-ideology, being-for-people-who-look-like-me, or many more possibilities. The Book of Mormon conveys the biblical message that the problems we encounter in society are not fundamentally political problems but religious ones (p. 16). Therefore the solutions are necessarily religious, not political.

The Nephite scripture urges a “politics oriented toward the Other” (p. 3), one beyond bad and evil that cultivated self-interest and self-gratification. “In the here and now, politics rests on competition, conflict, and violence arising from self-assertion, anger, faction, vanity, and pride. Such politics traffics in a light-minded, pretentiously grave
posturing that all too seriously reckons that the defeat of one’s opposition is all that matters” (p. 3). A politics of the Other requires that we recognize that those who disagree with us are more than likely rational, with good motivations, but perhaps moved by a conviction to purposes or ends that are different from those to which we are committed. The fact that our opponents’ political means and ends differ from ours doesn’t make them villains. Whether our political commitments emerge from highlighting individualism or communitarianism, our religious commitments ought to require that we reject the politics of cruelty. We should all agree that such policies, regardless of party affiliation, are odious and morally and religiously repugnant.

The Bible and the Book of Mormon call us to an ethics of love, of brotherhood and sisterhood, of inclusiveness and care. The better we read those scriptures, the better and more apt we are to enlarge our circles of love and acceptance. In the past 40 years, developments in our ability to read the biblical text have dramatically improved our capacity to understand the biblical and Book of Mormon text and context, and I will make use of some of that biblical criticism in this review. Such developments permit us to read between the texts to understand how Hebraic writings such as the Hebrew Bible, the New Testament, and the Book of Mormon are constantly in dialogue with each other to produce commentary on the world of politics that a single scriptural work cannot deliver, reflected through its limited prisms on reality.

Over the past four decades biblical critics have made huge advances in demonstrating that the Hebrew and Christian Bibles constantly allude to other portions of the scripture. We have come to the realization that intertextuality is a central feature of biblical textuality. 6 Such persistent allusion is just as fundamental to Book of Mormon textuality as it is to any group in antiquity who believed they were still carrying out the biblical

6. Most biblical critics are sensitive to the conflation of the terms allusion and intertextuality. They insist that allusion requires a temporal relationship, the writer doing the alluding living after and having access to the text being alluded to. Some critics also insist on authorial intentionality, that the belated alluder consciously intends the connection. Intertextuality, on the other hand, is often used atemporally, such as referring to Shakespeare’s allusions to T.S. Eliot. Biblical critics are a variety of historians and are touchy about the charge of anachronism. In most circumstances, I don’t think the distinction between the two terms makes much difference, and my tribal affiliation is to literary critics who generally don’t care so much about historians’ obsessions. I will use the two terms interchangeably in order to have a varied vocabulary available to describe a range of textual relationships that are fundamental to biblical and Book of Mormon readers.
mandate to multiply and fill the earth and to make the blessings of the Abrahamic covenant available to all the progeny of Noah and Adam and Eve. If the reader doesn’t grasp the Book of Mormon’s constant allusion to the Bible, that reader doesn’t understand the Book of Mormon (or the Bible, for that matter, for as I have quoted Nephi already, “wherefore they both shall be established in one; for there is one God and one Shepherd over all the earth” (1 Nephi 13:41).

**Allusive Scriptures and Metalepsis**

Not only does the Hebrew Bible constantly and insistently allude to other parts of its own canon, but so do any subsidiary texts that followed in the biblical tradition: the Apocrypha, the Pseudepigrapha, the New Testament, the Book of Mormon, the Dead Sea Scrolls. These belated ramifying texts were in constant dialogue with the trunk but also the other branches. What Schiffman says about the Dead Sea Scrolls should also be applied to the Book of Mormon (and the other mentioned texts): “We have to acknowledge that, to a great extent, the authors of some of the scrolls saw themselves as in some way continuing the biblical tradition or actually living in a sort of time-warped biblical Israel.” Such persistent allusiveness, both internal to the Hebrew Bible and between successor writings and that Bible, places demands on the readers of the successor and ancestor writings. “Therefore, between this corpus and the Hebrew Bible — as well as inside the corpus — we should expect complex levels of intertextuality. Put simply, the Bible was formative for Second Temple literature and, hence, intertextuality was rampant.”

A pressing need for readers to match the sophistication and complexity of the Bible and the Book of Mormon has come with the recognition of biblical intertextuality.

I ought to emphasize that in this persistent allusiveness — the New Testament, the Dead Sea Scrolls, the Book of Mormon and the rest of the family of ancient Hebraic writings (the descendent texts) — are merely doing what the predecessor text does. Biblical scholars and disciples have become manifestly more sensitive to this constant reference to earlier biblical passages and narratives, keenly aware that

the biblical authors themselves also comment on, explain, revise, argue with, and allude to texts written by their

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predecessors. The implications of this phenomenon, which we may call inner-biblical allusion and exegesis, are important both for students of the Hebrew Bible and for students of the religious and literary traditions that grew from it.9

Of course, any adequate understanding of the Bible requires that modern readers understand the ways moderns, medieval people, and ancients approached the texts with fundamentally different presuppositions.10 Any adequate grasp of the Hebrew Bible, the New Testament, and the Book of Mormon requires readers who have struggled to understand the persistent allusiveness of those scriptural texts. The writers paid the price to understand traditional modes and conventions, and contemporary readers must pony up in the same coin.

Ancient Hebraic writers used techniques we call allusive because they believed that God was in charge of history and God’s path keeps circling upon itself, so there are multiple falls from paradise, exodus escapes, redemptions from bondage, confrontations between kings and prophets, new covenants between God and humans, etc. The stories repeat patterns because history is repetitive. So too is human nature unchangeable (outside divine intervention), and like God’s salvation history, one eternal round, so it would be surprising if past events didn’t repeat, because human shortcomings are as predictable as sunrise, winter, or greed. For exploration of the political-theological nexus of Hebraic writings we must recognize that the children of Israel repeatedly were dominated by foreign despots and cultivated their own autochthonous tyrants. Consequently, we would expect to find political structures and other human inventions repetitive; King Noah of the Book of Mormon is not sui generis nor even original, but part of a pattern as old as humanity and human society itself.

Indeed, the self-aware manner in which Qumran sectarians and other Second Temple period authors reworked and drew on biblical ideas and biblical phraseology raises one final question: Is it possible that intertextuality is simply a complex word for phenomena that were just second nature to ancient

10. James L. Kugel, How to Read the Bible: A Guide to Scripture, Then and Now (New York: Free Press, 207), 14–16, 31–33. The ancient and medieval rabbinic tradition was fully aware of this constant allusive interplay in biblical textuality, but they approached it using different assumptions than we moderns do.
Jewish authors? Perhaps “there is nothing new under the sun” (Eccles. 1:9).\textsuperscript{11}

The problem for us moderns is that we don’t write or read the way ancient Hebraic writers wrote and read, nor do we think the way ancients thought. Consequently, we often miss too easily and too simply the point of ancient Hebraic narrative by assimilating antiquity to modernity.

I could point to the traditional analysis of allusion in Hebraic texts as typology in the Christian tradition, or I could take up Robert Alter’s notion of type scenes and related allusive techniques internal to the Hebrew Bible. I could rely on the more general discussion of intertextuality, which usually emerges from literary criticism; these are different approaches to describing the same phenomena. I will instead begin from New Testament scholar Richard B. Hays on metalepsis as the New Testament incorporates references to the Old Testament. Just as the Book of Mormon constantly alludes to the Old Testament, the New Testament also projects the history of salvation as one riff after another on Old Testament events and themes, because those Christian writers believed that their historical situation was an extension of that portrayed in the Old Testament. Hays narrows his focus to one type of allusive reference — metalepsis: one detail in the referring text can evoke a much larger narrative context full of detail in the alluding text while assuming the reader will understand. Metalepsis can be subtle, so elusive that it might easily be missed or misunderstood:

Allusive echo functions to suggest to the reader that text B should be understood in light of a broad interplay with text A, encompassing aspects of A beyond those explicitly echoed. This sort of metalectic figuration is the antithesis of the metaphysical conceit, in which the poet’s imagination seizes a metaphor and explicitly wrings out of it all manner of unforeseeable significations. Metalepsis, by contrast, places the reader within a field of whispered or unstated correspondences.\textsuperscript{12}

The invocation works from a mode of indirection. Metalepsis as a literary figure is extremely efficient, for “allusions are often most powerful when

\textsuperscript{11} Schiffman, “Intertextuality in the Dead Sea Scrolls,” 224.
least explicit. This remains true even if some readers are slow of heart to discern the metalepsis.”

For example, the gospels often invoke entire narratives from the Old Testament by dropping just one word or a name. In the gospel of Mark, the author is an expert at metalepsis by using such allusive details to see a much larger narrative world. “Significant elements of the intertextual relations lie just under the surface, suggested but not explained by the narrative” in which the reader of the metalepsis has some heavy lifting to do to keep up with the text. “The result is that the interpretation of a metalepsis requires the reader to recover unstated or suppressed correspondences between the two texts.” Much like Mark, Paul is constantly quoting, alluding to, echoing, and citing scripture. “The extraordinary thing about Paul’s use of this metaphor [comparing the incestuous relationship in the Corinthian congregation to the purification of the Passover dough] is how little he explains.” He leaves it up to the reader to catch the reference and fill out the connection. The auditor who misses the clue isn’t Paul’s ideal reader.

The gospels, like the Book of Mormon, persistently use various forms of allusion. Metalepsis is one such reference in which a small metonymic detail evokes a much larger and fuller narrative.

Metalepsis is a literary technique of citing or echoing a small bit of precursor text in such a way that the reader can grasp the significance of the echo only by recalling or recovering the original context from which the fragmentary echo came and then reading the two texts in dialogical juxtaposition. The figurative effect of such an intertextual linkage lies in the unstated or suppressed points of correspondence between the two texts.

Modern readers commonly read the wrong meaning into scripture when scriptural narrative repeats with a difference. We moderns often mistakenly think in terms of copying, plagiarism, or lack of originality when we encounter a repetition, but these are all modern concerns, not ancient ones, and what modern readers often mistake as a deficiency

should more likely be read as a plenitude. Biblical writers considered recurrences of foundational events more real (not mere facsimiles) because they repeated earlier patterns and paradigms. So attention to even the smallest allusive connection is essential to the reading enterprise: “the allusive ripples spread out widely from brief explicit citations to evoke larger narrative patterns.”

The reader who is forewarned to look for quotations, allusions, and echoes is forearmed about the vigor needed to keep pace with the text.

The Book of Mormon’s use of a biblical name (Noah and Gideon are examples I will explore along with a single word — disguise — to ground my discussion of metalepsis) is able to recall to the reader’s mind the entire biblical backdrop of the drama from the Primeval History of Genesis, the period of judges and conquest, and the biblical engagement with monarchy. The gospels, like the Book of Mormon, persistently use various forms of allusion. Metalepsis is a minimal reference in which a narrative element evokes a maximal narrative context. We moderns (and historical criticism of the Bible exponentially compounds the tendency) are trained to think atomistically, to break the object of study into smaller and smaller units in the hope that when we get as miniature as possible we can reassemble the tree, the zebra, and the liver from those quarks and other subatomic particles. We ought to think of metalepsis as more like microcosmic thinking than atomistic study, in which the microcosmic object always connects up the chain of being to the macrocosmic original. Of course, to use the short phrase “chain of being” ought to remind the reader of more holistic medieval and antique thought when some unifying force (say, a deity) held nature together much as on a different scale gravity, electromagnetism, the weak nuclear force, and the strong nuclear force serve a similar function today.

For example, in the conflict between the prophet Abinadi and King Noah, one small clue points allusively to the many stories in the Old Testament with narratives of conflict between kings and prophets: the disguise Abinadi wears. Abinadi is to be seen in continuity with the biblical prophets: Abinadi comes in disguise (Mosiah 12:1); Saul comes in disguise to the witch of Endor to raise the ghost of Samuel (1 Samuel 28); a prophet disguises himself to condemn the king (Ahab) who released an enemy king (1 Kings 20:38); a prophet urges a naïve King Jehoshaphat to disguise himself in battle (1 Kings 22:30); King Josiah

disguises himself to go to battle (2 Chronicles 35:22); and King Jeroboam tells his wife to disguise herself to consult the blind prophet Ahijah (1 Kings 14:2). The metalepsis occurs when with one small detail (the prophetic or antagonistic disguise) evokes the entire world of biblical stories about conflict between kings and prophets and the theological point bolstered by that series of biblical stories. Each narrative differs in details and decoration, but the Book of Mormon invokes those biblical stories for readers who have eyes to see, for narrative blindness can lead to moral and political blindness.

Two details in the conflict story between King Noah and Abinadi point back to the biblical Noah; the metalepsis develops out of two hints: the name both Noahs bear and the vineyard that both Noahs plant to produce the grapes for wine. What Hays says about the New Testament is just as accurate regarding the Book of Mormon: “If we want to understand what the New Testament writers were doing theologically — particularly how they interpreted the relation of the gospel to the more ancient story of God’s covenant relationship to Israel — we cannot avoid tracing and understanding their appropriation of Israel’s Scriptures.”

A large part of the alluding story’s meaning is carried by that space, too often ignored or too little examined, between the referring and the referred to stories.

The events recounted in Genesis are intended to be archetypal — paradigmatic patterns — in which first events model and establish precedent in the world and society they introduce. Those events in what biblical scholars call the Primeval History (Genesis 1–11) lay out the pattern of God’s relationship to humans and human relationships with each other in society. That Primeval History outlines three beginnings, not just one, to represent the new world(s): (1) Adam and Eve in the Garden of Eden, (2) Adam, Eve, and their progeny after the expulsion into the lone and dreary world, and (3) after the deluge and Noah’s charge to repopulate a recently baptized world. Each of the three events and worlds needs to be seen in relationship to each other. “Each of the three beginnings of humankind is characterized by a sin or fall: Adam’s and Eve’s eating of the fruit, Cain’s murder of Abel, and Noah’s violation” after his drunken exposure. For my purposes in this review, Noah’s planting

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a vineyard, producing wine, and his subsequent drunkenness are the most important, but some treatment of the previous two introductions of humans into new creative orders needs to be seen as the backdrop to the King Noah narrative. All Hebraic scripture demands a reader who is sensitive to the allusive qualities of the material being read: and what is true of the New Testament is just as true of the Book of Mormon, for “the New Testament itself can be understood only in light of a profound theological reading of the Old Testament.”

Because we have been disciplined to think as moderns, we must be schooled to reason and narrate outside our linear and unidirectional conceptual schemes and historical notions to understand ancient patterns of thought. We must recognize that, as with the Dead Sea Scrolls, the New Testament, and the Hebrew Bible itself, we must read the Book of Mormon in near constant dialogue with the record that Lehi risked his sons’ lives to obtain from Laban. “Every text of the Hebrew Bible opens a window to other biblical texts and to postbiblical interpretations.” We exist in a living tradition, and we moderns need to acknowledge that we, in our own way, are doing what Second Isaiah was doing when appropriating the religious tradition to which he belonged. “It follows that the religion which generated the Hebrew Bible in a crucial respect resembles the religions generated by the Hebrew Bible. Israelite thinkers, like those of Judaism and Christianity, looked back to existing texts and constructed new works in relation to those earlier ones,” and we stand little chance of understanding this if we don’t understand that.

The Two Noahs

To understand the politeia in the book of Mosiah, we must understand the typological connections between the biblical Noah and King Noah. The name of King Noah should by itself alert the reader to the symbolic link between the two characters. In some important ways that guide the reader along the path to meaning, what happens to the biblical Noah happens to the Book of Mormon Noah. The story of the first Noah is

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important because he functions as a second Adam. Of Noah and his vineyard, Steinmetz notes that “it is the first vignette that we are offered of the postdiluvial world, indeed the only thing we know about Noah after the flood story is completed. As such, I think, it describes for us what this new world is like.”

Noah’s world and the vineyard in it aren’t merely retrospective, in that they attempt simply to repeat the world of the Eden, but they reflect the divine command to exert dominion over the created order: “Thus, Noah’s vineyard is not a return to primitive Eden, but a development of Eden in accord with the implicit eschatology of Genesis 1–2.” Adam and Noah are charged with completing and expanding the creative work that occurred in Eden by cultivating the creation and extending it. Since the Bible views Noah’s world as the one we still inhabit, understanding the meaning the author attributes to it is essential. Noah’s is the third world described in the Primeval History, and comparison with the first two worlds (the Garden and the lone and dreary world after expulsion) is essential to grasping the biblical view of our created order. Each world is characterized by a transgression or fall from grace: the humans’ partaking of the fruit, Cain’s murder of his brother, and Noah’s drunkenness.

The murder perpetuated by Cain introduced a mimetic contagion, for after Noah’s arrival but before the flood, human society had devolved into mayhem and bloodshed: “The earth also was corrupt before God, and the earth was filled with violence” (Genesis 6:11). God sees the violence and decides to start over with a new Adam and a new world because “God saw that the wickedness of man was great in the earth, and that every imagination of the thoughts of his heart was only evil continually” (Genesis 6:5), and “it repented the Lord that he had made man on the earth, and it grieved him at his heart” (Genesis 6:6). After seeing the level of corruption and violence, God telegraphs his plans to Noah: “God said unto Noah, The end of all flesh is come before me; for the earth is filled with violence through them; and, behold, I will destroy them with the earth” (Genesis 6:13).

The Noah-as-Adam story is what Sonnet calls a false start narrative. God’s attempt to replicate humans and their societies in the divine image proves problematical, if not a failure, so God decides to start over from the beginning with recalcitrant humans, with the Noachide covenant.

the Abrahamic covenant, the Mosaic covenant, the Davidic covenant, and others: “Each of the covenants that govern biblical history — the creation covenant, the covenant with the people of Israel (grafted upon the covenant with Abraham), and the monarchic covenant — has had a ‘false start,’ which included an act of repentance coming from God.”

In each of the founding stories the humans inhabit a new world, and “each of them tells of the first act of violation perpetrated in a new world. In addition, Adam, Cain, and Noah are each described in relation to the earth” because some planting occurs: the tree in the garden, Cain’s vocation as a farmer, and Noah’s vineyard. The deluge is a dissolution of the first created order that permits the watery chaos to de-create the original work of God’s organizational act.

The process of the deluge’s receding and the land emerging, the animals disembarking and God’s blessing the Noah group and issuing virtually the same creation and reproduction mandate Adam and Eve received shows that “the flood account is a historical action of new creation” parallel to the first one. Each transgression results in a curse, and part of that curse in the Adam and Eve story and the vineyard story is related to human nakedness and sexuality.

Similarly, King Noah inherits a world not entirely new but at least renewed by his father (King) Zeniff; keep in mind that the new worlds of Adam and Eve and of Noah are born or reborn under the divine initiative. The new world that Zeniff attempts to recover and King Noah continues is nowhere labeled a divine scheme. In fact, Zeniff himself calls his program of recolonizing the Land of Nephi an “overzealous” project (Mosiah 9:3, the description is used another time: 7:21, of King Zeniff the account says “he being over-zealous to inherit the land of his fathers”) initiated by humans, not God. And Zeniff himself is only a bit player in the Zeniffite campaign: the real focus is his son, King Noah, and the antagonistic prophet Abinadi. Nephi and the Lehi group had literally gained a new world when they migrated out of Jerusalem (the land of promise; 1 Nephi 18:23); Zeniff and his group attempt a paradise regained. Why else would Zeniff name his heir Noah?

31. Ibid., 131.
Sometime after arrival, Lehi dies, and Nephi leaves this land of first inheritance to escape his brothers’ murderous designs and possesses a new, new world, the land of Nephi (2 Nephi 5:8). Years later, Mosiah migrates from the land of Nephi (Omni 1:12) and settles in the land of Zarahemla. Later, under Zeniff’s leadership, a group of Nephites return to inhabit “the land of Nephi, or of the land of our fathers’ first inheritance” (Mosiah 9:1), which they intend to redeem and possess (not the least from Lamanite control): a brave new world, a brave new land (even if a repetition of place and action from earlier generations). Just as Adam is a gardener and the tree of knowledge dominates the garden’s landscape, Cain (as opposed to Abel, who is a pastoralist) is also a farmer, and both Noahs plant a vineyard. A vineyard is different from, say, wheat or oats. Grains don’t require as long-term a commitment to a particular piece of ground: a season from planting to harvest. But a grape vineyard demands a three-year commitment before it begins to yield fruit suitable for wine making. Noah the mariner and Noah the ruler are committed long term to the land they cultivate. All four of these Adam figures are men of the earth: “each story begins with a planting; the tree of knowledge, Cain’s produce, and Noah’s vine each set the stage for the fall that is to occur,” with apparently both pride and planting which precede a fall.

In fact, Noah is not only the antitype of the typological Adam, the Genesis text expresses hope that he will undo the curse that Adam brought on humans and the creation. After the fall, “the locus of humanity’s discomfort is their work and toil, and the source of their comfort will be the ground, despite YHWH’s curse. The first person plurals indicate that Noah will be a representative for all humanity, paralleling Adam’s role.” Genesis 5 gives a false etymology (perhaps disputed is a better description) of Noah’s name when Noah’s father (no philologist) recounts the human genealogy: “And [Lamech] called his name Noah, saying, This same shall comfort [nachum] us concerning our work and toil of our hands, because of the ground which the Lord hath cursed” (Genesis 5:29). Noah’s name is based on the Hebrew word “to rest,” not “to comfort.” This desired reversal of the curse upon

33. Ibid.
34. Green, “Vineyards and Wine from Creation to New Creation,” 132.
35. Noah’s Hebrew name is alluded to in the Genesis Eden account: “The etymology of Noah’s name also connects with 2:15 in which God ‘rests’ Adam in the garden. God gave Adam rest in the garden, and Noah imitates God by giving humanity rest by planting a vineyard in fulfillment of the hope/prophecy of Lamech that Noah will provide ‘relief’ (םחנ) ‘from the ground.’” In this way Noah “lives up to the meaning of his name, … creating ‘rest’ around him by planting a vineyard
the ground and the humans connects Noah more closely to Adam as a savior figure who holds promise to fix the difficulties resulting from the fall. “This, in fact, is one interpretation of the significance of planting the vineyard; Noah, for the first time since Adam’s sin, brings forth comfort from the earth.”36 The original plants in the Garden were sown or transplanted by God, but the plants cultivated by Cain, Noah, and King Noah were placed there by human initiative. Once the humans are forced into the fallen world, they have to plant, cultivate, and harvest (and in the case of grapes, further refine the produce of the ground) the

and thus parallel[ing] Adam in the garden of Eden.” (Green, “Vineyards and Wine from Creation to New Creation,” 142, quoting Richard S. Hess, “Studies in the Personal Names of Genesis 1–22,” Alter Orient und Alter Testament 234 (Kevelaer: Butson & Bercker, 1993), 116–17; Hennie A. J. Kruger, “Subscripts to Creation: A Few Exegetical Comments on the Literary Device of Repetition in Gen 1–22,” Studies in the Book of Genesis: Literature, Redaction and History, ed. A. Wenin, BETL 155 (Leuven, BEL: Leuven University Press, 201), 443). Both Adam and Noah are expected to expand the work of gardening, of working the ground throughout the world as much as human progeny are expected to multiply and fill the earth. The etymology of King Noah’s name may also be alluded to when describing that king’s court and the luxurious appointments they had built for themselves at the expense of the people’s labor and taxation; they themselves did not work with their hands to support themselves but engaged in priestcraft. Noah built “elegant and spacious buildings,” “a spacious palace” with a throne, and expensive seating in their temple with a breastwork so “they might rest their bodies and their arms upon while they should speak lying and vain words to his people” (Mosiah 11:8–11). And although Lamech isn’t an astute Hebrew etymologist when he attaches Noah’s name to “comfort” or “relief,” the biblical writer knows the etymology of Noah’s name and plays on the meaning when Noah’s ark “rested” on the mountains of Ararat (Genesis 8:4). The Genesis narrative plays with both interpretations of Noah’s name: “to rest” and “to comfort.”

36. Steinmetz, “Vineyard, Farm, and Garden,” 201. As Steinmetz notes, rabbinic tradition holds that Noah’s vine was a cutting from the Garden of Eden, so it hearkens back to a time before the fall. “The fruit of the vine is a luxury, pleasurable to experience like the fruit of Eden and in stark contrast to the staple of grain for which human beings have had to labor. For Noah’s viniculture as the alleviation of the consequences of the earth’s curse” Steinmetz refers to various sources (201n18). One should keep in mind the symbolism of wine in the Bible: wine represents joy (Judges 9:13 and Psalms 104:15). In addition to joy, wine was also viewed as an aphrodisiac, and Noah in advanced age may view wine as an aid in his fulfillment of the reproductive aspect of the creation mandate; although an old man, Noah is not exempt from the command to multiply. This commandment to “be fruitful” and “fill the earth” is given twice in the first creation account in Genesis (1:22 and 1:28) but three times in the post-deluge account (8:17, 9:1, and 9:7) (Green, “Vineyards and Wine from Creation to New Creation,” 133–34).
crops themselves. Lamech’s hope for his son is that Noah will redeem the land from the curse accompanying the fall (from toil and thorns), just as Paul believes that a second Adam will reverse the effects of the fall and redeem all of mankind (1 Corinthians 15:45–49).

When God promises never again to curse the ground (Genesis 8:21–22), Noah’s first act after receiving the creation mandate is to plant a vineyard, which “is his act of faith that demonstrates his confidence that the new creation will endure according to God’s promise. Because a vineyard requires at least three years of care before it produces suitable fruit, … Noah’s act represents substantial investment in the current creation” and its durability. The Genesis narrative goes to great lengths to convey that the Noah story is a repetition of the two previous creation stories which result in the human inheritance of a newly founded order.

The Noah story is more important in that the text asserts that Noah’s world is still our world; God has not de-created and re-created the world since Noah’s time. Noah is exemplary for the cosmos in which he is the model and first man. “We must read the vineyard story in the context of the prior creations and violations and that such a reading will provide a description of human existence in the new — and real-world.” The King Noah narrative so obviously triggers an allusive connection to the biblical Noah. Each transgression is tied in some way to “the awareness or seeing of nakedness, and the intimation of sexuality or sexual sin.” The verse before the Book of Mormon mentions King Noah’s vineyards and drunkenness, noting the sexual sins of King Noah and his sycophants: “And it came to pass that he placed his heart upon his riches, and he spent his time in riotous living with his wives and his concubines; and so did also his priests spend their time with harlots” (Mosiah 11:14). King Noah’s sins are much more wide-ranging than just carnal sins, but the story’s chronicler highlights the sexual: “he did not keep the commandments of God, but he did walk after the desires of his own heart. And he had many wives and concubines. And he did cause his people to commit sin, and do that which was abominable in the sight of the Lord. Yea, and they did commit whoredoms and all manner of wickedness” (Mosiah 11:2).

The three biblical stories of new beginnings in a novel world need to be wound together with the King Noah narrative, because that is what the Book of Mormon’s allusive quality demands that we understand. The

39. Ibid., 194.
Zeniffite experiment of redeeming the land of the first inheritance is also a failed experiment and false start after King Noah’s failed one-term kingship, as both the Saulide and Davidide monarchies disintegrated into oppression and violence. The lesson isn’t lost on King Mosiah, who, after the two splinter groups of Zeniffites rejoin the main Nephite current with their story of King Noah’s oppressive rule, persuades the Nephites to abandon kingship. God repents after the Adamic covenant (Genesis 6:6) — a the covenant with newly freed Israelites narrated in Exodus 34 (Exodus 32:12, 14), and the monarchical covenant of making Saul king — and starts anew with David (1 Samuel 15:11, 29, 35). “In all three divine commitments, time is re-launched after a catastrophe and is endowed with a new quality,” and in the case of King Noah’s fall, a new constitutional order.

The Israelites’ failed experiment with monarchy sets a pattern for biblical writers, so the model of false starts isn’t just apparent in the Primeval History, but “the paradigm of God’s repentance and resilience is to be found in the ‘false start’ of monarchic history” also. Sonnet refers to Meir Sternberg’s exposition of biblical meaning. For the biblical writers (and also Book of Mormon composers and editors) God repeats patterns in history that humans too often don’t perceive, except in hindsight, and by reading the sacred record with prophetic tutoring. One biblical narrative is linked to others, and the job of the biblical reader is to see the connections, for

in a God-ordered world, analogical linkage reveals the shape of history past and to come with the same authority as it governs the contours of the plot in fiction [in Genesis and the rest of the Hebrew Bible]. … As one cycle follows another through the period of the judges, the Israelites thus stand condemned for their failure to read the lessons of history: the moral coherence of the series luminously shows the hand of a divine serialize[r].

That same analogical thought process ought to be extended to Book of Mormon narrative in general, and the story of King Noah in particular. Samuel’s caution about kingship warns that the king will appropriate the Israelites’ sons and daughters for his own service,

41. Ibid., 480–81.
confiscate their land and produce, and “will take one-tenth of your flocks, and you shall be his slaves” (1 Samuel 8:17, NRSV). Samuel’s rebuke echoes the Israelite experience of slavery in Egypt. Enthroning a king will result in a repetition of Egyptian bondage, but this time to an Israeliite king instead of an Egyptian Pharaoh. “Samuel’s exhortation indicates how systematic subjugation can emerge from prosperity. Only because one already possesses ‘fields, vineyards, and olives’ can these be confiscated. The more productive one’s land and flocks, the more these can be taxed. The more children one has, the more who can be conscripted.”

Under Zeniff, King Noah’s father, the Nephite group realizes their theological and eschatological goal of inheriting and possessing the land of their fathers, and they prospered in it. “We did inherit the land of our fathers for many years, yea, for the space of twenty and two years” (Mosiah 10:3). That prospering in the land is specified in the production of fruit and grain, linen and cloth to the extent that the Zeniff group “did prosper in the land” (Mosiah 10:4–5). But after Zeniff “conferred the kingdom upon Noah, one of his sons” (with no mention of Zeniff’s apparent death) (Mosiah 11:1), the successor king demonstrates the potential for a return to slavery much like a return to Egypt. A prophet emerges who predicts such descent into Egyptian-like slavery: “Thus saith the Lord, it shall come to pass that this generation, because of their iniquities, shall be brought into bondage, and shall be smitten on the cheek; yea, and shall be driven by men, and shall be slain” (Mosiah 12:2). When King Noah’s priests interrogate Abinadi, it is obvious that they believe they have possessed the land of first inheritance and redeemed it, achieving some eschatological goal.

When Kings and Prophets Don’t See Eye to Eye

Joseph Spencer’s reading of the confrontation between King Noah and Abinadi is insightful for what it reveals about the theological motivations of King Noah and his priests (no doubt those rationales handed down from Zeniff are the main driving force for the reclamation project). The priests, at Abinadi’s trial, recite Isaiah 52:7–10 and ask why the prophet seemingly contradicts Isaiah’s beatific predictions. These priests take for granted that this passage “had a single, obvious, incontrovertible

meaning — a meaning that everyone in the Land of Nephi would immediately see. Such an interpretation would have to have been well-known and rooted in a culture-wide ideology.”

These Zeniffites apparently had a theological goal to reclaim the land of first inheritance, and they used a variety of typological interpretation, applying Isaiah’s prophetic oracle to themselves: “Because Zeniff seems to have seen himself as an eschatological figure, he likely would have seen Isaiah less as spelling out the still-future history of Israel than as detailing the present history of Israel — the history he and his people had lived out.” Prophets like Abinadi with their message of doom and repentance were no longer needed, because “the good tidings of the eschatological restoration of Nephi’s kingdom had been definitively delivered, prophets (Isaiah, Nephi) and kings (Zeniff, Noah) had finally seen eye to eye and together lifted up the voice to sing praises.”

History had come to an end, and pesky, nattering, nabob prophets like Abinadi had been made obsolete. Of course Abinadi prophesies no end of history, as a Francis Fukuyama might, but asserts that history had not culminated but was actually repeating itself: a human descent into wickedness and violence, in this instance led by their king. Initially, the project of repossessing the promised land of first inheritance achieves its eschatological goals, in the Zeniffite view, for “we again began to establish the kingdom and we again began to possess the land in peace” (Mosiah 10:1), and the ground yields its produce in abundance: “And I did cause that the men should till the ground, and raise all manner of grain and all manner of fruit of every kind” (Mosiah 10:4). The promise first given to Nephi of prospering in the land (“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” 1 Nephi 2:20) is fulfilled (Mosiah 11:5), and they successfully defeat the Lamanites militarily (Mosiah 10:20). Nephi had been promised that if he and his descendants were righteous he would be made a ruler (1 Nephi 2:22). Zeniff and his people, according to this interpretation of Isaiah, think they have fulfilled not only the positive vision of Isaiah but also the promises made to the fathers, Nephi in particular. That is the Zeniffite condition when Zeniff turns monarchy

45. Ibid., 144.
46. Ibid., 145.
over to his son Noah: “I, being old, did confer the kingdom upon one of my sons; therefore, I say no more” (Mosiah 10:22).

The priests as King Noah’s agents are asserting a theological and textual interpretation, Spencer notes; and Abinadi is challenging the typological meaning of “likening the scriptures” predominant among the Zeniffites. Against this reading of scripture and history, King Noah is not a new Adam, argues Abinadi, redeeming his people from the fall and liberating the land from the curse, as he plants and harvests grapes from a vineyard and other crops to repeat the gardening activities of the first Adam and the first Noah. This farming and harvesting is symbolic of all the consequences of the fall, and Lamech holds out hope that Noah would redeem the land from the curse wrought by Adam: “And he called his name Noah, saying, This same shall comfort us concerning our work and toil of our hands, because of the ground which the Lord hath cursed” (Genesis 5:29).

King Noah asserts that the Isaiah passage foretells their own time when they themselves are empowered to declare “how beautiful upon the mountains are the feet of him that bringeth good tidings; that publisheth peace; that bringeth good tidings of good; that publisheth salvation; that saith unto Zion, Thy God reigneth” (Mosiah 12:21). Abinadi, they counter, is declaring the need for future repentance and punishment rather than declaring peace, good tidings, comfort, and redemption in the present tense. Isaiah foretold a time when any gospel message would “break forth into joy; sing together ye waste places of Jerusalem; for the Lord hath comforted his people, he hath redeemed Jerusalem” (Mosiah 12:23).47 Noah’s priests instead maintain that Abinadi is wrong: “And now, O king, what great evil hast thou done, or what great sins have thy people committed, that we should be condemned of God or judged of this man? … 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” (Mosiah 12:13, 15). Lamech hoped for “comfort” from his son Noah, and Zeniff returns to the land of Nephi in the belief that the Lord through this act of redeeming their symbolic Jerusalem had “comforted his people.” The Book of Mormon reader needs to see how the messages of King Noah and Abinadi are diametrically opposed, and the conflict of interpretation is borne out in their typological views and readings of Isaiah.

47. Isaiah 52:9, the verse the priests are quoting, uses the Hebrew nâcham, “to ease or comfort.”
Abinadi has to reorient the theological and historical interpretation of Zeniffite society. He first teaches the priests the ten commandments, imperatives their society, the priests, and King Noah have been violating. Then Abinadi teaches the true meaning of Isaiah’s messianic prophecies. The suffering servant songs of Isaiah are yet to be fulfilled, for the messiah must first come as a suffering messiah, who shall take the world’s sins upon himself and die (Mosiah 15:7–12). That future redeemer is the one spoken of by Isaiah, as Abinadi echoes back to the priests the passage they quoted from the scripture and prophets such as Abinadi are still needed, for

Behold I say unto you, that whosoever has heard the words of the prophets, yea, all the holy prophets who have prophesied concerning the coming of the Lord — I say unto you, that all those who have hearkened unto their words, and believed that the Lord would redeem his people, and have looked forward to that day for a remission of their sins, I say unto you, that these are his seed, or they are the heirs of the kingdom of God. …

Yea, and are not the prophets, every one that has opened his mouth to prophesy, that has not fallen into transgression, I mean all the holy prophets ever since the world began? I say unto you that they are his seed.

And these are they who have published peace, who have brought good tidings of good, who have published salvation; and said unto Zion: Thy God reigneth! And O how beautiful upon the mountains were their feet! And again, how beautiful upon the mountains are the feet of those that are still publishing peace! And again, how beautiful upon the mountains are the feet of those who shall hereafter publish peace, yea, from this time henceforth and forever! (Mosiah 15:13, 15–17)

Prophets, Abinadi notes, were essential in the past, in the present, and will be required “from this time henceforth and forever!” The Zeniffite celebration of their achievements in redeeming the land is a wrongheaded and mistaken interpretation of Isaianic and Nephite scripture. King Noah’s name — whether based on the Hebrew word to comfort or to rest — and the allusion to the biblical Noah account is key to understanding the Zeniffite portion of the book of Mosiah. King Noah has brought unrest to the land and the people instead of rest.
Kings and Other Oppressors

King Noah is the prototypical evil king whom the descendants of Abraham encountered time and again in scripture. Biblical narrative provides a few examples of good kings: Josiah, Hezekiah, Solomon in the first half of his life, David (a king without flaws, if the account in 1 Chronicles is to be taken at face value). The Book of Mormon explicitly compares bad King Noah with good kings Benjamin and Mosiah. I have pointed out the way the King Noah narrative is to be seen against the biblical Primeval History, especially the story of Noah. The Noah narrative establishes the biblical framework for the world we live in now, having been preceded by other world formations with higher expectations and aspirations for human conduct in the Garden and the lone and dreary world. The Noachide, Abrahamic, and Mosaic covenants are attempts by divinity to establish proper relationship between humans and between God and humans, but God had renounced another total reboot in the flood episode. The establishment of monarchy among the Israelites is just another extension of that Noachide world.

Just as the movement from one Adam to the next and the next results in the humans’ taking more and more responsibility for themselves in planting and nurturing the fruit of the ground, and the same is true as we move through the Primeval History, as humans take more and more responsibility for their sins. “Both Adam and Eve, when accused by God, cast blame on others rather than accepting personal responsibility for their actions” (Adam blames Eve, Eve blames the serpent). In the next generation, Cain can’t shirk the responsibility for his fratricide onto others. When Cain is angry that God doesn’t accept his sacrifice, Cain is forced to accept that he himself is a moral agent, answerable for what he himself has done. “Cain is enjoined to accept responsibility for his actions. Cain’s sin, in fact, results from his refusal to assume such responsibility and his choice, instead, to destroy the object of his blameful anger.” Steinmetz asserts that Genesis 3:18 and 4:7 call on Eve and Cain to accept their own moral culpability. “These clearly parallel statements, I believe, have the same import: although you may be seduced to sin, you have the power to rule over that which lures you,” so each human is responsible for choosing between good and evil.

49. Ibid., 204.
50. Ibid.
Similarly, when the two Nephite assemblies attempt to restore kingship after the disastrous events of King Noah, Alma\textsubscript{1} and Mosiah\textsubscript{2} use this exact argument about each person being accountable as moral agents for themselves. Citing the example of King Noah, who “did cause his people to commit sin” (Mosiah 11:2), Alma\textsubscript{1} urges his group not to shift their righteous responsibilities onto a king or a teacher:

Now as ye have been delivered by the power of God out of these bonds; yea, even out of the hands of king Noah and his people, and also from the bonds of iniquity, even so I desire that ye should stand fast in this liberty wherewith ye have been made free, and that ye trust no man to be a king over you. And also trust no one to be your teacher nor your minister, except he be a man of God, walking in his ways and keeping his commandments. (Mosiah 23:13–14)

Mosiah\textsubscript{2}, also reverting to the example of wicked King Noah, notes that people have too often shifted their moral accountability to their leaders: “For behold I say unto you, the sins of many people have been caused by the iniquities of their kings; therefore their iniquities are answered upon the heads of their kings” (Mosiah 29:31). But such an arrangement is morally inadequate.

Mosiah\textsubscript{2} finds this moral blame-shifting to be unsatisfactory, and he calls it an instance of inequality. Equality in the Book of Mormon means that people take responsibility for their own moral or immoral decisions: “Now I desire that this inequality should be no more in this land, especially among this my people; but I desire that this land be a land of liberty, and every man may enjoy his rights and privileges alike” (Mosiah 29:32). Mosiah related to the people the burdens he himself had borne, with the hope that a more egalitarian solution would help the people take responsibility rather than shift censure or credit to a king. “And he told them that these things ought not to be; but that the burden should come upon all the people, that every man might bear his part” (Mosiah 29:34). Equality is achieved when the people accept accountability for their own moral choices and actions. The Nephites are persuaded by Mosiah\textsubscript{2}’s argument and accept this form of equality: “Therefore they relinquished their desires for a king, and became exceedingly anxious that every man should have an equal chance throughout all the land; yea, and every man expressed a willingness to answer for his own sins” (Mosiah 29:38). This moral accountability is the very purpose of the Eden, Cain, and Noah stories in Genesis. Partaking of the fruit of knowledge of good and evil includes such culpability and reward. “Human beings are responsible for
their own deeds; once the human being achieves the capacity to choose between good and evil, blame for sin cannot be cast upon any external agent.”

The biblical account establishes the larger backdrop against which Book of Mormon kings are to be compared and contrasted. The Israelites’ suffering under the oppression of kings is analogous to their Egyptian experience under Solomon and later kings. “The first signs of oppression come in Solomon’s reign. The royal bureaucracy can now put endless dainties on the king’s table, and while internal taxation clearly receives a substantial boost from foreign tribute, impressed Israeli labor reaches four months a year for each of 30,000 men (1 Kgs 4–5).” Solomon is the oppressor king, the model of kingship warned about in Samuel’s manner of the king: using forced labor for his building projects. “The fact is that Solomon was the Israelite king who came closest to living up to this forbidding picture, and it is not credible that anyone familiar with Israel’s history, and concerned about the break-up of its united kingdom, should have been unaware of this fact.” Solomon’s son and successor Rehoboam (no Dale Carnegie student) suggests that his father was a piker when it comes to Egyptian-like bondage: “Now my father loaded you with a heavy burden, and I will add to your burden; my father punished you with whips and I will punish you with scorpions’ (1 Kings 12:14).” If the northern tribes accept Rehoboam’s kingship as they endorsed his father’s, they will have made a covenant on those terms. Solomon started the process of converting prosperity in the land into bondage and servitude, a land of milk and honey into a land of oppression and taxation. King Solomon systematically violated the law of the king, as did King Noah. In fact, Samuel predicted that the newly appointed kingship function would oppress the people by taking ten percent of their produce. Now ten percent doesn’t seem so oppressive, for a government needs revenue, as Halpern notes: for ancient or modern readers “the king’s predilection for tithing seems … more responsible than corrupt”, of course Samuel describes the manner and taxation of

51. Ibid.
54. Ibid., 404.
56. Ibid., 18.
future kings in a period without a central government and state, one with only localized infrastructure and defense expenditures, so a ten percent taxation rate might in such circumstances seem like a policy initiated by a king of debt and an emperor of taxation. The description of King Noah ensures that the reader see his taxation as oppression and corruption by noting that it is not only twice the going rate of kingly taxation at one fifth, and not only on the agricultural production as Samuel warned, but also on precious metals (Mosiah 11:3). King Noah is twice the oppressor Solomon was.

Just as Adam and Eve’s transgression results in the curse of hard labor to produce food and children, Cain’s curse makes him a vagabond and a wanderer; similarly, Noah’s drunken nakedness and Ham’s mocking of that posture results in a curse on Ham’s son. When Abinadi pronounces judgment on King Noah’s wickedness, he delivers a curse that the Zeniffites will experience bondage and suffering (Mosiah 11:20–25). In the Mosaic regime (as opposed to the kingly Davidic regime), prophets occupy the rulership slot. After regime change to a system ruled by kings, the prophet still has a central role with three functions: king makers, king critics, and king removers, while the tribes can join the prophet in these three functions. Abinadi needs to be seen in this same function, or at least operating as the king critic and moving force as king remover. Both King Noah and Abinadi need to be seen as inheritors of a long line of biblical precedents.

We often use the word type or variations, such as typology, when we read the Bible or the Book of Mormon (archetype, typical, typify, Robert Alter’s type scene, typecast, prototype); and much of our language about printing comes from the same etymological roots: typography, typist, typeface, typesetter, typewriter. The etymology of the Greek word points to a substantial original, and the antitype is a copy, just as a hammer would leave an indentation in wood, and a printing press or typewriter leaves an ink spot and impression on paper that matches the metal type. The vocabulary emphasizes the typicality of some object or idea. These words come from the Greek typos, sometimes transliterated as tupos. The Latin translation of type is figura, from which we derive in English, and

most other languages influenced by classical or church Latin, a range of words regarding metaphor: *figuration, figurative language, figure of speech*. “The terms *typology* and *figural interpretation* are essentially synonymous, though the latter more clearly emphasizes the act of reception by the reader.”

The word *archetype* comes from Greek roots meaning “original or foundational” and “pattern or model.” Gore points out that King Noah is “an archetype for iniquity” (p. 106) and is understood to be a typical example of a wicked ruler. When the word *typos* or its plural *typoi* (or synonyms such as *paradeigma*, a “pattern or example”— one can see the English *paradigm* in it) are used in the New Testament, the reader should be reminded that the acts of God and of humans are repetitive, following some established pattern. King Noah was a bad king because he “lived *in-and-for-himself*” (p. 108), which is the way of the world. Such degeneracy in high station “shows that corrupt leaders can corrupt the people” (p. 110). This living-in-and-for-oneself is what made King Noah the archetypal evil king. Gore contrasts being-in-and-for-oneself with being-with-and-for-others. Mosiah 2 preaches and practices the latter, while King Noah embodied the former philosophy (although Nehor and his order formally introduce the former “as a counterpoint to the regime established by Mosiah” (p. 135)).

The problem with King Noah is not just his personal wickedness, but the larger reverberations of his rule, for “he *did cause his people to commit sin*, and do that which was abominable in the sight of the Lord.

Yea, and they did commit whoredoms and all manner of wickedness” (Mosiah 11:2). His wasn’t just a private indiscretion but he caused the Zeniffites to sin also. Alma notes that King Noah’s wickedness caused his own personal sin as a priest of that king (Mosiah 23:9), much as government ministers or cabinet secretaries and legislators would sin by becoming mere sycophants to a wicked ruler. King Mosiah notes the larger causal factor for kings generally: “For behold I say unto you, the sins of many people have been caused by the iniquities of their kings” (Mosiah 29:31); the private character flaws and misdeeds of political leaders aren’t merely private matters, but have political consequences, and are magnified when combined with political authority. It is a biblical principle that the ruler’s character is too often stamped on the ruled. Under King Manasseh, the Israelites “hearkened not: and Manasseh seduced them to do more evil than did the nations whom the Lord destroyed before the children of Israel” (2 Kings 21:9; see also 1 Kings 14:16; 1 Kings 15:26; 1 Kings 16:2).

This politics of being in-and-for-oneself doesn’t end with King Noah. It is expressed as a public philosophy of Nehor, who declared that priests and teachers should be supported by the taught, and no longer work to support themselves (Alma 1:3). He grew proud, wore expensive clothes, and established a church driven by a prosperity gospel (Alma 1:5–6). Nehor’s philosophy is articulated in opposition to Mosiah’s social principles. Mosiah says that every person should “esteem his neighbor as himself” (Mosiah 27:4), while Nehor urges that “every priest and teacher ought to become popular” (Alma 1:3). The principle of equality was central to Mosiah’s political reform, and continues as a guiding governing tenet as long as Nephite judgeship endures. Gore refers to Nehor’s novel notion as a cult of personality (p. 139), but it can easily be discussed in similar contemporary terms as a cult of celebrity, or as people pursuing an apprenticeship in notoriety, in which being infamous or famous is more important than being good or charitable. For Nehor, this notoriety is about wearing expensive clothing and avoiding physical labor (ibid.) Nehor’s leadership doctrine also exalts the leader, placing the ruler’s interest above the interests of the populace. “Nehor represents the problem of a provocative leader whose motives do not rank the goodwill of their audience highly and who employ rhetoric to serve morally bad or questionable ends” (p. 142). One form of idolatry is to fashion and worship political idols. “Idolatry in public discourse refers to false promises, including the vain hope that human problems have an
ultimate solution” (p. 135). This suggests that only the demagogic ruler can fix the problems a society faces.

For 90 years “the order of Nehor” will be the phrase that marks the chief rival philosophy to that of the church of God, “thereby fostering being-in-and-for-oneself, as exemplified by Nehor, and the outwardly directed speech of Alma, which cultivates … being-with-and-for-others” (p. 143). One of the greatest sins, according to Mosiah2, is not so much to have inequality among the people, but to accept that inequality as the natural state of society. “Throughout his reign, Mosiah saw inequality as one of the greatest harms to the people, and, as indicated above, he is no longer convinced that the sins of the people should be answered on the heads of their leaders” (p. 120, citing Mosiah 27:3–5). As that passage from Mosiah insists, one form of such inequality can be remedied by having people (priest, teacher, government official) work with their own hands to support themselves. When Mosiah2 sends a letter to the Nephites, urging that they no longer pursue a monarchical governmental form, he articulates a principle upon which this equality would be founded:

The positive political vision offered in Mosiah’s epistle is rooted in equality of responsibility, which is described by Mosiah in two specific ways. First, equality means dividing the share of the public burden among everyone, rather than shouldering the king with all of it. … Second, equality means laboring with your own hands for your own support. (pp. 120–21)

We often have a presentist attitude in reading ancient texts. We expect such writings to reveal people living in such times to think like our contemporaries, to socialize like us, to work out their everyday lives as we do. We need to be more like anthropologists of the past and let antiquity be more antique. Only in modern times (over the past, say, four hundred years) did we come to expect a division between church and state, family and neighborhood, religion and knowledge about the surrounding world. We might be tempted to take the narrative portraying conflict between Alma2 and Nehor to be one about theology, but religious confrontation is also fundamentally political. When Nehor opposes the polity established under Mosiah1, Benjamin, and Mosiah2, which is continued under the judgeship of Alma2, he challenges the regime as much as the church. Alma2 is, after all, both chief judge and high priest at the time of the confrontation with Nehor (Mosiah 29:42). ‘The doctrine of Nehor disrupts the possibility of establishing a regime of equality and the sharing of public burdens by sowing the seeds of
inequality and idolatry,” and when the order of Nehor continues after his execution, his acolytes not only take up arms to oppose the Nephite establishment after losing an election, they also defect to the Lamanites. Thus “the order of Nehor fuels Lamanite aggression as well as rebellion among the Nephites. It inspires a lust for dominance and control as well as for property and carnal security” (p. 154).

The sharp distinction between religious and secular movements doesn’t exist in these stories the way we moderns think about segmenting parts of our lives. The approaches to individual life and social relationships between those who maintain allegiance to Nephite judgeship and the church and the nascent order of Nehor are inevitably public and political. When Amlici, a disciple of Nehor, attempts to overthrow the political structure and seeks to be king (first by democratic then by extraconstitutional means), believers and adherents to Nephite traditions viewed such actions and advocacy as “alarming” (Alma 2:3). Those in the church placed more value on assisting the poor and weak than on acquisition of wealth, striving for equality rather than climbing a stratified social structure. The order of Nehor endorsed (and was willing to enforce through appeal to violence) their own value commitments: self indulgence, idolatry, conspicuous consumption, stealing, dishonesty, infidelity, and murder (pp. 164–66). Every society faces similar choices between contrasting virtues and vices, and as Mormon edits the Book of Mormon, he highlights these different fundamental commitments that each society cultivates (p. 166).

There will always be Nehors, people who are in-and-for-themselves, who feel no need to curb their base desires for recognition, achievement, and gratification. They seek only their own welfare and do not consider themselves obligated to play host or to proffer hospitality. There will also be Almas, people who are for-the-other, who foster networks of sympathy and develop sensitive hearts and hands willing to serve the common good. The presence of Almas in the world represents an extraordinary possibility. They sound a clarion call to all who might hesitate or fence-sit between being-in-and-for-oneself and being-for-others. (p. 168)

Nehor is executed, but his doctrine survives him, for the next chapter notes that Amlici belongs to the order of Nehor (Alma 2:1). Amlici’s political program is organized according to Nehor’s theological program, and both entail a return to kingship and overthrow of judgeship while making social inequality the official policy of government: “This
Amlici had, by his cunning, drawn away much people after him; even so much that they began to be very powerful; and they began to endeavor to establish Amlici to be a king over the people" (Alma 2:2).

The narrative about Amlici continues the Nehor thread. Amlici challenges the new political regime. “That there should be a referendum on a return to monarchy only five years into the reign of the judges reveals the relative strength of Amlici’s faction as well as Alma’s desire to govern by the people’s voice” (p. 172). It must also demonstrate the weakness of the new government to be contested so soon. The book of Alma encounters hurdle after obstacle, challenge after confrontation to government by the voice of the people, often authored by explicitly named *kingmen*, led by Nephites with the Hebrew word for “king” (*m*l-*k*, or *m-lek*) built into the root of their names (Amlici, Amalickiah).

Amlici first attempts through constitutional means to change the recent governing structure from judgeship to kingship — with Amlici, of course, ambitious to make himself king. When the Amlici party loses the plebiscite, their alternative is to reject the vote result and to declare Amlici king, declare martial law, and resort to violence to enforce the result (Alma 2:10). To ensure that the reader sees the connection between the Amlici rebellion and the narrative strand back to Nehor and King Noah, Gideon shows up in these narratives. After the Amlicite rebellion, Gideon makes his ultimate appearance in the story. The final battle between the Amlicites and Nephites begins in the valley of Gideon and the venue of the future city named Gideon. Gideon is used one last time to bookend the narrative trajectory from opposing King Noah and suggesting a liberation exodus to escape Lamanite bondage, to confronting Nehor in defense of the old-time religion from a self-interested and unprincipled politics, to the successful military action against the first not-yet-so-named kingmen in the valley of Gideon. Gideon ties the political events in the book of Mosiah to those in Alma, especially the political transition. “As if it was not already obvious, the name of the valley where the battle breaks out is emphasized to show that Alma is defending the same cause for which Gideon opposed Nehor” (p. 179), and stretched back to the Zeniffite political interrogation of the kingship’s faults.

The story of Nehor and Amlici doesn’t really end with Alma chapter 2 (although Gore’s analysis does), for the order of Nehor continues to affect politics through the book of Alma, but the making of longer and longer books needs to end. Putative kingmen continue to acquire power through force and manipulation. Gore sees in the biblical passages
( Judges, 1 Samuel, 2 Samuel) and the Book of Mormon passages (Ether, Mosiah, Alma — especially Mosiah 29 to Alma 2) a pattern that sketches out a politico-theology of scripture. While politics is to be engaged, it isn’t the telos of life. The gift of brushing the texts together “is in the call to mourning and wakefulness. No other response can do justice to the horror and destruction brought about through sin.” The dead bodies of Amlicites and Lamanites moldering in the graves or battlefields remind us what politics is about as it is practiced in most of its manifestations: “The strong, recurring desire to dominate others at the price of everything is precisely the opposite of the common good. Combatting this, finally, may not be totally within our power, but we can guard against it by cultivating mournfulness and wakefulness” (p. 195).

The Two Gideons

The two Noahs multiply into multiple Adams as we gain a knack for understanding biblical repetition. Gore correctly sees the Book of Mormon Gideon as a bridge to the biblical past and the period of the Judges, and from opposing King Noah bridging to the future to another period of Book of Mormon judges; Gideon carries a heavy burden of intertextual weight to ensure we read the story of salvation history as recursive. The biblical Gideon is one of the first of the deliverer/saviors in the book of Judges: “Both Gideons are warriors whose task is to defend a people beset by idolatry” (p. 145). That allusive connection between the two Gideons should be triggered by their names: “One quite obvious clue that the book of Mosiah is open to and seeks to engage the biblical book of Judges is the presence of a character named Gideon. The biblical Gideon … and the Book of Mormon Gideon … have a lot in common” (p. 144). Whether we are reading about two Noahs or two Gideons (one each for the Bible and Book of Mormon), we ought to remember that identical or similar names are a metaleptic clue to a connection the reader should make when reading antique Hebraic writing. The King Saul of the Hebrew Bible and the Jewish Saul who later carried the Greek name Paul in the New Testament ought to be seen as parallel characters with some theological point being made by the repetition. A “Jacob” in the Hebrew Bible and a “James” in the New Testament ought to trigger the reader to see a correspondence. The same is true of a typological relationship of the name “Joshua” in the HB and a “Jesus” in the NT. When we get a “Laban” and a “Nabal” (a palindrome of Laban) in biblical narrative and a “Laban” shows up in the Book of Mormon, the text is making a point about repeated stories and events — and not too subtly. “Recognizing
the similarity between names means that the name of Jesus in the New Testament is not a tradition-free nominal marker but instead bears content from the Old Testament even prior to any information about Jesus’ own life and work being provided by the New.\(^{60}\)

Gore treats both Gideons as anti-monarchical warriors and saviors, rescuing the people from idolatry and kingship. “Both Gideons are warriors whose task is to defend a people beset by idolatry. Gideon is called to slay kings” (p. 145). Gore sees the biblical Gideon as more straightforwardly a mosiah of the Israelites: one who destroys the idols, liberates the chosen people, and declines kingship for himself and his sons: “One of the reasons why the biblical Gideona is highly regarded in republican circles is his refusal to worship idols and to become king” (p. 147). The Bible is more subtle and nuanced than Gore’s portrayal permits. True, Gideon overthrew the idols, but after his victory over the Midianites he requests the precious metals obtained in the booty and fashions an ephod; the Israelites worship in a way indistinguishable from idolatry (Judges 8). Likewise Gore notes that Gideon refused the kingship office the Israelites offer, and “not without contradiction, Gideon acts as a proto-king and desires his children to inherit his power and influence” (p. 148). Gore mentions Abimelech, Gideon’s son, and asserts that despite Abimelech’s “treachery” (murdering 70 of his own half brothers), but “never succeeds in establishing himself on a throne” (p. 149). To the contrary, the Bible asserts that Abimelech was made king (Judges 9:16) and reigned three years (Judges 9:22). And Jotham, Abimelech’s half brother, uses the word king in his parable about the plants (Judges 9:7–21, referring to Abimelech in verse 16 as king) to refer to Abimelech’s place after the murder of his 70 half brothers.

Gore could treat the allusive connections with more sensitivity than he does. In the Judges Gideon story, Gideon ostensibly refuses kingship (even dynastic kingship) after delivering the Israelites from Midianite oppression (Judges 8:22–23), but other indicators obscure the claim that he is opposed to idolatry and monarchy. For one, Gideon names his son Abimelech, “my father is king,” and Abimelech (after some intrigue) does indeed become king for a short period (Judges 9:1–6, 22). Gore even notes the presence of Abimelech in the narrative (p. 149), without also pointing out that his name undermines the notion that Gideon was

a good or thorough anti-monarchist. Instead of kingly office, Gideon asks for the people’s plunder; from the gold earrings he fashions an ephod which the people worship in an idolatrous manner (Judges 8:24–27). Gideon’s words, as recorded in the book of Judges, do indeed renounce kingship, but his actions don’t. Gideon’s harem, request for gold spoils, and struggles for hereditary leadership among his sons are all indicators of kingly status: “Gideon’s wealth, harem, children, his sanctuary, and the disputes among his children concerning the succession to their father are generally cited as the major evidence for the royal character of his life and career.”

Such a harem “is characteristic only of kings in historical times.” Davies outlines more details in support of the notion that despite denials, Gideon’s trajectory was toward kingship: (1) Gideon and his sons seem to have exercised dynastic rulership in Shechem; (2) Jotham’s parable of leadership among the community of trees in the middle of the Gideon/Abimelech narrative never mentions Israelite kings but is clearly a parable about kingship requiring only an analogical sensibility to apply to Abimelech (Judges 9); (3) other characters in the story compare Gideon and his brothers to a king’s children (Judges 8:18); (4) Gideon asks for captured jewelry of defeated kings to, perhaps, fashion the same status for himself; and (5) Gideon’s explicit denial of kingly ambitions butts up next to his request for the gold booty of kings so he can forge an ephod, an object that in later monarchies is symbolic of kingly presence. “Gideon like Saul and David sought to show his royal position by possession of an ephod.”

Despite voicing his refusal of the position, “Gideon did, de facto retain certain important privileges belonging to the ruler,” including the following: (1) the ephod at Ophrah, which location may have become a sacred venue with political and religious implications; (2) Gideon’s son’s name Abimelech, which “seems to allude to royal status;” (3) Gideon’s dual name Gideon-Jerubbaal (not necessarily stemming from two different sources) might be a doubled royal appellation which often occurred in later Israelite and Near Eastern systems; (4) the large-scale harem, including a wife of royal Shechemite descent, was a common monarchical feature of the time and place; (5) the allusion in Judges 8:18 is that Gideon and his siblings are a king’s children; and (6) the implication

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of Judges 9:2 is that Gideon’s sons are dynastic rulers. So Gideon’s explicit refusal of the offer to become king is more nuanced: “Gideon’s words are not a refusal: they are rather a protestation: a protestation of the kind of kingship he would exercise, an avowal that his kingship and that of his family will be so conducted as to eliminate any personal and tyrannical element, and to permit of the manifestation of the divine rule through his own.”

So the story of Gideon and his son Abimelech augur what will happen when the Israelites request a king, as a warning of “what the granting of a dynastic monarchy to Gideon’s family would have meant.” It is a “narrow escape” from the whims and selfishness an erratic king can impose on the citizens, and shows what the antithesis of a righteous ruler would do. “It also advances the view that kingship of the Abimelech type (and thus kingship generally, for Abimelech’s is that form of Canaanite city-state kingship with which Israel at that time would have been most familiar; cf. 1 Sam. 8, would have been inimical to the best interests of Israel.”

Had the Israelites heeded the Gideon/Abimelech warning narrative, they would have known better than to request a king like all the nations, when they already had God as their king.

**King Mosiah and the Mosiahim of the Book of Judges**

The biblical Gideon and the Book of Mormon Gideon do have some allusive connections that indicate an intertextual association we ought to catch. The book of Judges details the rise of ad hoc deliverers who save the Israelites from Midianites, Philistines, or other neighboring threats. The word often used for this “deliverer” is *mosiah*, which can be translated “savior.” The “deliverer’ and ‘judge’ are identical” to the Deuteronomist more generally and in Judges 2:16 in particular. (Judges 2:16 uses *yasha*, which is the same root as *mosiah*). Both are deliverers who “save” their people from bondage (to King Noah and to the Midianites) (Judges 6:14).
Both are *mosiahs* from the tribe of Manasseh (if we assume the Gideon in the book of Mosiah is a Nephite [as opposed to, say, a Mulekite] (see also Judges 6:15). All the Zeniffites desired to return to possess the land of the Nephites’ first inheritance (if we generalize from Zeniff’s heritage to the larger group of Zeniffites, which ought to be a reliable generalization, for “Zeniff … was made king over this people, he being over-zealous to inherit the land of his fathers” (Mosiah 7:21)). Mosiah 12:1–2 presents to the people under Limhi’s kingship a dilemma. In bondage to the Lamanites, Limhi consults how they might “deliver” themselves. Gideon comes forward to suggest a strategy by which “I will be thy servant and deliver this people out of bondage” (Mosiah 22:4), much as the biblical Gideon serves as a deliverer, the Israelites from Midianite bondage; and the angel declares to Gideon, “Go in this thy might, and thou shalt save [yasha’] Israel from the hand of the Midianites: have not I sent thee?” (Judges 6:14). Later, when the Book of Mormon Gideon is reintroduced in his confrontation with Nehor, the reader is reminded that “it was he who was an instrument in the hands of God in delivering the people of Limhi out of bondage” (Alma 1:8). Remember also that the biblical Gideon was a charismatic judge and savior of the Northern tribe of Manasseh (Judges 6:15; see also Alma 10:3, where Nephi’s genealogy notes his descent from Manasseh).

These stories of deliverer/saviors in the book of Judges likely concerned judges and events occurring in the northern tribal territories and collected by “prophetic groups in the northern kingdom.” Gideon, like all the savior/judges in the book of Judges, is God’s answer to the people’s cries for deliverance; then he leads the Israelite army to victory against their oppressors. Unlike the biblical Gideon, the Book of Mormon Gideon demonstrates no ambivalent ambition for dynastic glory. And Gore is right that the reader ought to see in the biblical Gideon a conflation of kingship and idol worship as related-but-different forms of idolatry (p. 147). And, as Gore notes, much biblical criticism of Judges sees in Gideon a proto-king. “Gideon’s act of refusing the monarchy for himself and his posterity harkens back to the moment just following his sacred calling. His first public act, done under cover of darkness, is to destroy the grove and altar to Baal that belonged to his father, Joash” (p. 148). Gideon is often seen as a good Yahwist because he overthrows

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69. Ibid., 310.
the pagan altars (Judges 6:25–32). But his role as anti-idolatry leader is more ambiguous.

Gideon serves as a narrative bridge between the period of kingship and judgeship in the Book of Mormon. The biblical Gideon serves a similar narrative function. Gore usefully notes the essential allusive connection between the two Gideons: the Book of Mormon Gideon “was likewise not one to submit to authority or idolatry. He appears to have accepted only the rule of just men. His refusal of Nehor links the latter with King Noah, who was also prone to flattery and dependent on the support of those whom he regarded as existing primarily for that purpose” (p. 150). Gore devotes much of his discussion of the Book of Mormon Gideon to his role in confronting Nehor. But more emphasis should be placed on his earlier function in confronting King Noah and delivering the people of Limhi from Lamanite bondage. This Gideon is also a narrative bridge from kingship to judgeship.

**Federalism, Branches of Government, Separation of Power in Antiquity: An Anachronism, Mere Wishful Thinking?**

I have been sketching out a governing arrangement in ancient Israel and among the Book of Mormon people that looks much like a federal system with various layers of government from local to national and within each layer a separation of powers so that authority is dispersed among different elements of the system to avoid too much concentration of power; the position I have articulated also shows the Nephites under Mosiah 2 acting democratically in the transition from kingship to judgeship and its revalidation when challenged, even engaging in debates that look much like New England town-hall meetings:

And it came to pass that the people assembled themselves together throughout all the land, every man according to his mind, whether it were for or against Amlici, in separate bodies, having much dispute and wonderful contentions one with another. And thus they did assemble themselves together to cast in their voices concerning the matter; and they were laid before the judges. (Alma 2:5–6)

My reader would be justified in questioning whether or not I am confusing the U.S. Constitution with Samuel’s manner of the king or engaging in anachronism by projecting modern governing structures on primitive societies. After all, might some semblance of separation of powers and republican forms of government be more of an argument
for the Book of Mormon’s modernity rather than its antiquity? It is a fair question, so I want to attend to it directly. Biblical critics have long addressed this very issue in the context of Samuel’s transition to kingship. In taking up historical topics, one must always be wary of anachronism: thinking that the past must be like the present, so past people and societies must think and act as we do; we then project onto the past our own understandings and patterns of thought and action. Anachronism places ideas or events in questionable chronological order. This warning is relevant to my topic in that my reader might consider that in asserting something akin to our modern notion of democracy, or federalism in the Hebrew Bible and Book of Mormon, I am committing anachronism. Being aware of the problem is the first step in addressing it. The second step in thinking about the process and orienting a direction of historical development in complex ways moves toward the right temporal relationship.

The Greek and Jewish traditions develop a “difference of logic,” for they have distinctive ultimate purposes and foci; the Greek political tradition’s main concern was “Who should rule and how?” while the Hebraic and Jewish tradition focused less on institutions and rulers but more on what is the goal of governance.\(^1\) Biblical and the Jewish political thought that developed out of it had three main goals: (1) remembering the lessons of slavery in Egypt, pursuing liberty from oppression; (2) incorporating the lessons learned from wandering in the wilderness that “liberation without food is simply starvation,” so land policy and political structure advocated prosperity (exile from the land resulted in loss of both freedom and prosperity); and (3) the pursuit not of happiness or property, but freedom and prosperity that occurs within the covenant relationship with God\(^2\) — the promises to Abraham of land and offspring which emerge from the creation mandate to Adam and Noah and emphasize the fertility not just of humans but of plants and animals: “Blessing, in the first instance, means children, plain and simple,”\(^3\) security from neighboring peoples so prosperity can be enjoyed,\(^4\) and a vertical covenant community relationship with God integrated with a horizontal community relationship with others.\(^5\) The book of Mosiah, starting with the Zeniffite digression, raises frequent concern with

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72. Ibid., 3–4.
73. Ibid., 9.
74. Ibid., 10–11.
75. Ibid., 11.
freedom: from King Noah’s oppression by Lamanite domination, and from control by the priests of Amulon, once integrated into Lamanite social structure.

The idea that the biblical Hebrews had a constitution comparable with what Aristotle would call a politeia was introduced by Josephus. This fountainhead of Jewish commentary on the Republic of the Hebrews was Josephus, who asserted that the Hebraic politeia was unique in that it had God himself as the civil sovereign, even if it employed judges, kings, and councils as the executive at various points. All the words we use to articulate the notions of limits on government (federalism, constitutionalism, republicanism) emerge from ancient thought, usually attributed to the Greeks. But at least as important, those ideas are also separately traceable to the biblical notion of covenant.

The claim that constitutional thought has its roots in the Book of Deuteronomy is ancient indeed. Josephus (37–100 C.E.) referred to Deuteronomy as the politeia — regime plan or national constitution — of the Jewish people and implicitly suggested that the idea of a constitution is first found in the Bible and not in Greco-Roman sources, as his readers would have undoubtedly believed.

One shouldn’t too easily conflate republican government as we know it in modern political systems with what ancients experienced and wrote about (although both are differently republican); neither should we neglect the similarities and genealogies. Using terms such as “representative government,” “checks and balances,” “equality,” “separation of powers,” “branches of government,” and “democratic” “must be understood as importing concepts that do not spring from the intellectual tradition” in the Hebrew Bible, and therefore have the potential to be misunderstood. “There is nothing illegitimate in this practice — despite the risk of mistakenly imputing one’s own conceptual framework to the object of one’s studies — but it does have the unfortunate tendency to obscure the Jewish terms and approach to collective matters of rule and authority.”

And yet, despite the valid warnings biblical critics offer about reading our own political structures and commitments back into biblical narrative,

79. Ibid., 3.
biblical critics at the same time acknowledge that in important ways the biblical text laid the foundation for our contemporary ideological and political commitments and arrangements.

Whether starting with Adam or Moses, Samuel or Solomon, Noah or King Noah, the biblical political ethos constructs any account of a biblical politeia around the notion that God is the King and meta-ruler of any earthly state based on biblical principles of governance. “Power in society is God’s,” and to humans God denies any “concentration and permanence of power.” All moral commitments in politics, all law, all authority originates in deity, and God’s commitments and goals should be the commitments and goals of any state founded on biblical principles, including “freedom and a measure of equality.” In the eleventh century BCE Samuel presaged the message of the classical prophets of the eighth century by predicting that earthly kings would abuse their power and deviate from the notion that monarchs are mere servants of the divine king; the classical prophets, such as Isaiah, Jeremiah, and Hosea, were types and shadows of Samuel when “by the eighth century the consequences of the idea of divine kingship had been ever more ignored by the rulers of the people, and reality had come ever more into conflict with it. It was then that the great prophets rose to adjust the reality of their day to the standards of the idea.” As long as there were prophets called by Yahweh, and not sycophants appointed and paid by their kings, there was ever the conflict between kings and prophets calling those monarchs such as King Ahab, King Manasseh, and King Noah back to a covenant model of governance. Jeroboam — the founding king of the Northern Israelite regime — was an archetypal evil king in the Northern tradition (1 Kings 12:26–33), and Ahijah the prophet called him to repentance. Just as Kings Benjamin and Mosiah were the symbolically good kings in the Book of Mormon, the Bible similarly presents paradigms of good kings and bad kings: “The crucial event in Judah, comparable to

81. Ibid.
82. Ibid.
84. Ibid., 280–81.
the sin of Jeroboam, was the faithfulness of David. ... David in Kings is the symbol of fidelity, Jeroboam the symbol of infidelity.  

Evans offers a similar warning when reading about the two groups of men Rehoboam consulted after his father Solomon died about how to start governing as king (1 Kings 12) and dominating the battle space on the king’s behalf. His advice from the “elders” (his father’s counselors) was to give the people what they want by promising tax breaks and lowered regulation, and then once power was consolidated the king could do anything he wanted. The young turks’ (his friends from youth) advice urges him to tell the people his real plan: that Rehoboam will make their tax burdens heavier than those Solomon laid on them. Understandably, the ten tribes reject that proposal and secede from the Kingdom of Judah to form their own separate monarchy. But the rump monarchy left to Rehoboam demonstrates the constraints the people can exert on the king, even the heir of Solomon, who had concentrated and centralized authority: The people “made him king, as if to say that they would serve him only so long as he served them.”  

Evans warns against taking these two advisory groups as a bicameral political entity as we might think about them in modern times or for comparison to cultures surrounding the ancient Israelites. “Not only does the slenderness of the evidence oblige us to make the most of it in a dangerous extent, but it increases the risk, which is always present in studies of the remote past, of importing into our sources modern constitutional ideas and practices which have no place in them.” Malamat, in the same issue of the journal, offers a companion warning against anachronism. Kingly advisers are common in the ancient Levant, but to read too much into either the Rehoboam consultation or similar stories from Sumer is to run such a risk, despite the fact that Malamat asserts that a Sumerian city state did have in the third millennium what some scholars have labeled “primitive democracy” with representative bodies, at least in local governance.

It is then possible to argue for some element of participatory governing institutions in ancient Israel and its neighbors which

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85. Ibid., 282.
resulted in “the restriction of the absolute power of kingship and to the democratization of political conduct.”

With the warning about too easily assimilating ancient institutions to modern ones, biblical critics still often note that biblical Israelites did have participatory political arrangements: the biblical ‘ēdāh and kāhāl, “the assembly” and “the people.” Gordis takes the use of these words as evidence of primitive forms of democracy in Israel, operating at least by the time the Torah was granted to the congregation at Sinai. This assembly endured over the ages, even though its influence waned. “But the positive democratic spirit which actuated it in its earliest period never died in Israel, and through the Bible, it entered the fabric of Western civilization.”

Similarly, “the elders” (of the people, of the assembly, of the tribes — the term is used in various ways) often “appear as a governing body; this function overlaps their representative function and their association with the leader,” whoever the leader happened to be. In this structure of having local elders acting in local governance and an advisory role in national politics, the Israelites were — like their Mesopotamian neighbors — “ruled by popular sovereignty to a high degree,” and these elders in Israel were “very frequently representative of the people.”

These local representative assemblies functioned differently than larger deliberative bodies. In Absalom’s rebellion “it is clear that the ‘elders of Israel’ and ‘the men of Israel’ are not used synonymously, but … there is a clear distinction between them. Whereas the king and the ‘elders of Israel’ accepted the advice of Ahitophel, ‘the men of Israel’ rejected it. This, then, was a higher authority, which could overrule the decision of the elders,” and Tadmor argues that “the men of Israel” is another way of referring to the army. When David and Abner negotiate to incorporate the Northern Tribes into David’s kingdom, Abner brings a delegation of elders to meet with David. “Note how the institution of the elders is still playing an authoritative role in covenant-making and the election

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89. Ibid., 253.
92. Ibid., 531.
93. Ibid., 534.
of kings," and Rehoboam convenes a similar deliberative body when he moves to make himself king. The message is the same as far as governance is concerned: “the rule of Judean kings over the northern tribes is conditional upon a covenantal agreement between the king and his future subjects,” arrived at after negotiation with representatives of the people, whether the “assembly” or the people.

Athens gave the world democracy, but the ancient Greeks had a spotty record when it came to liberation from despotism. Ancient Greek thought exercised its influence even through the time of the Founders of the American Revolution, but for the Greeks, hierarchy and class structure were essential in political governance. “The greatest philosophers of Athens, Plato and Aristotle, viewed the necessity of social hierarchy as absolutely axiomatic.” Democracy even in classical Athens was democratic, but not in the way we moderns define democracy, for the majority of the residents were slaves and women with no role in governance. The influence of the Bible on subsequent polities was the opposite counterbalance, a source of advocacy for equality. All Israelites were considered equals before God. Since their entry into the Promised Land, Israelite law portioned out the land equally and built in safeguards to ensure that the land, if sold or confiscated, would revert to the families to which it had been granted, thus ensuring some measure of economic equality (unlike Rome, for example, where in the Empire, concentration of landholding among the rich led to contentious agrarian reforms intended more widely to distribute the means of production beyond just the aristocracy). “By investing greatly in the creation of a covenantal brotherhood of individuals bound by law and theology, the Pentateuch envisions an ideal society that holds together on the merits of its members, rather than on the basis of the authority of its power brokers.” Deuteronomy limits the institutional power of various centers of authority and oppression: “the military, the cult, the judiciary, the economy, and the harem” by placing “checks and balances that curb

96. Ibid., 165.
97. Ibid., 167.
98. Ibid., 168.
100. Ibid.
the power of the various seats of authority: the king, the priesthood, the judiciary, and the prophet.”

If my summary sounds too much like Madison and Hamilton, then the reader ought to consider the connection not to be one of anachronism, but of directional influence from the Bible to early modern thinkers to the American Founders. The Greeks weren’t the only influences on even the more secular of such American Revolutionary thinkers as Jefferson and Paine (who were outliers in their distance from the Christian mainstream of the leaders in the Revolutionary and Federal periods). Berman asserts that “the kernel of a theory of checks and balances that one may adduce from a reading of Deuteronomy is suggestive of formulations we do not encounter again until the writings of the American founding fathers.”

The Bible precedes Montesquieu in establishing some separation of powers, for “Deuteronomy illustrates notions of separation of powers that have usually been considered quite recent. Classical Greek political thought understood that in the absence of a strong center in the figure of a monarch or tyrant, factionalism threatened the stability of the polity.”

The Pentateuch and Deuteronomist History stand out starkly against the other political structures of the ancient Near East in that “for the first time in history, a division of at least some powers is articulated along lines of institution and instrument rather than of class and kinship.”

To be like all the nations isn’t entirely a model of despotic kingship, for some of the nations in ancient Israel’s neighborhood had developed some forms of participatory governance: “The existence of primitive democracy in Mesopotamia is now generally recognized.”

The Hittites, for example, demonstrated a wide variety of structural forms that included royal and democratic models, and their political inheritance took “seriously the opinion of others, equals, vassals and people alike.”

Ancient Israel, like those people surrounding it, developed democratic tendencies. Several passages in the period of judges and kings look very much like deliberative processes (Judges 20, 2 Kings 11:12,

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101. Ibid., 10.
102. Ibid.
103. Ibid., 78.
104. Ibid., 79.
106. Ibid., 160.
Nehemiah 5:13), and during this era “the political system was essentially based on a voluntary federation with a ‘democratic character’ unlike the monarchical regime which generally dictated from above.” These processes and institutions endured not only through the tribal era of the judges but later into the period of the kings.

Think of Mosiah’s discourse on equality and the need for every citizen to carry the burden of governance instead of delegating that agency and burden to a king. The Bible precedes the Book of Mormon in rejecting the dominant Mesopotamian notion that stratification of society is just part of the natural order of the world. “The covenant paradigm as ideological underpinning for an egalitarian order should prompt us to consider anew the role of human kingship in biblical thought.”

The Bible outlines a political system entirely dissimilar to those known before a people called Israel emerged. The monarchies and despotisms of the ancient Near East were based on the exclusionary principle, where rulers attempted to monopolize power. The Bible and some rare ancient systems invest in a “collective” power system in which authority is divided between various power centers: “Collective power strategies divest a single ruler of the control of power. The various offices of power are subordinated to a bureaucratic management structure determined by a code of law and formally established standards of conduct.”

Berman details how the Law of the King in Deuteronomy 17 restricts the accumulation of military power by the monarch, divests the ruler of cultic status, insists that only a “brother” can be king, so a foreigner can’t be imported from some Mesopotamian Hanoverian dynasty, and restricts the assimilationist trend of the king’s harem of foreign wives. But the Law of the King insists that the king’s duties were identical to the duty of every Israelite. “The prerequisite for being a good Israelite king is to be a good Israelite citizen.” That is a powerful pattern of egalitarianism.

111. Ibid., 54.
112. Ibid., 58–62.
113. Ibid., 63.
Of “the law of the king” in Deuteronomy and Samuel’s “manner of the king” conveyed warnings about kingly abuse of power, a paradigmatic abusive king who violated the prohibitions in the Law and the predictions in the Manner is Solomon. “The ‘manner of the king’ in this description agrees very well with what we are told of Solomon’s régime,” but these are just standard practices of kingship like those of all nations, and “it is doubtful whether the lesson was fully learned at so early a period in the history.” Solomon was only the third king since the founding of the Saulide attempt at dynasty. Both the Northern and Southern kingdoms would have plenty of experience with wicked and oppressive kings before dynastic kingship disappears in the biblical tradition under coercion, invasion, and conquest from Mesopotamia. The law of the king (Deuteronomy 17) and the manner of the king (1 Samuel 8) have to be viewed as anticipations of legislation, the markup of law, the Federalist Papers laying the groundwork for adoption of a constitutional arrangement. “The Law of the King and the Statute of the King probably preserved parts of a social contract which laid down quasi-constitutionally the rights and duties of the king. This is the mispat ha-melukah (the Law and Statue of the King) which Samuel proclaimed and committed to writing subsequent Saul’s coronation (1 Sam. 10:25) as attesting the covenant between the king and the people before God. Of this document only a selection of prescriptive and proscriptive ordinances which apply to the king have been preserved in the Bible.” Kaplan argues that Samuel’s manner of discourse has parallels to the Babylonian Fürstenspiegel, or is a mirror for princes, whose goal to provide a model for rulers and princes; it sets forth the proper behavior of a ruler, and draws on eighth century BCE Near Eastern documents (although the date of the Babylonian Fürstenspiegel is disputed), especially the Babylonian Fürstenspiegel and other documents read in Babylonian new year ceremonies. This document belonging to a loose genre of details that are improper behavior for a ruler, including misuse of judicial powers, bribery, pilfering silver from the people, and the use of forced labor. Mesopotamian gods are the enforcement mechanism mentioned in the Fürstenspiegel who threaten the king with

curses on the land, invasion, and military defeat. Samuel may be doing what this not uncommonly archived Babylonian document does: school the potential ruler in advance with the goal of limiting the exercise of power by the king, and so has affinities to the manner and the law of the king articulated by the Samuel character and the Deuteronomist in an attempt to “curb” the “excesses” to which kings are prone.

Ultimately, the point is that the kingship of Noah points back to earlier understandings of the social contract between ruler and people which permit the overthrow of a ruler who violates that covenant. “The threat that the king’s mission could be revoked should he not comply with the statutes of the divine Covenant and the social contract with the people, as interpreted by the prophet, meant that even the institutionalized dynastic monarchy in Israel retained the principle that continuity of leadership was not automatic, neither in the lifetime of a king, nor from generation to generation.” Gideon, it seems, was justified in starting a rebellion against King Noah.

Another influential devolution of authority came with the appointment of judges, not by the king but by the people. The power of the prophet is another important check on the king’s authority. Soon after the Law of the Kings (Deuteronomy 17) is articulated, the role of the prophet is spelled out (Deuteronomy 18:15–22) in a way that the prophet checks the influence of both the priest and the king. The prophet Samuel selects the first kings of Israel at the inception of Israelite monarchy, serving as a one-man electoral college. The verses adjacent to the Law of the King deal more holistically with the institutions of authority in the biblical polity: judges (16:18–20; 17:8–13), kings (17:14–20), priests (18:1–8); and prophets (18:9–22).

The passages in Deuteronomy 17 on kingship and 1 Samuel 8–12 are viewed as the principal commentaries in the Hebrew Bible with an anti-monarchical stance. “Not only is a king not required, but it seems that according to Deuteronomy, Israel would be better off without one.” God acquiesces to the will of the people despite both Samuel’s and the

117. Ibid., 632.
118. Ibid., 641, 642.
120. Berman, Created Equal, 69.
121. Ibid., 71.
123. Ibid., 34.
deity’s better judgment, but God relents in order to punish the people for choosing unwisely. “No law can actually control a corrupt king. And a corrupt king is what the people deserve for forsaking the almost direct rule of God, with the prophet-judge Samuel as more intermediary than ruler.”

Note that when Alma refuses to be made king and advises the people not to subject themselves to kings, he doesn’t do it in the name of God but by his own opinion based upon the principle of equality: “Ye shall not esteem one flesh above another, or one man shall not think himself above another; therefore I say unto you it is not expedient that ye should have a king” (Mosiah 23:7). Similarly, when King Mosiah urges the people to shift from kingship to judgeship, he gives the advice in his own name, not God’s: “I command you to do these things in the fear of the Lord; and I command you to do these things, and that ye have no king; that if these people commit sins and iniquities they shall be answered upon their own heads” (Mosiah 29:30). The brother of Jared and Jared acquiesce to the will of the people despite their reservations (Ether 6:21–27), and God isn’t even mentioned in the process; Samuel also acquiesces to the desires of the people despite both God’s and the prophet’s reservations. The intermediary between the Jaredites and God — the brother of Jared — is chastised for not calling upon God (Ether 2:14). This sketches an almost secular relationship between God and these people, so it is hardly surprising that no mention is made of a consultation with God when the Jaredites decide on their governmental structure. This is different from the authority Abinadi declares in condemning King Noah: “Thus saith the Lord” (Mosiah 12:2).

Gore labels Samuel and the brother of Jared as anti-monarchists (p. 98); but a more nuanced view of opinions against kingship needs to be advanced. Nor should Alma’s comments regarding kings in Mosiah 23 be viewed as anti-monarchical. When Alma declines the job offer, he gives a principled reason and a practical reason: “But he said unto them: Behold, it is not expedient that we should have a king; for thus saith the Lord: Ye shall not esteem one flesh above another, or one man shall not think himself above another; therefore I say unto you it is not expedient that ye should have a king” (Mosiah 23:7). He then follows with the practical reason: “Nevertheless, if it were possible that ye could always have just men to be your kings it would be well for you to have a king” (Mosiah 23:8), citing King Noah as the example of what happens when the wrong person is chosen as king. King Mosiah provides similar reasoning:

124. Ibid., 36.
Therefore, if it were possible that you could have just men to be your kings, who would establish the laws of God, and judge this people according to his commandments, yea, if ye could have men for your kings who would do even as my father Benjamin did for this people — I say unto you, if this could always be the case then it would be expedient that ye should always have kings to rule over you. (Mosiah 29:13)

In the next verse he cites himself and his father as examples of good kings, before referring to King Noah as the counter example. If Alma is anti-monarchical, then King Mosiah is also.

Eslinger notes that the passages in 1 Samuel 8–12 are often divided into anti-monarchical and pro-monarchical sections. But some characters within the narrative express differing views toward kingship. There are those (Samuel) who start out anti-monarchical, but by the end of the narrative endorse a tepid pro-king position. Others start out pro-king and move toward a more ambivalent position by the end of the story. Other biblical critics see the institution of kingship in Israel as neither pro- nor anti-positions, but a clear-eyed view of the problems and promises of monarchy. Mayes sees the Deuteronomistic writer as portraying kingship as a problem rather than a sin, a theological conundrum. He is not anti-monarchical, “rather, he sees the benefits of the institution, especially in the matter of justice in Israel,” while recognizing that it poses risks. The pro- and anti-monarchical sentiments might just be differing points of view from a narrator who wants to present both the good and bad qualities of various governmental forms. The solution to the problem as worked out in 1 Samuel 12 is to impose the requirement that both king and people yield to the law of Yahweh.

McCarthy concurs: “the section is not just about kingship, it is about kingship as a problem, and the reader is not allowed to lose sight of this even in the so-called promonarchical units.”

When the Israelites asked for a king “like all the nations,” two models were available in their neighbors: the Egyptian standard with

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127. Ibid.
a deified, absolute ruler; and the Mesopotamian structure, having a mortal king with checks upon his authority in the assembly of elders in the society, and the limitations of other gods in the pantheon. This Fertile Crescent model requested of Samuel by the people had the people making the king, not the military or deity elevating the leader. With the people as king-makers, that system is “literally ‘democracy.’” This spreading model of dynastic kingship was not only adopted in Israel, but by other Transjordan peoples at the same time. According to Alster, the requirement in Deuteronomy 17 that if a king is to be chosen, he must be selected from “among thy brethren” implies that any Israelite male could be appointed king, regardless of lineage. This qualification makes possible a broad equality “which empowers the general male populace, rather than the king, and places on their shoulders the responsibility for upholding the covenant, including the mandate to appoint leaders — judges and kings — who will help them in their task.” This sounds very much like Mosiah’s notion of equality, by which the people should shoulder an equal burden of governance and not shift the burden of sin and responsibility onto a king.

The rabbis interpreted the political passages of the Hebrew Bible so that responsible government was inextricably entwined with the idea of covenant, for in the covenant each Israelite male is equal and the res publica owned by each person equally. “All share equally in the responsibility for creating the malkhut shamayim [kingdom of heaven], which is the purpose of political action; all therefore possess a sanctified right (enshrined in the torah) to participate in the process whereby policies are formulated and executed” within a political structure that is “both federal in arrangement and consensual in tone.” We don’t know how diffused the democratic tendencies were through the height and depth

130. Ibid., 284.
of ancient Israelite society, but we can judge that at the highest level, power sharing was idealized. We would translate that into separation of powers today, when power is diffused among priests, kings, and prophets. Cohen even goes so far as to call these institutions the “three branches” in the biblical texts and even sees that such “power-sharing” preferences provide a tendency toward “representative government.” Ancient Israel didn’t organize their democratic institutions the way we do in Western societies, but nevertheless they seemed to have governmental ministers serving executive functions and the elders advising the king and his agents; each keter (crown) “acts as a particular prism on the constitution of the Jewish polity. Accordingly, each is entitled to exercise a constitutional check on the others.”

In the U.S. constitutional arrangement, James Madison wrote about the legislative branch in Article 1 of the Constitution because the Founders viewed Congress as the leading branch of governance, but we see an evolution in which the executive branch attempts to siphon control away from the other two branches (often referred to as the “imperial presidency”), and we often hear complaints that judges too often legislate and exercise “judicial usurpation.” Similarly, the biblical history record notes trends when “principal instruments of one keter attempted (sometimes, and for limited periods, successfully so) to attain commanding authority within the edah [assembly] by posing as the repositories of two domains. By thus amalgamating prerogatives and wearing, as it were, two crowns, they contrived to neutralize the constitutional influence of the third and subject its officers to their own particular will.”

Another check on the concentration of power that accompanies monarchy is a tribal muster rather than a professional army. A tribal armed force is answerable to local leaders, while a standing army is

136. Ibid., 29; Cohen, “The Concept of the Three Ketarim,” 34.
140. Ibid., 40.
141. Ibid., 41–42.
answerable to the king; and in times when the latter’s services aren’t needed against external enemies, the professional army and its accompanying mercenaries can be used to squelch internal dissent. Under David, a mercenary army of non-Israelite Canaanites who had been conquered formed the backbone of the new state army. With no tribal loyalties, these soldiers owed their income and lives to the king (Uriah the Hittite was one of these Canaanites serving in David’s national army). Talmon refers to this group as a “Swiss Guard” that was increasingly relied upon by David.  

142 Solomon later drew administrative boundaries that ran across tribal lines, thus further diminishing the influence of alternative political structures. The king used agents to carry out his will. One of those agencies was the standing army, which doubtless led to a decreasing influence and efficacy of the “people’s army,” and “its say in public affairs dwindled.” Saul and David, at least early in his kingly rule, led the army personally. The third Israeliite king, Solomon, is never shown as a warrior king. “He is, quite to the contrary, depicted as being totally inexperienced in military affairs, a mere youngster who certainly could not command an army (I Kg 3:7).” Solomon had, in the evolution of monarchy, subcontracted the military function almost entirely.

These innovations under Solomon were assimilationist, moving Israeliite society away from its unique features, and toward the governing structures of societies surrounding it: the people wanted to be “like all the nations” after all. Solomon imported from neighboring Phoenicia not just the architects and workers to build a Canaanite-style temple, but also the dynastic house and the dynastic notion of kingship. David followed the Law of the King and hamstrung captured horses, but Solomon profited from a thriving trade in horses (horse-drawn chariots, this new weaponry, consolidate power in the institution of the monarchy, although chariots were less useful weapons in the hill country of Judea than on the flat coastal plains). This led to a new class of elites made of professional military officers and court officials, with the expansion of taxation and corvée labor required to financially support such a system. Inevitably, such officers and officials need to be rewarded, usually with

143. Ibid., 242.
144. Ibid., 243.
146. Ibid., 239.
land, so the Israelite system of land ownership broadly distributed is threatened. Solomon also drew new administrative boundaries, deliberately ignoring tribal boundaries in order to reduce the political influence of tribal leaders. “While David eschewed outright innovations which seriously violated traditional religious and social institutions, his son Solomon sought to transform Israel into a full-fledged Oriental monarchy, and was prepared to ignore or to flout older institutions in his determination to centralize powers and to consolidate his realm.”

During the time of the judges, a judge (shofet) had two functions. The first was to judge the people, deciding difficult conflicts and providing justice and relief for those who sought redress). When peaceful times dissipated, the judge became a military leader. “In both situations and in both roles he is called a shofet,” to save or deliver the people. By the way, at the inception of judgeship among the Nephites, Alma is shown carrying out both functions: he judges Nehor (Alma 1:10-15), and leads the Nephites in battle (Alma 2:16, 29–32). The federated system of the biblical judges period gave way to a monarchy “like all the nations” and the oppressive power grabs and taxation such a system overwhelmingly tends toward. The charismatic judges were expected to carry out two main functions: lead the people in battle, and provide justice. The biblical kings were expected to continue in both functions: in some respects “kingship arose in Israel in continuity with the traditions and theological conceptions of the pre-monarchic league,” not just continuity with the judges but also stretching back to Moses and Joshua. The titles applied to the judges and the kings are the same before and after the political revolution: sōfēt, mōšēl, nāsī, mōšīa’. “Despite etymological differences, the use of the terms in parallelismus membrorum and their interchangeability in parallel passages indicates that they were considered synonymously during, as well as preceding, the monarchy.” The configuration of the regime under kingship is not much different from that of judgeship. “There is no difference between

148. Ibid., 240.
149. Ibid., 240–41.
the king and the ‘savior’ of old,” although Talmon notes that the king will not have to rely on a tribal muster but will recruit a professional army, and such a transformation in the structure of the state will have profound consequences.

By Solomon’s reign, the army would incorporate cavalry and chariots, resulting in the consequent political gravitational pull of a black hole, with power accumulating to a center that will hold. The kings did (as kings do) develop bureaucracies to carry out those functions. The army and the administrative state develop as agents of the king. David soon acquired the temperament and habits of the sedentary king. A main implied criticism of David in the Bathsheba affair (2 Samuel 11) is that David tarries at home when he should be leading his soldiers in battle. David’s son Absalom gathers support for his overthrow of David by arguing to the people that David is skimping on justice, for “thy matters are good and right; but there is no man deputed of the king to hear thee. And Absalom said moreover, Oh that I were made judge in the land, that every man which hath a suit or cause might come unto me, and I would do him justice!” (2 Samuel 15:3–4). Absalom argues that since his father is not fulfilling the two main obligations, the people are justified in rebelling; the same is true of Sheba’s attempt to overthrow David. The same goes in the Book of Mormon for Gideon’s rebellion against King Noah. King Noah’s proceeding against Abinadi is a clear-cut instance of injustice, and King Noah uses his soldiers as agents without going out himself to lead the armies. When Alma’s group splinters from the main Zeniffite colony, King Noah sends his troops:

The king, having discovered a movement among the people, sent his servants to watch them. Therefore on the day that they were assembling themselves together to hear the word of the Lord they were discovered unto the king. And now the king said that Alma was stirring up the people to rebellion against him; therefore he sent his army to destroy them. (Mosiah 18:32–33)

Of the biblical examples, Wolf notes that “in both cases it is clear that the tribes of the kingdom of Israel acted from the conviction that their obligation of faithfulness and obedience to the reigning king ceased as soon as it became evident that for his part he was no longer carrying out the function bestowed on him according to the commission he had

153. Ibid., 13.
154. Ibid., 14.
been given.”\textsuperscript{155} The Northern and Southern kingdoms were subject to persistent internal rebellion, assassination, and coups,\textsuperscript{156} although such political turmoil was much more common in the Northern Kingdom. The turnover started with the first king, Saul. Absalom appeals to the people to negate the sedentary model of kingship that comes along with his father’s increasingly bureaucratic state, and return to an earlier model whereby the leader risks in battle and at the city gate. “Absalom’s revolt failed, and with it the hope of his supporters to set back the clock and to revive the authority of the ancient institutions.”\textsuperscript{157} Similarly, after the Nephite revolution from kingship to judgeship, Amlici attempts to return to an earlier relationship between the ruler and the ruled by overthrowing judgeship in order to make himself king. This tradition of approving revolt when the king violates the charter with the people endured in the Northern Kingdom, where the “people [were] free to choose whom they wished to be their leader,” because the people were the sovereigns, not the king.\textsuperscript{158} In the selection of king and his deposition, the people ruled. Wolf refers to the congregation of people providing “checks and balances” to limit the power of kings.\textsuperscript{159}

**Founding Fathers, Biblical Roots and Branches**

We often think our contemporary concerns and concepts are late arrivals, born in modernity and refined to take definitive shape in the twenty-first century. The early and even late modern periods in the West were still saturated with Christian (and more generally biblical) thought and allegiances. The 15th, 16th, and 17th centuries gave birth to what we think is a distinctively modern politics and political theology. Nelson notes that these concepts and institutions are commonly attributed to a modern trend toward secularism, but one still steeped in religious commitments. “Questions about politics quickly became questions about Revelation, about the proper understanding of God’s commands as reflected in Scripture.”\textsuperscript{160} But the theological connections in such development of political thought began to lessen in the 1700s and recede faster later. The Wars of Religion, the Scientific Revolution, and other


\textsuperscript{156} Talmon, “Kingship and the Ideology of the State,” 22.

\textsuperscript{157} Tadmor, “‘The People’ and the Kingship in Ancient Israel,” 54.

\textsuperscript{158} Wolf, “Traces of Primitive Democracy in Ancient Israel,” 105.

\textsuperscript{159} Ibid., 108.

\textsuperscript{160} Nelson, *Hebrew Republic*, 1.
factors resulted in what is commonly called The Great Separation, as political concerns disengaged from theological ones or actively opposed political entanglements with religion. This Separation, as the consensus articulates, resulted in distinctive features of modernity: commitments to individual rights, the role and shape of the state, and religious toleration. But to be successful, religion had to be disentangled from politics, the latter immunized from the former. Nelson argues that this conventional wisdom about certain modern institutions and commitments gets the chronology and causation all wrong.

While Nelson agrees that the modern shape of democracy, individualism, human rights, and federalism developed in the 17th century, it wasn’t from the separation of political thought and religious considerations, but the kneading together of the two: “It is, indeed, not for nothing that seventeenth-century historians have dubbed their period ‘the Biblical Century.’” Yet secularization was not the reason for these developments but the intensifying influence of the Bible during the period. Christians (many committed and a few nominal) drew upon rabbinic and medieval Jewish discussion to conceive of the Hebrew Bible as articulating a theory and structure of good government. The earlier political philosophy considered monarchy, aristocracy, and polity (what we today would call republicanism) as legitimate governmental structures. But the 17th century saw important thinkers — based on their readings of the Old Testament and medieval and contemporary Jewish midrashic analysis of the Torah — rejecting the first two governmental structures: “They now began to claim that monarchy per se is an illicit constitutional form and that all legitimate constitutions are republican.” These thinkers argued that a republic was the only valid governmental structure endorsed by the Bible and by God.

These Protestant thinkers saw in Deuteronomy 17 and 1 Samuel 8–12 a political constitution endorsed by God, an eternal political arrangement that had neither been negated nor superseded in the Christian dispensation.

They increasingly came to see it as a set of political laws that God himself had given to the Israelites as their civil sovereign. Moses was now to be understood as a lawgiver, as the founder of a politeia in the Greek sense. The consequences

161. Ibid.
162. Ibid., 1–2.
163. Ibid., 2–3.
164. Ibid., 3.
of this reorientation were staggering, for if God himself had designed a commonwealth, then the aims of political science would have to be radically reconceived.\textsuperscript{165}

The passages in Deuteronomy and 1 Samuel restricted the power of the king and provided a counterweight to the centripetal accumulation of power in the monarchy. The responsibility of believing Christians, according to this line of thought, was to align their own governing arrangements according to this biblical pattern. “It became the central ambition of political science to approximate, as closely as possible, the paradigm of what European authors began to call the \textit{respublica Hebraeorum} (republic of the Hebrews); to compare it both to ancient and modern constitutional designs and thereby to see where the latter were deficient.”\textsuperscript{166}

Think of political covenants such as the Mayflower Compact. The Puritan colonists who settled Massachusetts took their Bibles seriously and saw themselves as repeating the biblical exodus. “The American constitutional tradition will be found to have derived much of its form and content from the Judeo-Christian tradition as interpreted by the dissenting Protestant sects that made up such a high percentage of the original European settlers in British North America.”\textsuperscript{167}

Long before Madison and Hamilton, the Fundamental Orders of Connecticut and similarly the Rhode Island Acts and Orders had installed a federal system of government, antecedent to the use of the word \textit{federalism}. The word \textit{federal} emerged from the Latin \textit{foedus}, meaning “covenant.”\textsuperscript{168} Such a federal system features central governing parts and local governing elements, all without losing their own identities. “Federalism in the political realm is thus analogous to the Judeo-Christian marriage relationship, and it too is derived from the Bible. As with a marriage, political federalism creates a permanent relationship while preserving the moral independence of the partners,”\textsuperscript{169} whether they be spread across one horizontal governing level (such as branches of a central government) or parts of a vertical system (such as national governments linked all the way down to state, county, city, and even township governments), or both. Wherever such Protestants settled (New England, Dutch outposts in the Mid-Atlantic

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\item[165.] Ibid., 16.
\item[166.] Ibid.
\item[168.] Ibid., 33.
\item[169.] Ibid.
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colonies), “when it came time for these Protestants to order themselves politically as their charters allowed and as circumstances required, they turned to the covenant form.”  

Because Calvinists were considered dangerous by more powerful and government-aligned versions of Christianity, Calvinists tended to migrate to find religious freedom and looked to the Bible to formulate political constitutions: “Across Europe and the Atlantic, from Germany to New England, Calvinists came to think of their theopolitical enterprises as 'new Israels.'”

The New England Puritans immediately come to mind, but “political Hebraism has [also] been recognized as a foundational principle in the establishment of the Dutch republic (1581), which took its inspiration from the biblical narrative of Exodus.”

The same modeling of ancient biblical precedent was enacted by American colonists: “Confronting particular political dilemmas with regard to legitimacy and authority, American patriots appropriated a biblical constitutional paradigm to help them make sense of their historical circumstances.”

The biblical tradition is one of the main source streams of our notions of federalism and constitution. We in the 21st century may have trouble thinking this process through, because we no longer have as strong an influence from the Bible or typological thought as the American colonists and founders had. “The importance of the Mayflower Compact is that it was the first explicitly political use of the church covenant form — the first of many political covenants to follow.”

Such covenant forms were having their impact before the American founding, before Locke, Montesquieu, and Rousseau were old enough, or even not yet born, to write about branches of government or life, liberty, and property. “By 1641 there was in operation on American shores much of what would become American constitutional government” founded by settlers steeped in religious devotion and biblical readings.

These Protestant settlers saw, in their possession of a new land, a repetition of what had happened to biblical Israel as they conquered Canaan. Their attempt to escape the oppression of kingship in European contexts worked out a repeat of their reading of 1 Samuel, which cast

170. Ibid., 25.
172. Ibid., 237.
173. Ibid., 240.
175. Ibid., 29.
the request for a king as resulting in a punishment for the people, who had perfectly good relationship to each other and God in the rule by judges. They read the period of the judges before Saul was anointed king as constituting a biblical idea of “the idea of several tribes living under a common, covenanted government, while preserving their respective tribal identities; [and this] became the model for the federal or covenant relationship in politics. Each town or county in America was the equivalent of a tribe, each based on a tribal covenant that created the ‘peopleness’ of the tribe.” This federal idea would later be justified and articulated in secular terms and contexts, but the model came from covenant theology.

The Hebrew Bible doesn’t provide a theoretical discussion of the workings of government; as Michael Walzer says, “there is no political theory in the Bible. Political theory is a Greek invention.” Although readers can pick up details in the narrative, they have to fill in gaps in order to make any systematic description. Yet Elazar sketches four “constitutional periods” between the Exodus and Malachi. The first begins with the leadership of Moses and extends through a federal arrangement, organized by a loose confederation of tribes. “This union, perhaps the first true federal system in history, was bound together by a common constitution and law” with rudimentary national integration. The second constitution arrived with kingship, which possessed limited power hemmed in by preexistent tribal and religious arrangements. A persistent conflict between “king and prophet was to be the primary constitutional feature of the second constitutional period.” Even when no overt conflict between king and prophet is related, the possibility of such confrontation tended to keep the king in line, as the prophet served his “watchdog” role. This was in addition to counterbalancing the impact of the elders and people on the king’s exercise of power.

One should see the conflict between prophets and kings in the Deuteronomistic History as a balancing of powers, a division of labor intended to ensure that kings don’t aggregate too much power into one institution or person. The American Founders tried to create a similar

176. Ibid., 34.
178. Walzer, In God’s Shadow, xii.
180. Ibid., 109.
separation of powers between different functions of government: legislative, executive, and judicial. If we see 1 Samuel 8–12 as a narrative about the prophet’s establishing legislation, about what will happen if the people’s request for a king is realized; and if we read in the story about Nathan’s condemnation of David’s murder and adultery, plus Samuel’s condemnation of King Saul for claiming priestly and executive functions to himself, we see some balancing of prophetic and monarchical powers — checks and balances. All the narratives from 1 Samuel to 2 Kings demonstrate the danger of the king’s accumulation of authority sufficient to result in despotism. Even early in the development of monarchical institutions and powers, David felt free enough to encroach on religious functions by appointing his own priests and instituting his independent policies.\(^{182}\) King Noah also dismissed the current group of priests and appointed his own, more amenable to his interests (Mosiah 11:4). Jeroboam also instituted at the beginning of his reign what the Bible views as idolatry, by setting up two shrines, so his subjects didn’t have to go to Jerusalem to sacrifice and be influenced by southern political propaganda. A central feature of that plan was to appoint priests not of the tribe of Levi but ones loyal to him (1 Kings 12:31).

In the Northern Kingdom the prophets provided sufficient weight to prevent consolidation of kingship into dynastic arrangements. “Kingship in the northern tribes meant, in no small degree, a restoration of the principles and practices of the tribal federation with the kings far more limited in power than their southern counterparts and the older institutions of the tribal federation stronger in their governing role.”\(^{183}\) The functions of judges/saviors in the Judges period were ad hoc and charismatic and not dynastic. “This principle of discontinuity in the chain of leadership resulted in interregnal gaps between saviors.”\(^{184}\) Before the institution of kingship in 1 Samuel, the Israelites in the period of judges reacted to foreign threats with an ad hoc charismatic leader emerging to face the danger. With the possible exception of Gideon, such leadership never resulted in dynastic leadership but “allowed no institutional consolidation, and, above all, … it could not be transferred to, or inherited by, another person,”\(^{185}\) but completed its cycle with the death of that judge/deliverer, or even earlier upon completion of the defense of the tribes from foreign incursion. This temporary or limited-term leadership was

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182. Ibid., 142.
premised on the faith of the people that God would raise up in troubled times a mosiah who is adequate to the challenge. The destruction of the Northern Kingdom resulted in the third constitutional period, with a weakening of the prophets as a counterbalance to the monarchy in the remaining Southern Kingdom, and prophets advocating for the traditional arrangement between power centers. The fourth period (the Second Commonwealth period) began when the last of the Davidide rulers exited the scene, and what independent rule that existed was done by a council. In all four of these constitutional arrangements “the fundamental principles animating government and politics in ancient Israel were theocratic, federal and republican.” Through all these historical changes it is entirely proper to use what we think of as modern political terminology to describe the institutions. “Political relationships in ancient Israel were based on the covenant or federal principle (the word federal is derived from the Latin foedsus, which means covenant)” and regardless of the constitutional form, the Bible builds that structure on the notion of a covenant between the people and God. These federal structures and mindsets didn’t end with the termination of rule by judges, but endured during the monarchical period. Even the memory of that federal system was maintained by the prophets in later periods as “a messianic goal.” An essential aspect of that federal system was the republican principle, because it “reflects the view that the political order is a public thing (res publica), that is to say, not the private preserve of any single man or ruling elite but the property of all those within the scope of its jurisdiction,” with a sharing of authority among different power centers.

Just previous to the Nephite governmental reform that instituted judgeship, King Mosiah\(^2\) had translated the Jaredite record. Seeing parallels between the Jaredite experience of kingship and the Nephite occasion with King Noah, Mosiah\(^2\) endeavored to avoid the Jaredite disaster through institutional change. And we ought to use appropriate terminology. Mosiah\(^2\) engages in regime change, and other examples of regime change in the Bible might provide a model for deeper understanding of the political revolution in Mosiah 29. Elazar focuses on two such regime changes: the Mosaic and Davidic ones. Under Joshua,

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187. Ibid., 118.
188. Ibid., 120.
189. Ibid., 122.
the Mosaic regime had its most representative formulation with the three crowns (*ketarim*) represented: the ruler, the priests, and the people. The judges succeeded Joshua in this regime; under this Mosaic regime, Samuel was the last of the leaders who straddled the two divisions of the judge responsibilities (the civil administrative and the judicial), just as Alma₂ in the Nephite tradition similarly bridged two roles: prophetic and executive.

After the transition to kings, the biblical constitution maintained elements of the previous regime. “What was characteristic of the new regime is the combination of monarchic and tribal (or federal) institutions.”⁰¹ But the people still maintained sovereignty with the power to appoint (David and Solomon) and depose kings (Rehoboam),⁰² so that even dynastic successors had to go to the assembly and get the “consent of the governed.”⁰³ We moderns think of such institutional contrivances in terms of separation of powers, but such parceling out of authority was also characteristic of Hebraic and Jewish history, which had “no sympathy with a system of government in which a single body or group possesses a monopoly of the attributes, prerogatives, and privileges of political authority.”⁰⁴ Mosiah₂ held a constitutional convention and consulted with the governed to change regimes after King Noah violated the previous covenant between ruler and ruled. Mormon, abridging and summarizing, merely states that “Zeniff conferred the kingdom upon Noah,” without elaborating on any of succession procedure, such as ritual or covenant (Mosiah 11:1). Similarly reticent about governing arrangements is Nephi, of whom the third person narration reads, “Nephi began to be old, and he saw that he must soon die; wherefore, he anointed a man to be a king and a ruler over his people now, according to the reigns of the kings” (Jacob 1:9). In the two biblical regimes “only after rulers had usurped power or done something to break the normal constitutional relationship between governors and governed was it necessary to go through some formal covenantal act in order to reestablish the principles upon which the relationship was built.” So after Queen Athaliah usurped the throne (2 Kings 11), the priest Jehoiada covenanted with the palace guard and later the people to restore traditional governance (2 Chronicles 23:1–3).⁰⁵

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⁰² Ibid., 119.
⁰³ Ibid.
⁰⁴ Ibid., 121.
The Book of Mormon engagement with kingship and judgeship is illuminated once the reader recognizes the biblical transformations of governing forms and the biblical influence on modern formulations of government into the period when kings became merely ceremonial or were eliminated altogether.

**Nephite and Jaredite Kingship Exemplifications**

When King Mosiah₂ proposed changing the Nephite constitution to eliminate kingship, as Gore points out, he was responding to events in the previous chapter (Mosiah 28), having finished translation of the Jaredite record. Gore focuses on the inception of monarchy among the Jaredites, but one example king he doesn’t mention rules and misrules almost exactly the way King Noah did, and is exemplary in the same way, spurring Mosiah₂’s reforms. “Riplakish did not do that which was right in the sight of the Lord, for he did have many wives and concubines, and did lay that upon men’s shoulders which was grievous to be borne; yea, he did tax them with heavy taxes; and with the taxes he did build many spacious buildings” (Ether 10:5). He built a magnificent throne for himself, and prisons for dissenters and tax delinquents, until the people deposed him, killed him, and exiled his family (Ether 10:6–8). Brent Metcalfe reads the similarities to be evidence that Joseph Smith plagiarized from himself in writing the Book of Mormon, stylizing King Noah and King Riplakish as copies of each other: “Attention to other literary forms and structures can be similarly problematic. One striking literary phenomenon in the Book of Mormon is the instance of narratives that mirror each other. As a case study we can distinguish twelve parallels between the stories of the Nephite king Noah and the Jaredite king Riplakish.”¹⁹⁶ Metcalfe imposes a modern notion that a repetition in a story indicates lack of originality, a penchant for narrative theft. He never once considers that ancients valued repetitions and similarities because they viewed history as repetitive, and such recurrence made the events more real, more historical, more pedagogical, not less. Metcalfe joins that notion about recurrence with a simplistic modern notion that if a text demonstrates literary features, it can’t also be historical: the literary and the historical are mutually exclusive.¹⁹⁷ Ancient thought

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¹⁹⁷. I have elsewhere written about the modern penchant for assuming without reading through the countervailing sources the notion that if an ancient story has what we think of as literary elements such as repeating motifs, it can’t at the
didn't make a sharp distinction between literature and history. The literary and the historical were just different facets of rhetoric. Since Hayden White demonstrated, starting in the 1970s, that history and literature are inextricably intermingled, even contemporary historical theory has demolished the boundary between history and fiction. So that King Noah and King Riplakish conform to a literary motif says nothing about their historical status. White has led the revolution in historiography, which reverses the positivistic notion that literature and history are two totally different kinds of writing. Since White, we must consider that the two kinds of writing are too closely bound together for the historian to unwind them.

In White’s view, then, there is a stock of “archetypal story forms,” which are the bearers of the ideology of the given culture. When a historian, including the most modern and “scientific” of historians, reconstructs the past, this is always done in conformity to the plots which the intertext of the culture allows. This is what endows the narrative he or she creates with both plausibility and significance.198

Of course, the classic example of the tyrannical king in scripture who taxes his people too heavily, multiplies concubines and wives, and builds elegant edifices is the older Solomon. He 1) imposes heavy forced labor levies to build his palaces and temples (we usually call that corvée labor, and in the biblical tradition, it reminds the children of Israel of their slavery in Egypt (1 Kings 9:16, 21)); 2) takes many foreign and domestic wives and concubines (1 Kings 11:1–8; 9:16); 3) builds a luxurious throne (1 Kings 10:18–20) and palaces; and 4) consolidates and profits from a tremendous trade in horses and chariots, using that power to kill dissidents and rival claimants to the throne from Saul’s line. The Law of the Kings in Deuteronomy forbade the accumulation of horses, and David hamstrung the horses he captured in battle — think of horses and chariots as the stealth bombers and nuclear missiles of warfare at the same time be historical. See Alan Goff, “How Should We Then Read? Reading Mormon Scripture after the Fall.” FARMS Review 21, no. 1 (2009): 137–78, https://scholarsarchive.byu.edu/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=1797&context=msr. The sharp distinction between history and literature is another modern invention that doesn’t reflect how history was written or understood in the ancient world; and uncritically applying that notion to ancient texts is to build a historical and textual foundation upon a misunderstanding of antiquity.

198. Daniel Boyarin, Intertextuality and the Reading of Midrash (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 1990), 86.
today, so the accumulation of these advanced weapons results also in the accretion of power in the monarchy (1 Kings 10:26–29). Solomon turned to wickedness in his old age and presents the clearest model of evil kingship that King Noah replicates and Riplakish foreshadowed; this is kingship in all the nations that Samuel warned about.

Most of Gore’s attention to the allusive connection between the Nephite and the Jaredite patterns of kingship is spent on the selection of the initial king in the Jaredite tradition. Much as Samuel passes over the eldest sons of Jesse until settling on the youngest and least likely candidate to be the king to succeed Saul, in Ether 6 the brother of Jared is alarmed that the people request a king: “Surely this thing leadeth into captivity” (Ether 6:23), and each of the sons refuses the kingship until the last one accepts. Much like Samuel, Jared acquiesces to the desires of the people: “Suffer them that they may have a king” (Ether 6:24). Jared lets the people select their king; they select the sons of the brother of Jared, who all reject the honor and obligation until they run out of sons. They then move on to the sons of Jared, and only the last one accepts the offer and position (Ether 6:25–27). A portent of the dangers of kingship, Samuel’s choice of David “ultimately reveals the damage wrought, both individually and collectively, when political power is misused” (p. 79). Gore sees a similar dynamic in the selection of the first Jaredite king:

The rejection of the monarchy by the sons of the brother of Jared and most of the sons of Jared signifies an understanding on their part that the thing would lead into captivity. As we will see, the older brothers of Orihah [the first Jaredite king] who are unwilling to take the throne refuse to subscribe to an idolatrous politics. (p. 79)

Gore describes this politics of kingship as not only dangerous but also a religious offense, a variety of idolatry.

The Book of Mormon also describes King Noah’s leadership as idolatrous. Note that it doesn’t state that the Zeniffites worshipped idols made of wood and stone, but that their willingness to believe and follow the lies, flattery, and misrule of their king was itself idolatrous: “they also became idolatrous, because they were deceived by the vain and flattering words of the king and priests; for they did speak flattering things unto them” (Mosiah 11:7). Believing the deceptions and blandishments of an incompetent and wicked ruler and his sycophants, merely because one prefers lies to the truth, is a form of idolatry denounced by Abinadi and the story’s narrator, Mormon. (The account of Zeniff is written in the
first person by Zeniff himself, but starting in Mosiah 11:1 the narrative shifts to third-person narration).

The Jaredite people ask that Jared and the brother of Jared appoint one of their sons to be king. The brother objects: “And now behold, this was grievous unto them. And the brother of Jared said unto them: Surely this thing leadeth into captivity” (Ether 6:23). Like Samuel, Jared acquiesces to the people's desire to be like all the nations. Note the repetitive claim here that the monarchy the Israelites, Nephites, and Jaredites experienced had a recurring quality: “But Jared said unto his brother: Suffer them that they may have a king. And therefore he said unto them: Choose ye out from among our sons a king, even whom ye will” (Ether 6:24). Not only is King Noah a repetition of Noah, but King Noah, in King Mosiah’s reading of the record, is also a repetition of King Riplakish, and many other kings in the scriptural tradition. “By bringing Mosiah 29 into dialogue with the book of Ether and Judges—Samuel, Mormon draws attention to the weight of the phrase ‘the voice of the people’ to emphasize the responsibility of the people to express their desires and to bear the burdens — whether of kingly oppression or the shared responsibility of governing” (p. 62). This vicarious experience Mosiah₂ had through reading about the Jaredite kingship “surely grabbed Mosiah’s attention, presaging the possible fate of his own people” (p. 74). The book of Ether touches on something universal in human experience that Mosiah₂ hopes to avoid with preventive measures: “The Jaredite fall was profound and showed the depths of depravity to which any people could sink if they did not check the lust for power. The brother of Jared prophesied that captivity would befall his people if they appointed a king, and captivity ensued as father, son, and brother fought against one another, tearing society apart from the top over a quest to hold the throne” (p. 74).

**Slow Down: Intertextual Crossing Ahead**

Having explored the intertextual connections between Noah and King Noah alongside those between the two Gideons, the most straightforward metalepsis hinted at in the Mosiah politeia pointing to the biblical politeia occurs when 1 Samuel and Mosiah define the relationship between a seer (ro’eh) and a prophet (nabi). In the Samuel/Saul story the people haven’t been persuaded by Samuel in chapter 8 that establishing a monarchy is worse than the current alternative. God tells Samuel to make it so, but Samuel procrastinates, dismissing the assembly to go home (1 Samuel 8:22) without having anointed a king. The narrative introduces the reader to Saul, whose height seems to be a qualification
for kingship (1 Samuel 9:2). Saul and his servant are looking for lost asses. The servant suggests they consult Samuel about where to search: “Beforetime in Israel, when a man went to inquire of God, thus he spake, Come, and let us go to the seer: for he that is now called a Prophet was beforetime called a Seer” (1 Samuel 9:9).

The book of Mosiah ensures that the reader make the connection to Samuel/Saul and kingship in the chapters after the Limhi and Alma groups recount their oppression under King Noah. In the chapter before Mosiah enacts constitutional reform that converts government by kings to government by judges, King Mosiah uses seer stones to translate the Jaredite records recovered by Limhi’s scouting party. Of those stones, the account explains, “And whosoever has these things is called seer, after the manner of old times” (Mosiah 28:16). Earlier, Ammon told Limhi that King Mosiah was not only a king but also a seer, and a seer is greater than a prophet (Mosiah 8:13–17). This is an example of what Richard Hayes often refers to as metalepsis, an intertextual connection, which by invoking one small detail, the writer can evoke the larger narrative shape of an earlier text. In the narrative about Saul’s anointing by Samuel as king, the mention of the seer reveals “what Saul’s journey to Samuel is all about: the mispat bammelek [the manner of the king], the rights and duties of the king, will necessarily involve the mispat bannabil, the rights and duties of the prophet.” Prophet and king are inextricably interconnected in biblical governance, and in the case of the anointing of a king (both Saul and David are the prime examples), the prophet can appoint the ruler or dismiss him (1 Samuel 13:13–14). At least under the initial kings anointed by Samuel, the king is more just a military commander than one who fully exercises the powers of kingship we think about when considering monarchy, and is still subject to the prophet/seer.

Gore calls the intertextual connection between the Book of Mormon and the Bible a “preoccupation with the inner and outer workings of the great biblical text,” not merely subservience to the Bible (p. 30). It engages with it, expands on it, and explains it. Such relationship of incorporating the Bible into itself, and correcting the Bible when it needs emendation and gap filling, makes for a much more complex positioning of the two scriptures than merely copying or plagiarism. The book of Mosiah in the Book of Mormon especially has a particularly strong

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affiliation with the biblical books of Judges and Samuel (p. 32), with its backdrop of idolatry followed by military threat from outside groups and internal conflict and violence. The recurrence “in Judges-Samuel is found in Mosiah-Alma too,” with a similar theological message about wickedness and captivity (p. 33). What is often translated as the “manner of the king” in 1 Samuel 8:8–18 could be translated as the “legislation of the king,” for Samuel is setting up not just the expectations but the contractual relationship between the people and their king. The scriptural figures Samuel and Mosiah 2 both warn that political arrangements fall apart, and leadership by kings is particularly prone to failure (pp. 34–35). Similar to Jim Faulconer’s reading of Mosiah, Gore sees a futility in politics: “Readily apparent in these narratives is the precept that politics cannot save human beings from themselves” (p. 35). This should result in a tragic view of politics, but perhaps a comic view of religion, as long as religion is not viewed as a subsidiary of politics. Mingling the two all too often results in bad tragedy, bad comedy, history, pastoral, pastoral-comical, historical-pastoral, tragic-historical, tragical-comical-historical-pastoral, scene indivisible, or poem unlimited. This failure of politics laid out by Samuel and developed in the dialogue demonstrates the disadvantages of dynastic kingship, while the people focus on the immediate problem it solves: who will lead the Israelites militarily when they are threatened?

Of course, by the time King Noah comes along, the Israelites and Lehites had experienced centuries of kingship’s benefits and travails. Gore notes the intertextual connection between the Nephite disestablishment of monarchy and the Israelite establishment, using different terminology than I myself employ. Mosiah 2 is “the mirror image” of Samuel: the former is the last of the Nephite kings who oversaw the transition to judgeship, just as the latter was the last judge who supervised the transition to kingship and even supervised the first king (p. 36). The Book of Mormon doesn’t present a case study in which the Nephites merely reverse the institution of kingship and revert to an earlier and better form of government by judges. “What the Book of Mormon does not offer is fairy tale wherein the failures of Israel are simply reversed and corrected” (p. 54). Rather, the Book of Mormon is more realistic, recognizing that all formal arrangements in government bear their own risks and failings. The Book of Mormon illustrates that kritarchy, the rule of judges (p. 53), is no cure-all, but merely reveals different human and social weaknesses than those manifest by kingship. Gore argues that the analysis of politics in Mosiah 29–Alma 2 conveys a complementary
lesson to portions of the Deuteronomistic History in Judges, 1 Samuel, and the King David narrative, along with discussion of kingship in the book of Ether, to analyze the weakness of politics in addressing the fundamental problems of politics that politics can’t solve.

Gore finds not just the intertextual connections between 1 Samuel and Mosiah to be important interpretive filiations to understand, but he usefully goes beyond that allusive nexus to read what the story of leadership institutions in Ether adds to that discussion. “By tracing the effects of the succession crisis experienced by Samuel, the book of Mosiah develops a parallel, kindred political theology of the heart” (p. 61). The matrix includes the Jaredite experience with kingship, especially in a founding generation of a civilization. “One of the ways the book of Mosiah overmatches the biblical story is by referencing the story of the Jaredites” (Ibid.). Even though, chronologically, the Jaredite record would precede the Samuel narrative, and the Nephite experience would bring up the rear, yet “the Book of Mormon is engaging in serious dialogue with the Bible, showing that biblical stories are by no means finished or complete” (Ibid.).

A Concluding Prolegomenon: Allusive Texts and Contemporary Reading

The biblical believer asserts that the Bible is inspired by God but written by humans, even like-minded humans who may liken their thoughts about history and humanity to God’s thoughts. As with all productions planted by human minds and harvested by human hands, it contains gaps, contradictions, and puzzles which the divine mind leaves the readers to fill or demystify — with sufficient clues to do so adequately. “If God is the implied author of the Bible, then the gaps, repetitions, contradictions, and heterogeneity of the biblical text must be read, as a central part of the system of meaning production of that text.”200 The Bible and the Book of Mormon can be both inspired and full of aporias and ambiguities. It is a rabbinic way of thinking which insists that scripture requires the reader to unriddle the fissures and inconsistencies because ultimately — when rightly read — the shortcomings are such only from a too limited and shallow reading. Some of those gaps need to be filled by the reader, with a recognition that the creative process resulting in the Eden event and all that follows hasn’t ended the divine creative impulse. God continues to create, and so do humans, as much as they are created

200. Boyarin, Intertextuality and the Reading of Midrash, 41.
in the divine image. The creation mandate given to Adam and Eve and
Noah included the human extension of the divine work of organizing
the chaotic wildlands by engaging in agriculture, an extension of the
work God undertook to bring organization out of chaotic, unformed
matter. Humans have merely added upon that cultivation engaged in as
Adam wrings produce out of the land by the sweat of his brow; Cain
exercises dominion by planting and harvesting food; Noah nurtures the
rows of his vineyard; and King Noah plants vineyards and wine-presses
to make wine in abundance. We modern humans greatly expand that
creative work by typing words into keyboards, manufacturing cars and
computers, designing and building complex machines such as aircraft
and CRISPR gene-editing equipment. We fulfill that creative mandate
by sitting, philosophizing, and writing about texts we inherit from past,
and the connective conceptual tissues, such as theories about allusion,
that, much like tendons and ligaments, permit those scriptural muscles
and joints to bend, flex, and leverage. As such, the text that recounts that
creative activity constantly works forward and backward, into the future
and pointing to the past, so that type and anti-type are connected with
allusive filaments we may yet not grasp. In some future we’ll no longer
see through a glass darkly, but clearly.

The nearly ubiquitous presence of allusions to the Bible
in postbiblical Hebrew literature is a major index of this
binocular vision of the Bible: the allusions occur because the
Bible provides later Hebrew writers a thick concordance of
phrases, motifs, and symbols that encode a set of theological,
historical, and national values (a canon in the strict sense of
the O.E.D.); and the allusions occur ... because the Bible in
Hebrew speaks resonantly, even to the most pious readers, as
a collection of great works of literature.201

We twenty-first century readers have only begun to read.

The Bible (and the Book of Mormon), like all texts, we “never
really confront [them as] a text immediately, in all its freshness as
a thing-in-itself. Rather, texts come before us as the always-already-read;
we apprehend them through sedimented layers of previous
interpretations, or — if the text is brand-new — through the sedimented
reading habits and categories developed by those inherited interpretive

201. Robert Alter, Canon and Creativity (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press,
2000), 32.
traditions.” Sometimes those interpretive traditions mislead readers, as the always-already-read texts are read superficially, in ways that would be improved upon by adjusting or abandoning one interpretive tradition (modern reading habits and presuppositions, for example) for another.

The tendency moderns exhibit to foreground historical questions as we read such sacred texts is one such tradition we ought to recognize as limited, superficial, and misleading. We need to start from a new genesis and learn to read again, and Gore’s example of, and emphasis on, reading the spaces and gaps between Book of Mormon passages and between the Book of Mormon and the Bible provides one such exemplary opportunity to start reading anew. The reader then can be conscious of the “metacommentary,” “according to which our object of study is less the text itself than the interpretations through which we attempt to confront and to appropriate it. Interpretation is here construed as an essentially allegorical act, which consists in rewriting a given text in terms of a particular interpretive master code.” By understanding the presuppositions and habits we bring to reading ancient scripture, we can better comprehend the inevitable contribution the reader brings to the task of creating meaning from the texts. We can not only become better readers but also better disciples, for reading also is part of the creative mandate. We ourselves are Adam and Eve, plowing deeply the furrows into the genealogy of humans, working the soil of a whole new world of textual understanding and planting, as we organize and harvest the ground east of Eden. We have much planting and reaping to do, and we textual farmers should dig and fertilize, cultivate and weed, and water in the hope that we may gather in abundance the wisdom sown by God and our ancestors.

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203. Ibid., 9–10.
disciplines from BYU. He received his doctorate in humanities from the University at Albany (SUNY).
Abstract: A little more than 40 years ago, Cyrus Gordon discovered and described for the first time an ancient literary technique which he had found in the Hebrew Bible, and he gave it a name — a Janus parallel. That is why no one, more than 40 years ago, could have faked a Hebrew Janus parallel in an English translation of an ancient document. But, as I reasoned, if Janus parallels were a Hebrew literary device at the time Lehi left Jerusalem (for an analog see chiasmus), then such parallels probably can be found in the Book of Mormon. In this article I describe the technical methodology for discovering Janus parallels in an English translation, and I provide two new examples.

Cyrus Gordon, in his 1978 publication “New Directions,” drew attention to a heretofore unrecognized ancient literary technique in the Bible and called this ancient technique “Janus Parallelism.” In doing so, he was giving a nod to the Roman god Janus who has one face on the front of his head looking forward and another on the back of his head looking back.

In its simplest and strictest form, a Janus parallel consists of a tristich, three lines or stichs, often of poetry. Hebrew poetry in general consists of two parallel stichs, or colons, and Hebrew prose also often employs parallel lines. But a Janus parallel must consist of at least three stichs to allow for the double parallel, as will be explained. The middle line of such a tristich usually contains a polysemous word or phrase. One meaning of the second line anticipates a synonymous or antithetical parallel with the third line, while the other meaning of the second line looks retrospectively at a synonymous or antithetical parallel in the first line. In a well-constructed Janus parallel, the first line and third line will
not usually parallel each other closely, while the middle stich looks both forward and back.

By way of example, I offer the analysis of Gary A. Rendsburg, a student of Cyrus Gordon, published in 1980, on a verse of interest to Latter-day Saints.\(^5\) In the King James translation of Genesis 49:26, Jacob blessed his son Joseph saying, “The blessings of thy father have prevailed above the blessings of my progenitors unto the utmost bound of the everlasting hills.” This tristich can be structured as follows:

| The blessings of thy father have prevailed | ברמת אביך גברו |
| above the blessings of my progenitors | על ברכת הורי עזר |
| unto the utmost bound of the everlasting hills. | התאות ובשת עולם |

The Janus parallel turns on the two Hebrew words at the end of the second stich, הורי עד. Depending on which vowels are supplied to the unpointed text, it can be read as “my progenitors of old,” which parallels with “your father” in the first stich. Or with different vowels, it can be read “mountains of old” which proleptically points to “everlasting hills” in the third stich.\(^6\)

The King James translators followed the first interpretation which produced a translation similar to the following (my own) rendering:

The blessings of your father surpass
The blessings of my progenitors of old,
The delight\(^7\) of the eternal hills.

The Septuagint (the ancient Greek translation of the Old Testament) and a few modern translations preserve the second interpretation, which I render from the Hebrew as follows:

The blessings of your father surpass
The blessings of the mountains of old,
The delight of the eternal hills.

It can clearly be seen in this tristich that “the blessings of your father surpass” in line one and “the delight of the eternal hills” in line three are neither synonymously nor antithetically parallel with each other. Yet the polyvalence of the middle stich produces parallels both with “the blessings of your father surpass” and with “the delight of the eternal hills.”

If, as Gordon, Rendsburg, and others have demonstrated, ancient Hebrew literary techniques included Janus parallels, they could appear in the Book of Mormon.\(^8\) However, just as with the King James translation
of Genesis 49:26, there is a major issue with recognizing Janus parallels in an English translation of an ancient text. Janus parallels depend most often on the polysemous nature of a word or phrase in the middle line of a three-line parallel set, as can be seen in the above biblical example. Even a practiced and adept translator will find it nearly impossible to find a word or phrase in the target language that replicates the polysemy of the middle line of the original text and allows the middle line to still parallel with one of its meanings the first line and with its second meaning the third line. (As a thought experiment, the reader should try to find an English rendering of the second line of this biblical tristich that at once parallels the first and third stich.)

Succinctly put, the English translation of the Book of Mormon will probably not replicate any polysemous parallels of a Nephite vorlage. If polysemous Janus parallels exist on the gold plates the only way to ferret them out is to make a conjectured but well-reasoned backtranslation from the English text to a supposed Hebrew or Egyptian vorlage, an obvious highly speculative exercise rife with subjective traps and semantic pitfalls.\(^9\)

Despite the difficulties, to my delight I eventually found a plausible example in the Book of Mormon of a Janus parallel in 1 Nephi 18:16 and published my discovery in 2017:\(^{10}\)

\[
\begin{align*}
\text{I did look unto my God,} \\
\text{and I did praise him all the day long;} \\
\text{and I did not murmur against the Lord because of mine} \\
\text{afflictions.}
\end{align*}
\]

The polysemy centers on the verb in the second stich, *praise*. The best candidate in this verse for a back translation of “praise” into Hebrew would be the *piel* verb *zammēr*, which can mean both “to praise” and “to sing.” With these two meanings of *zammēr*, 1 Nephi 18:16 can be read two ways:

\[
\begin{align*}
\text{I did look unto my God,} \\
\text{and I did sing unto him all the day long;} \\
\text{and I did not murmur against the Lord because of mine} \\
\text{afflictions.}
\end{align*}
\]

Or,

\[
\begin{align*}
\text{I did look unto my God} \\
\text{and I did praise him all the day long} \\
\text{and I did not murmur against the Lord because of mine} \\
\text{afflictions}
\end{align*}
\]
Since publishing this proposed Janus parallel, I have found two more possible examples of Janus parallels in the Book of Mormon. The first example I discuss, 2 Nephi 4:20, is fairly straightforward (I have italicized the possibly polysemous word):

My God hath been my support;
he hath led me through mine afflictions in the wilderness;
and he hath preserved me upon the waters of the great deep.\(^{11}\)

The Janus feature of this verse depends on the polysemous nature of the posited Hebrew vorlage of “led” (lead in the present tense). The verb led in the middle stich could be the English rendering of the Hebrew verb nḥḥ that can signify two (slightly?) different homographic lexemes: √1, nḥḥ, “lead” or “conduct” as in Isaiah 11:2; or √2, nḥḥ, “join with, stand by (someone)” as in Isaiah 7:2.\(^{12}\) Thus, if the two meanings are separated and rendered individually, the text in my rendering can be read either with the √1 meaning,

My God hath been my support;
he hath conducted me through mine afflictions in the wilderness;
and he hath preserved me upon the waters of the great deep;
or, with the √2 meaning,

My God hath been my support;
he hath stood by me through mine afflictions in the wilderness;
and he hath preserved me upon the waters of the great deep.

In the first reading, “hath conducted me” in the second stich anticipates the parallel “hath preserved me” in the third stich. In the second reading, “hath stood by me” is parallel retrospectively with “hath been my support” in the first stich. Though not a strict requirement for a simple Janus parallel, the semantic separation between the first stich and the third stich is not strong. Nevertheless, the subtle nuances of the parallels in 2 Nephi 4:20 are quite poetic and beautiful.

My second example, found in 1 Nephi 10:13, is quite different in that it does not depend on a possible backtranslation into Hebrew. In fact, unlike nearly all explanations of Janus parallels, it does not depend on polysemous words or phrases at all.\(^{13}\) The parallels in 1 Nephi 10:13 work thematically, with the theme of the middle stich pointing retrospectively to the first stich and proleptically to the third. Because it is not dependent
on polyvalence or polysemy it survived intact the translation into English. Structured as a tristich, 1 Nephi 10:13 reads,

that we should be led with one accord into the land of promise,

unto the fulfilling of the word of the Lord,

that we should be scattered upon all the face of the earth.

The Janus parallel in this verse can be overly simplified as being led ← fulfilling the word of the Lord → being scattered. The author has deftly placed before the middle stich the subordinate clause, “that we should be led with one accord into the land of promise,” which is then explained in the second line as “the fulfilling of the word of the Lord.” The third line, like the first line, is also couched as a subordinate clause, “that we should be scattered upon all the face of the earth.” This third line is also explained by the middle (second) line as “the fulfilling of the word of the Lord.” In other words, the second line explains the first and third line. Yet the first and third lines are not close parallels, even though when viewed through the historical lenses of the Restoration, the phrases “led with one accord into the land of promise” and “scattered upon all the face of the earth” can be viewed as somewhat parallel, if not synonymously then antithetically.

The three examples of Janus parallelism in the Book of Mormon that I have discussed so far, two here and one in a previously published paper, are surely only the tip of the iceberg of an ancient literary technique on display in this sacred volume. Their presence in the Book of Mormon makes it increasingly more evident that the door John W. Welch opened when he discovered chiasmus in the Book of Mormon more than 40 years ago was only the incipient notification to students of the Book of Mormon, prescient as it was, to pay attention to ancient literary techniques that bring out the meticulous construction and exquisite literary and doctrinal beauty evident in its pages.¹⁴

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Endnotes


2 For a first-hand account of Gordon’s discovery from the point of view of an observer, see Gary A. Rendsburg, How the Bible Is Written (Peabody MA: Hendrickson, 2019), 362n7.

3 For those familiar with the Harry Potter series, the character Quirinus Quirrell appears to be modeled after the Roman god Janus for whom our month of January is named.

4 In the ancient, pre-Hellenistic world, as far as we know, there were no handbooks nor instructions on how to construct a Janus parallel, nor for that matter on how to write a chiasm, or how to construct any literary form. The forms were known by all educated individuals, and certainly some attempts were more successful than others. But other than a general public opinion or private judgments, no one oversaw the correctness of individual attempts. Thus, there were exquisite compositions created by gifted literati on the one hand, and on the other hand, rather clumsy attempts.

5 Gary A. Rendsburg, “Janus Parallelism in Genesis 49:26,” Journal of Biblical Literature 99, no. 2 (1980): 291–93. I gladly acknowledge my discussion here of Genesis 49:26 as heavily dependent on Rendsburg. Because his article consists of slightly more than two pages, I refrain from referencing page numbers. Numerous other examples exist, but as will be explained, English translations do not reveal the Janus parallels that are in the Hebrew text (e.g., Genesis 15:1, Proverbs 31:21, Song of Solomon 2:12, etc.). For LDS interest in Genesis 49:26, see Wilford Woodruff’s 1878 statement that the Lord would “gather together the house of Israel to the valleys of these everlasting hills [in Utah], according to his decree to old father Jacob” (Journal of Discourses, 19:359). See also Orson Pratt, in Journal of Discourses, 2:292 (1855).
6 The form of the Masoretic lexeme, הָרִים, would require the translation “progenitors, forefathers,” as in the King James translation. Rendsburg, however, provides ample justification in his article allowing for the translation “mountains,” which does not have a waw (וְרִים) which was probably a mater lectionis anyway (Rendsburg, “Janus Parallelism in Genesis 49:26”). Rendsburg offers evidence that, in fact, it was read as “mountains” and/or “progenitors” anciently. The most compelling piece of evidence is that the LXX translates it as ὀρέων, “mountains.” Additionally, according to Rendsburg, Rashbam, the medieval Jewish commentator, translated “the blessings of your father ... surpass the blessings of the mountains.” Rendsburg also suggests that both meanings, “mountains” and “forefathers,” were current when Targum Yerushalmi (also called Targum Pseudo-Jonathan; its date is disputed, though most date it to the 8th century with a range between 4th to 14th century) was written because it appears to reproduce both meanings in its translation:

May the blessings of your father be added to the blessings,
Wherewith Abraham and Isaac who are like mountains blessed you,
And to the blessings of the four mothers who are like hills,
Sara and Rebekah, Rachel and Leah.

7 In my rendering of this verse, I have chosen to follow the definitions in The Hebrew & Aramaic Lexicon of the Old Testament, eds. Ludwig Koehler, Walter Baumgartner, and Johann Jacob Stamm, trans. M. E. J. Richardson, [CD-ROM] (Leiden: Brill, 1994–2000), (hereafter, “HALOT”), for תאוה, namely, from אָה (וה), meaning “longing, wish, yearning.” HALOT, citing Genesis 49:26, also suggests “abundance” and “splendour.” Thus, the New English Bible reads “bounty.” In a separate entry, HALOT also notes that the homograph תאוה (וה) means “marking; mark a boundary,” which explains where the “utmost bound” of the King James translation in Genesis 49:26 comes from. However, HALOT does not cite Genesis 49:26 as an example of this second homograph.


9 The first of many potential perils with this method is to rely on post-Iron Age Hebrew. This is not to say that post-Iron Age Hebrew cannot provide evidence, but it does mean that the further removed the backtranslation is from Iron Age Hebrew, the less likely it will reflect a Book of Mormon vorlage.

10 The discussion of 1 Nephi 18:16 was published as Paul Y. Hoskisson, “Janus Parallelism: Speculation on a Possible Poetic Wordplay in the Book of Mormon,” in “To Seek the Law of the Lord: Essays in Honor of John W. Welch,” eds. Paul Y. Hoskisson and Daniel C. Peterson (Orem, UT: The Interpreter Foundation, 2017), 151–59. I can now add to that discussion the fact that 1 Nephi 18:16, in addition to being an example of a Janus parallel, is one of the better examples in the Book of Mormon of what some scholars call “the propensity for languages to place shorter items before longer ones in a series.” Rendsburg, How the Bible Is Written, 424. That is, notice how the first stich of the Janus parallel in 1 Nephi 18:16 is the shortest line, while the third stich is longer than either of the previous two lines. For a general discussion of this phenomenon in the Bible (and other languages, including English) see Rendsburg, “Shorter Before Longer — and Divergences Therefrom,” in How the Bible Is Written, 424–42.

11 Royal Skousen, The Book of Mormon: The Earliest Text (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2009) also parses the structure of this verse as I have done.

12 For the Hebrew see HALOT, s.vv. הנחא 1 and הנחא 2. It would make little difference if other possible roots with the requisite consonantal structure were involved, such as הניה, because the 3rd masculine singular qal perfect forms with a pronominal suffix for either root would be identical in Iron Age Israel, ( ) הניה.

13 Because most Janus parallels depend on polysemy, the temptation to create a backtranslation of 1 Nephi 10:13 containing a contrived polyvalence, such as a qal versus piel form of a verb, is rather enticing. But there is no need, and therefore I forbear.
For a recent publication about literary beauty see Donald W. Parry, *Preserved in Translation: Hebrew and Other Ancient Literary Forms in the Book of Mormon* (Provo, UT: Religious Studies Center, Brigham Young University, 2020).
Abstract: This essay traces the modern-day usage and understanding of temples from the Kirtland Temple to Nauvoo and the Salt Lake Temple. Architecture was used to teach principles. While the Kirtland Temple was preparatory (think of the vision of Christ and the conference of keys by Abraham, Moses, Abraham, Elias, and finally Elijah), the Nauvoo Temple was dedicated to ritual usage. In 1879, the Church reduced temple usage to rituals, and thus assembly rooms are missing from later temples. Through his paper, Cowan shows how temples have changed according to revelation and how prophets have seen models in vision that then have been incorporated in the temples God’s people built.

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.

I am honored to participate in this conference, which pays tribute to Matthew Brown, and to talk about temples, a subject he loved. Elder James E. Talmage spoke of “a definite sequence of development” in understanding the purposes for which temples are built and that these changes are reflected in the buildings themselves. The piecemeal restoration of temple understanding in the latter days is reflected in the design of temples built during this dispensation.

Some basic patterns were set in earlier dispensations. The layout of the tabernacle and its grounds emphasized its sacredness and separation from the world. The tabernacle tent was divided into two rooms. The larger outer room was known as the “Holy Place,” and the innermost room was regarded as “The Most Holy Place” or “Holy of Holies.” The tabernacle was surrounded by a courtyard secluded by a fence of fabric panels. As the Israelites pitched their camp, the twelve tribes were arranged around the tabernacle as if to provide a protective shield from the outside world. Only those who were worthy could enter the courtyard, only priests were admitted into the tabernacle’s outer room, and only the high priest could enter the innermost room — The Holy of Holies — once a year on the day of Atonement. This illustrated the principle that the more holy the area, the fewer the number of people who could enter there.

Since Old Testament times, temples have served two major functions. They have been places of contact between heaven and earth — revelation between God and man. They also have been places where sacred ceremonies or “ordinances” have been performed by which the faithful enter into covenants with God. Both of these functions would need to be restored as part of the “restitution of all things” (see Acts 3:19–21) “in the dispensation of the fullness of times” (Ephesians 1:10).

The Kirtland Temple

The first of the functions mentioned above was restored at the Kirtland Temple. In 1833, the Lord promised to endow the Saints “with power from on high.” He specified that the temple was not to be built “after the manner of the world,” but according to a plan that He promised to reveal to three whom the brethren would appoint (see Doctrine & Covenants 95:1-4). Heeding the Lord’s admonition, a conference that convened just two days later appointed the three members of the recently organized First Presidency to obtain a draft (or plan) for the building.2

“Joseph not only received revelation and commandment to build a Temple,” President Brigham Young later testified, “but he received a pattern also, as did Moses for the Tabernacle, and Solomon for his Temple;
for without a pattern, he could not know what was wanting, having never seen [a temple], and not having experienced its use.”

Truman O. Angell, one of the Church’s supervisors of temple construction, later testified that the Lord’s promise to show the building’s design to the First Presidency was literally fulfilled. On an occasion when Joseph Smith invited his counselors to kneel with him in prayer, the building appeared before them in vision. “After we had taken a good look at the exterior, the building seemed to come right over us,” testified Second Counselor Frederick G. Williams. Later, while speaking in the completed temple, he affirmed that the hall in which they were convened coincided in every detail with the vision given to the Prophet.

Even though the temple’s exterior would look much like a typical New England meetinghouse, its interior had some unique features. The revelation specified that the building’s “inner court” should include two large rooms, one above the other, each measuring 55 by 65 feet. The lower hall was to be a chapel used for praying, preaching, and administering the sacrament. The upper hall was for educational purposes (see D&C 95:15–17).

An unusual feature of the temple’s two main rooms would be multiple pulpits. At both ends there would be a stair-stepped stand with three pulpits on each of its four levels. Those on the west were for the use of the Melchizedek Priesthood, while those on the east were for the Aaronic. Initials on each pulpit would represent the specific priesthood office held by the individual occupying it. These arrangements would help Church members to understand the relative authority of various groups of priesthood leaders.

Elder Erastus Snow later declared that the Kirtland Temple was built “to show forth the order of the Priesthood, Aaronic and Melchizedek.” Thus, the Kirtland Temple was a multipurpose building designed to accommodate a variety of functions.

The Saints built the temple despite poverty and persecution. A popular Latter-day Saint hymn declares, “Sacrifice brings forth the blessings of heaven.” The Saints’ sacrifice in building the Lord’s house truly was rewarded. The weeks before the temple’s dedication were a Pentecostal season, as the Prophet Joseph Smith put it, “long to be remembered.” The climax came one week after the temple’s dedication. On April 3, 1836, which was Easter Sunday, Moses, Elias, and Elijah restored priesthood keys, and the Savior Himself appeared to accept the temple. Joseph Smith recorded: “We saw the Lord standing upon the breastwork of the pulpit, before us; and under his feet was a paved work of pure gold, in color like amber. His eyes were as a flame of fire; the
hair of his head was white like the pure snow; his countenance shone above the brightness of the sun; and his voice was as the sound of the rushing of great waters.” The Lord promised to manifest Himself there if “my people will keep my commandments, and do not pollute this holy house” (D&C 110). Clearly, therefore, the Kirtland Temple was a place of revelation — the first function listed above.

### The Nauvoo Temple

Sacred ordinances, the other major function of temples, were unfolded while the second temple was being built at Nauvoo, Illinois. In 1840 Joseph Smith taught the Saints that they could be baptized in behalf of the dead (compare 1 Corinthians 15:29). They eagerly went into the Mississippi River to perform this ordinance, thus making gospel blessings available to their loved ones who had died without this opportunity. In 1842 the Prophet presented the endowment, which was a “course of instructions” describing the path that leads back into the presence of God and “setting forth the keys” by which this can be achieved. Soon couples were also being “sealed,” or married with solemn covenants “for time and for all eternity” (see D&C 132:7–20).

The revelation directing that the Nauvoo Temple be built reflected that it was to accommodate both of the two main functions of temples. First, the Lord promised to manifest Himself there and restore “that which was lost unto you.” Second, the temple was to be the place for baptisms and other sacred service that “belongeth to my house” (see D&C 124:27–30). When completed, the Nauvoo Temple repeated the Kirtland Temple’s pattern of two large meeting rooms but added a baptismal font in the basement and facilities for other ordinances on its uppermost floor.

Specific parts of the temple were completed and dedicated piecemeal so that ordinance work could begin as soon as possible. During the summer and fall of 1841, the Saints eagerly pushed the temple’s construction. In July, William Weeks began preparing plans for a baptismal font to be located in the temple basement. On October 2 when the Prophet preached on salvation for the dead, he emphatically declared: There shall be no more baptisms for the dead, until the ordinance can be attended to in the Lord’s House; and the Church shall not hold another general conference, until they can meet in said house. For thus saith the Lord!”

“Just five weeks later, the basement rooms were enclosed by a temporary frame building sided up with split oak clapboards.” Its roof
was so low that it fit under the beams of the ground floor. A wooden font, carved by Elijah Fordham under Weeks’s direction, measured twelve by sixteen feet. It rested on the backs of twelve oxen, four on each side and two at each end. These were patterned after the most beautiful five-year-old steer that could be found in the country.”

Joseph Smith dedicated these facilities on Monday, November 8. The first baptisms were performed there two weeks later.

Then, on November 30, 1845, Brigham Young and twenty others who had received their endowment from Joseph Smith gathered to dedicate the attic story for ordinance work. During the next 10 days, Brigham Young, Heber C. Kimball, and others were busy preparing the attic’s central “council chamber” for the presentation of the endowment. It was divided by means of canvas partitions into separate areas representing distinct stages in man’s eternal progress. Saints contributed furnishings for these rooms. Potted plants, for example, were gathered for the area representing the Garden of Eden. The east end of the room had a large gothic window and was furnished with fine carpets and wall hangings. This most beautiful area represented the celestial kingdom. When Joseph Fielding entered this part of the temple for the first time, he felt as though he had truly gotten out of the World.

The early Saints commonly referred to the Kirtland Temple as the Lord’s “house.” The Nauvoo edifice, on the other hand, was more consistently called a “temple.” Perhaps this change in designation reflected the fact that the latter structure was associated with sacred priesthood ordinances while the first was not.

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<th>History of the Church</th>
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**Early Utah Temples**

Baptisms for the dead were introduced at Nauvoo, but endowments for the dead were not inaugurated until the St. George Temple was completed in 1877. Because these latter ordinances required a much longer time to receive, they quickly became the activity occupying most of the time in the temple.

The St. George Temple was very similar to the temple at Nauvoo, consisting mostly of two large meeting halls, one above the other. There was a font in the basement for baptisms, but the endowment needed to be
accommodated by dividing the lower hall into sections using temporary partitions. Several Church leaders indicated that the design of future temples could be changed to more adequately meet these new needs.

In 1879 Elder Orson Pratt pointed out that the Church by then had tabernacles and other buildings for the Saints’ regular meetings. Therefore, temples could be dedicated especially for more “sacred and holy purposes” — for ordinances associated with “the Priesthood of the Most High God.” Elder Pratt insisted that the Lord is “not confined” to a single pattern in temple building any more than He is in the creation of worlds, “but He will construct His Temples in a great variety of ways.” Elder Pratt explained, “The Lord begins little by little; he does not reveal everything all at once.” There were no rooms for ordinances in the Kirtland Temple. When baptisms for the dead were restored, a font was provided in the Nauvoo Temple. Endowments for the dead, not known in the first two temples, were now being performed at St. George. Therefore, “by and by,” Elder Pratt concluded, “we will have Temples, with a great many things contained in them which we now have not.”

That there would be variations in temple design had been made known to President Brigham Young in St. George. “Oh Lord,” he had prayed, “show unto thy servants if we shall build all temples after the same pattern.” Men do not build their homes the same when their families are large as when they are small, came the inspired response. “So shall the growth of the knowledge of the principles of the gospel among my people cause diversity in the pattern of temples.” Years earlier, at the time ground was broken for the Salt Lake Temple, President Young had taught that the order of priesthood ordinances is made known by revelation, and therefore we should know what facilities must be included in our temples.

The pattern of separate endowment rooms had first been seen in the adobe Endowment House, dedicated in 1855. After receiving preliminary ordinances and instructions, one would pass successively through the garden, world, and terrestrial rooms, each with corresponding murals on the wall. All were located on the ground floor, and each was one step higher than the preceding room. One would then ascend a stairway to the second floor, where the terrestrial, celestial, and sealing rooms were found.

This new concept in temple design would be reflected in the Logan, Manti, and Salt Lake temples, completed during the last two decades of the 19th century. The space formerly occupied by the lower of the two
large assembly rooms would be divided to provide the specific rooms needed for the endowment and other ordinances. The basic architectural concept for these new temples was worked out by Truman O. Angell under the personal direction of the Prophet Brigham Young. Both the Manti and Logan temples would have similar dimensions, be built in the “castellated” (or castle-like) style with local stone, and would have two towers. By the later 1870s, however, Angell was in poor health and tied up with other projects, so the task of completing the design for these buildings was turned over to his two capable assistants. William H. Folsom, who had helped design the Salt Lake Tabernacle, became architect for the Manti Temple, while Truman O. Angell Jr. received the assignment to complete the plans for the temple in Logan.\(^\text{18}\)

Early the following year, the younger Angell proposed that rather than having two large assembly rooms with elliptical ceilings, as had been the case in Nauvoo, the Salt Lake Temple should follow the pattern that Presidents Young and Taylor had already approved for Logan and Manti. There would be only one assembly room on the upper floor, and it would have balconies under the elliptical windows along each side. The temple’s main floor would contain spacious rooms for presenting the endowment, while an intermediate floor would provide smaller council rooms for the use of various priesthood groups, including the general authorities. This plan would accommodate 300 people in the endowment sessions — more than twice the number that could be served in the basement under the original arrangement. These changes were consistent with Brigham Young’s 1860 instructions that the temple would not be designed for general meetings, but rather it would be for the endowments — for the organization and instruction of the Priesthood.\(^\text{19}\) Thus, the design even of the Salt Lake Temple reflected the Saints’ unfolding understanding of temple functions.

Because of its location at Church headquarters, the intermediate floor for the general authorities plays a unique and significant role in Church governance. Key decisions are reached following prayerful consideration by the Council of the First Presidency and Quorum of the Twelve Apostles, who meet weekly in their council room on that floor in the temple. These decisions include such matters as ordaining and setting apart new presidents of the Church, appointing other general authorities, creating new missions and stakes, and approving Church programs. Notable examples have included the 1952 decision to build temples overseas, the determination in 1976 to add what we now know as sections 137 and 138 to the standard works, and the 1978 revelation
extending the priesthood to all worthy males (Official Declaration 2). Reflecting on these weekly meetings in the temple, Elder Spencer W. Kimball affirmed that those who could witness the prophet’s wisdom in reaching decisions would surely believe he was inspired. “To hear him conclude important new developments with such solemn expressions as ‘the Lord is pleased’; ‘that move is right’; ‘our Heavenly Father has spoken,’ is to know positively.”

The Salt Lake Temple’s exterior was designed to teach important gospel principles. The intent of the temple’s design, one architectural historian observed, was “to aid man in his quest to gain entrance back into the presence of God from whence he came.”

I have valued Matthew Brown’s insights into the meaning of these symbols. Brigham Young testified: “I scarcely ever say much about revelations, or visions, but suffice it to say, five years ago last July [1847] I was here, and saw in the Spirit the Temple not ten feet from where we have laid the Chief Corner Stone. I have not inquired what kind of a Temple we should build. Why? Because it was represented before me. I have never looked upon that ground, but the vision of it was there. I see it as plainly as if it was in reality before me. Wait until it is done. I will say, however, that it will have six towers, to begin with, instead of one. Now do not any of you apostatize because it will have six towers, and Joseph only built one [on the Kirtland and Nauvoo Temples]. It is easier for us to build sixteen, than it was for him to build one.”

An early account described what happened when it came time to design the temple’s specific features: “Brigham Young drew upon a slate in the architect’s office a sketch, and said to Truman O. Angell: ‘there will be three towers on the east, representing the President and his two counselors; also three similar towers on the west representing the Presiding Bishop and his two counselors; the towers on the east, the Melchizedek Priesthood, those on the west the Aaronic Priesthood. The centre towers will be higher than those on the sides, and the west towers a little lower than those on the east end. The body of the building will be between these.’” Angell pointed out that each tower would have twelve pinnacles, symbolizing the Twelve Apostles.

As with the Nauvoo Temple, special ornamental stones were an important feature of the Salt Lake Temple’s exterior. An earthstone formed the base of each of the temple’s fifty buttresses. These were the largest stones in the temple, weighing more than six thousand pounds and having on their faces a representation of the globe, four feet in diameter. These stones served as a reminder, architect Angell explained,
that the gospel message had to go to all the earth. Each buttress had a moonstone about halfway up, and a sunstone near its top. Because the earth is presently in a telestial condition, the three ornamental stones on each buttress might represent the three degrees of glory in ascending order — telestial, terrestrial, and celestial. These, together with the starstones on the temple’s towers, also reminded Latter-day Saints of these kingdoms. One scholar has suggested another possible interpretation. Referring to Abraham 3:5, he pointed out that “as we move upward into the heavens, the time sequences become longer. Likewise, the temple stones that communicate time begin with a short period of time, the day, and move toward the eternal present, where time almost ceases to move.” The earthstones at the temple’s base represent our planet, which rotates once every day. Stones about halfway up the building depict the moon’s monthly cycle. Sunstones near the top symbolize yet a longer period of time — the year. The depiction of stars even higher on the building suggests yet longer periods of revolution.

The constellation of Ursa Major (the Big Dipper), depicted on the west center tower, is positioned so that the two “pointer stars” at the end of the dipper are literally aligned with Polaris (the North Star) in the heavens. This star appears to be a fixed point in the sky around which other stars revolve; hence, it might be thought of as representing eternity, or the absence of time. Angell suggested another message to be gained from this constellation on the temple — “the lost may find themselves by the Priesthood.”

Even the placement of the moonstones can remind us of the Savior. Proceeding from right to left, they successively represent the moon’s new, first-quarter, full, and third-quarter phases. Since the fifty buttresses cannot be divided evenly by these four phases, of necessity, there will be a break in the sequence at some point. One student of the Salt Lake Temple concluded that this was done on purpose. This break occurs on the north wall — the full moon and third quarter being skipped so that a new moon follows directly after a first quarter. A plan of the temple drafted in 1878 carefully plotted each moonstone according to lunar phase and month of year. The date of January 1 could then be assigned to the new moon immediately after this break; dates can then also be assigned to each of the succeeding phases. The right buttress on the face of the temple’s main east center tower would thus represent April 6, regarded by many as the date of the Savior’s birth. Gilded letters on this same tower identify April 6 as the date of the temple’s commencement and completion. The left buttress on this tower includes a representation
of the full moon. Because Easter is celebrated on the Sunday following the first full moon after the beginning of spring, this moonstone may remind us of the Savior’s atoning sacrifice, which was completed with His Resurrection on that first glorious Easter morning.

The buttresses of the east center tower also include cloudstones, which show rays of light penetrating through the clouds. These may be representations of the gospel light piercing the dark clouds of superstition and error (see Isaiah 60:2–3). Or they may recall how a cloud of glory filled the ancient temple (see 1 Kings 8:10) and will rest on the latter-day temple in the New Jerusalem (see D&C 84:5).

On the same tower, the keystone at the top of the lower large window depicts clasped hands. These remind us of the power that comes from gospel fellowship and of the unity that must exist among those who would build Zion (see Galatians 2:9; Moses 7:18; D&C 38:24–27; 88:133). The hands also suggest the importance of honoring sacred commitments. The keystone above the east center tower’s upper window depicts God’s “all-seeing eye” that watches over both the righteous and the wicked (see 1 Kings 9:3; Psalms 33:13–14, 18–19; Proverbs 15:3).  

At the dawning of the twentieth century, Church leaders instructed architects designing the new Alberta Temple that they should depart from nineteenth-century patterns in two ways. They did not need to include towers or the large upper assembly room. Thus there would be no accommodations for general meetings, and the remaining facilities were focused specifically on temple ordinances. This became the pattern for almost all temples built since that time.

During the second half of the twentieth century, new audio-visual means were used to present the endowment. In early temples, they were presented in a series of rooms with murals on the walls, beginning with the creation of this earth and depicting successive stages in our quest to return to God’s presence. However, when President David O. McKay announced the first overseas temple that would be built in Switzerland, he indicated that “the Church could bring temples to these people by building smaller edifices for this purpose and more of them.”  

Harold W. Burton, a Latter-day Saint architect then living in Southern California, recalled how in 1952, Howard McKean, then chairman of the Church Building Committee, wanted to discuss with him President McKay’s challenge to find a less costly way to build temples. Burton realized that it would be necessary to reduce the size of these sacred structures without diminishing their functional capacity. His experience in the motion picture industry a decade earlier led him
to a possible solution: “It was my opinion that if the first four Temple Ordinance Rooms could be combined, and with picture projection substituted for mural paintings to create a proper setting pertaining to the Creation, the Garden, and the World, very substantial reduction in the size of the Temple could be effected.” Although some felt this idea was “too revolutionary,” it nevertheless was adopted for the Swiss Temple.  

This made it possible to present the endowment in a single ordinance room, in more than one language, and with far fewer than the usual number of temple workers. The film was produced under the supervision of Elder Joseph Fielding Smith and Elder Richard L. Evans of the Quorum of the Twelve Apostles and architect Edward O. Anderson. Gordon B. Hinckley, secretary of the missionary committee (not yet a general authority), had the prime responsibility for creating the film. “It was a charge of enormous significance,” Brother Hinckley’s biographer declared. “The ramifications of this project were enormous, as they would extend far beyond the temple in Switzerland.” In the fifth-floor room of the Salt Lake Temple where Elder James E. Talmage completed his monumental book, Jesus the Christ, Brother Hinckley spent many evenings, Saturdays, and some Sunday mornings outlining ideas. Although other members of the committee were helpful, Brother Hinckley soon found himself working personally with President McKay. Together they spent considerable time reviewing the temple ceremonies and praying for divine guidance. President McKay later remarked: “There is no other man in the church who has done so much in assisting to carry this new temple plan to the Saints of the world as has Brother Hinckley.”

The Swiss Temple, dedicated in 1955, set the pattern for the New Zealand and London Temples that opened three years later. Originally, each of these newer temples had only one presentation room, meaning that a new session could begin only once every two hours. The Oakland Temple, dedicated in 1964, had two large endowment rooms, enabling a new session to start every hour or so. The next two temples would be even more convenient.

Of special interest to Saints along the Wasatch Front are the designs for the Ogden and Provo temples. At the August 14, 1967, meeting where the Ogden and Provo temples were announced, Church leaders explained that these new temples “will be of the smaller type” following the pattern developed for the first overseas temples, “but so designed to have a high capacity.”
A few days later, President McKay assigned Emil B. Fetzer to design the new temples. The prophet explained that “in the coming years, many Temples will be built. Of necessity, these Temples must be functional in design and cost so that they may accomplish their sacred purposes and to be blessings to the Church membership.” Specifically the prophet instructed them to use the “same architectural plan for both temples,” include no solemn assembly room, have only “a single spire rather than multiple spires,” not place an angel Moroni atop the spire, and not include any unnecessary “footage” or “cubage.”

Shortly afterward, Emil Fetzer and Fred Baker needed to fly to Europe on Building Committee matters. They met in the Kennedy Airport in New York before boarding a Pan-American DC-8 for the overnight trans-Atlantic flight. After the midnight dinner, they proceeded to discuss the “grand assignment” to design the two temples. Brother Fetzer recalled: “After we had discussed Temple design for some time, all of a sudden I felt as though I were walking through a Temple Building. I described to Brother Baker what I was seeing in my mind as I was walking through the Temple — the Temple recommend desk in the main entrance foyer, the inner foyer, the offices and ancillary spaces and facilities on the ground floor. On the second floor I saw and described the Chapel and Sealing Rooms. However, the most important of all that I was seeing was the unusual plan configuration of the third floor. There was a large, beautiful, center room (Celestial Room) surrounded by a cluster of six rooms (Ordinance Rooms) which completely surrounded the Celestial Room. A broad, circular hallway went completely around the six rooms with access to them from this hallway. It was a wonderful concept and a very unique and distinctive plan arrangement.” Before they knew it, it was daylight, and the plane was landing in Frankfurt. They had been discussing the temple “all night long.”

Fetzer later reported that the idea for this specific arrangement came from a park in Copenhagen that was completely surrounded by a roadway in the form of an elongated ellipse. He called this a “Danish ellipse,” and “a modification of this idea was adapted to be exactly what I needed to accommodate the rooms and corridors of the upper two floors.” Still, he insisted, this “unique and fundamental modification of Temple design concept was more than my own thinking. It was a direct inspiration given to me by the Holy Spirit.”

While “most monumental structures have been designed with first emphasis on the outside appearance, with the interior fit to the outside design,” Fetzer instead “gave first consideration and emphasis to the
needs of the interior and then designed the exterior to enclose the areas.” Hence the outside walls of the temple’s main upper portion followed the rounded course of the third floor hallway. Thus the Ogden and Provo temples fit the architectural maxim, “form follows function.”

At the end of the 20th century, President Gordon B. Hinckley directed the construction of much smaller temples around the world; though significantly smaller in size than most earlier temples, they retained the same high standards of construction and accommodated the same functions that had characterized larger temples over the years. Throughout all these developments, temples have been designed to accommodate their sacred functions as effectively and efficiently as possible.

Notes
6. St. George Stake Historical Record, quoted in Petersen, 405.
7. Hymns of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints (Salt Lake City: The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, 1985), “Praise to the Man,” 27.
10. Smith, History of the Church, 4:426, emphasis in original.
11. Smith, History of the Church, 4:446.
12. Smith, History of the Church, 4:446.
16. Erastus Snow, November 20, 1881, in St. George Stake Historical Record, ms, Church Archives.
22. Brigham Young, in *Journal of Discourses*, 1:133.
30. Recent scholarship has suggested other possible dates for the Savior’s birth. See for example, Jeffrey R. Chadwick, “Dating the Birth of Jesus Christ,” *BYU Studies* 49:4 (2010), 5-38.
Richard O. Cowan received his doctorate in history at Stanford University in 1961 and joined the religion faculty at Brigham Young University that same year. He therefore has completed more than a half century of teaching at BYU. He has taken a special interest in Latter-day Saint temples and developed a course in that subject. He is the author or co-author of more than a dozen books and numerous articles in the fields of Latter-day Saint history and the Doctrine and Covenants. For more than a decade he chaired the committee producing Gospel Doctrine Sunday School manuals for the Church and currently serves as patriarch in his Provo stake.
Book of Abraham Polemics: 
Dan Vogel’s Broad Critique of 
the Defense of the Book of Abraham

Jeff Lindsay


Abstract: Dan Vogel’s latest book claims to offer clear-cut evidence showing what, when, and how Joseph Smith fraudulently translated the Book of Abraham. While he claims to use an objective approach, he instead weaves a polemical agenda that ignores some of the most important scholarship in favor of the Book of Abraham. He ignores crucial evidence and relies on assumptions and hypotheses as if they were established facts. The arguments of apologists, which he claims to be reviewing and critiquing, are often overlooked or, when treated, attacked without letting readers know the substance of the apologetic argument. He neglects key arguments and important documents that don’t fit his theory. The work is a valuable tool to explore Book of Abraham polemics, but it is not even-handed scholarship by any means. Vogel’s latest contribution does not overturn the evidence against his paradigm nor overthrow the growing body of insights into the antiquity of the Book of Abraham.

The Book of Abraham is viewed by some critics of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints as the weak underbelly of the faith, an easy target to attack to undermine the beliefs of members and the interest of investigators. Dan Vogel, a long-time critic of the Book of Abraham, who has influenced many people with his theories and arguments — including some members of the Church — has published a new book aimed at exploding the defenses that Latter-day Saint scholars have offered for the Book of Abraham. Drawing upon arguments honed
over many years, *Book of Abraham Apologetics: A Review and Critique*¹ seeks to set the record straight by examining the arguments made by apologists and showing us what the evidence actually reveals.

After reading his claim to be just pursuing history “based entirely on a dispassionate, balanced analysis of the relevant historical documents” (xvii), I expected what would at least seem to be an even-handed consideration of key evidence on both sides of the debate, including discussion of important apologetic works and arguments. In spite of knowing what the conclusions would be, the journey could be valuable for students of the Book of Abraham to understand the weaknesses in evidences and arguments. Vogel’s book can indeed be valuable for that purpose, but only for a small fraction of the issues surrounding the Book of Abraham. What is neglected, unfortunately, contradicts the claim of dispassionate scholarship. The book is primarily valuable for understanding the most refined and creative arguments available, as far as I know, for the critics’ paradigm of how and what Joseph translated to give us the Book of Abraham. In providing a seemingly compelling and certainly creative story for the origin of the Book of Abraham based upon some of the mysterious Kirtland Egyptian Papers, Vogel excels, although the arguments still fail.

In addition to thoroughly discussing his paradigm for the translation, Vogel also tackles a variety of other issues. He explores several aspects of the Book of Abraham story: he provides a timeline for some of the key moments and documents involved and critiques aspects of the Book of Abraham text, the explanations of the facsimiles, and a few of the evidences apologists offer for the book. He also provides alternate nineteenth-century sources that could help account for the book. It is comprehensive in terms of providing the negative angles that can be taken, but it falls awkwardly short in responding to some important issues that defenders of the Book of Abraham have been pointing out for years.

Another reason for paying attention to Vogel’s book is that the background it provides can help Latter-day Saint scholars and students of the Book of Abraham to not only better understand focal points of the debate on the Book of Abraham and the methods critics use to undermine it, but to also better recognize when others even within the Church treat questionable claims from critics as fact. For example, understanding Vogel’s polemical arguments and methodology can help

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readers discern the nature of the unfortunate and now openly admitted influence of Vogel on an important volume from the Joseph Smith Papers Project (Book of Abraham and Related Manuscripts, hereafter JSPRT4). The volume is remarkably valuable, but readers need to understand the subtle but pervasive bias in the many choices and statements made therein. After publication, Brian Hauglid, one of the volume editors of JSPRT4, praised Vogel’s approach to the Book of Abraham, noting that it had influenced his work as an editor. Vogel discusses this and praises Hauglid for that in his book (xvi, also citing Hauglid’s public acceptance of critical approaches to the Book of Abraham, on Facebook, in footnote 20). That influence can be seen in many ways that have been pointed out elsewhere.

Unfortunately, scholars relying on the scholarship in JSPRT4 may not recognize the bias from the influence of Vogel and other critics that may lead readers to accept many errant, unstated assumptions or unjustified conclusions, or to miss many valuable insights that arguably should have been provided. Vogel’s arguments, though, will enable readers to see why, for example, the biased framing of details around the Book of Abraham manuscripts and the sloppiness in assigned dates for some of the documents are important and why those flaws improperly play into the hands of critics. (Such flaws would likely only be noticed by those familiar with the details of the attacks levied against the Book of Abraham and should not be used to impugn the work or motives of the Joseph Smith Papers team: in spite of the subtle and easily missed errors in one still remarkable volume, JSPRT4, the vast body of work from the

Taking the Shine Off *Shinehah*: An Insight Into Vogel’s Approach

It would be unfair to expect every argument in favor of the Book of Abraham to be considered, or to expect every scholar who has published something in favor of the book to be discussed by Vogel. But it’s fair to expect commonly cited issues to be addressed and major, foundational works to be cited and discussed. However, my expectations in this area were met with disappointment. Here we consider the noteworthy issue of *Shinehah* as a telling illustration of Vogel’s approach.

After reading Vogel and beginning this review, I turned to what may be the one of the most important and far-ranging foundational works of Latter-day Saint scholarship on the Book of Abraham, *One Eternal Round*, the *magnum opus* of Dr. Hugh Nibley that was completed after his death the help of Michael D. Rhodes.⁴ While reading pages 333 to 334, I was reminded that the word *Shinehah*, said to be “the sun” in Abraham 3:13, actually can mean the sun in ancient Egyptian. It is one of the numerous clues in the Book of Abraham that something is going on other than mere fabrication by Joseph Smith. The plausibility of *Shinehah* as the sun in ancient Egypt is now one of multiple evidences of ancient origins that apologists sometimes mention in discussing the Book of Abraham.⁵ It is not absolute proof of anything, but is a meaningful issue and one that demands attention.

What is especially interesting is that *Shinehah* was not widely used to mean the sun in ancient Egypt. Use of that term for the sun is only attested during a relatively brief span of about six centuries that overlaps with the likely time that Abraham lived, as John Gee has noted.⁶ Perhaps this was a lucky guess, but one that should at least raise an eyebrow.

As I read Nibley’s observations, I recalled reading about *Shinehah* several times in Vogel’s book, but I could not recall how Vogel attempted to refute the main point that Joseph’s identification of *Shinehah* as the

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sun was plausible in ancient Egypt. As I went back to Vogel, I saw he had much to say about Shinehah, mentioning it 28 times. He is obviously aware of the importance of this topic.

Beginning on page 158, Vogel claims that Shinehah did not originate with the translation of the Book of Abraham but was a code name used in the 1835 printing of the Doctrine and Covenants. He argues that Shinehah came first as a code name and then was added to the Book of Abraham in 1842 when Joseph allegedly did the translation of Abraham 3. There is reasonable evidence that Abraham 3 was likely translated, at least as a first draft, in 1835, but the translation of the Book of Abraham had at least begun before the Doctrine and Covenants was printed in August 1835. But whether the word Shinehah first appeared as a random code word in the Doctrine and Covenants that would be the same as a word in Abraham 3:13, or first arose during work on the Book of Abraham and then was adopted as a memorable code word standing for “Kirtland,” the meat of the apologists’ argument about Shinehah is that Joseph Smith correctly identified a real Egyptian word as the sun in Abraham 3:13. So how does Vogel deal with that argument?

Vogel goes on for several pages (158–63), arguing that Abraham 3 was not translated until 1842 and that its use of Shinehah may derive from an 1838 revelation that mentions the “the plains of Olaha Shinehah” (D&C 117:8). He also argues that Hebrew words in Abraham 3 like Kokaubeam (meaning stars) point to an 1842 date of translation, discounting the argument that Joseph’s brief 1842 translation work could have included working in Hebrew terms to the existing text — even though the many

7. A scrap of paper containing “Shinehah” was added as a code word to the 1833 revelation that is now D&C 96 by pinning the scrap to the original manuscript of the revelation, apparently in preparation for the August 17, 1835, printing. This most likely occurred in 1835 and could have occurred after translation of the Book of Abraham had begun, though it is possible that it occurred before Joseph received the papyri. The most logical scenario, in my opinion, is that the word was obtained through Joseph’s work related to the Book of Abraham and was then borrowed as a memorable code word to represent “Kirtland” in preparing for the 1835 printing of Section 96. See Jeff Lindsay, “Trying to Take the Shine off Shinehah: Vogel’s Response to a Commonly Cited Evidence for Book of Abraham Authenticity,” Mormanity (blog), April 10, 2021, https://mormanity.blogspot.com/2021/04/trying-to-take-shine-off-shinehah.html. Also see Christopher C. Smith, “The Inspired Fictionalization of the 1835 United Firm Revelations,” Claremont Journal of Mormon Studies 1, no. 1 (April 2011): 15–31, https://www.academia.edu/2357317, who prefers a May to June 1835 date for addition of the “Shinehah” scrap, while recognizing that it is still possible for that addition to have occurred after July 1835.

added foreign code names in the 1835 printing of the Doctrine and Covenants already set a precedent for updating an earlier revelation with added names.

But through all this talk of Shinehah and where it first occurred and when, it was only in preparing this review, prompted by seeing Nibley’s discussion of this issue as one of numerous equally fascinating issues in his tome, that I noticed something astonishing: there is no discussion by Vogel of why Abraham 3’s use of Shinehah is considered evidence for the Book of Abraham or why it matters to Latter-day Saint defenders. It’s as if Vogel is just inoculating readers against a commonly cited evidence without creating any awareness of what the evidence is. One could explain that without giving very much ground by proposing that Shinehah in Abraham 3:13 is just one lucky guess. But Vogel, clearly aware of the argument, doesn’t reveal why some see it as relevant evidence. This is not the dispassionate scholarship promised at the beginning of the book.

There are many other similar nuggets in Nibley’s One Eternal Round, along with fascinating vistas about ancient Egyptian perspectives that help us see the ancient setting of the broad themes of the Book of Abraham. Unfortunately, readers of Book of Abraham Apologetics will not even learn of the existence of Nibley’s magnum opus, for it is never discussed or cited. Nibley is brought into the conversation several times to criticize him for a few statements, but so much of the meat he offered for Book of Abraham students is simply left off the table. For Shinehah and a variety of other issues, I believe there should at least have been a recognition as to what the argument is with a footnote to the relevant documents, one of which most certainly should be One Eternal Round.

Where Vogel Shines: His Overarching Theory for the Translation of the Book of Abraham

The strength of Vogel’s book is in explaining in detail his paradigm for what and how Joseph “translated” in producing the Book of Abraham. According to Vogel, who sometimes seems to channel Fawn Brodie in reading Joseph’s mind, Joseph felt he had a valuable tool when he acquired the papyri, for since they could not yet be translated by scholars in the U.S., he could offer his own bogus translation to further impress his followers with his powers. He decided to take a different approach than anything he had done before by first producing a tool for translation, and then “translating” from it. The tool began as the “Egyptian Alphabet” and then became converted to the more complete volume known as the “Grammar and Alphabet of the Egyptian Language” (GAEL).
Characters from that volume were associated with long explanations having various “degrees” from one through five in which the fifth degree often corresponded with a more fleshed out “definition.” As a work of unschooled mortals with no knowledge of Egyptian, it seems completely misguided and is not an accurate translation of the characters that are Egyptian. Vogel insists that Joseph first created the GAEL, and then used some of it to build a story line and “translate” the Book of Abraham, while apologists see strong evidence that it is dependent on the Book of Abraham translation as well as the Doctrine and Covenants or other sources, and is not the source of the translation or story line of the Book of Abraham.

In Vogel’s paradigm, Joseph selected a scroll belonging to an ancient priest named Hor that was merely an ordinary funerary text with some interesting drawings, including our current Facsimile 1. Joseph misinterpreted an ordinary funeral scene as Abraham on the altar, and then picked some text near (but not immediately next to) that figure on a portion of the scroll that is now known as Joseph Smith Papyrus XI (JSP XI), believing it to contain the Book of Abraham. After working on the GAEL long enough to have some ideas for a story line, Joseph had two scribes write characters from JSP XI into the left margin of some blank pages and then dictated the “translation” that went with those characters, typically giving lengthy blocks of text, as many as 200+ English words for one character or short string of characters in the margin.

This translation began with just 3 characters for Abraham 1:1–3 dictated to W.W. Phelps on Book of Abraham Manuscript C, with a title beginning with “Translation.” Then he later dictated more text, beginning with Abraham 1:4, to two other scribes at the same time, with Frederick G. Williams writing Book of Abraham Manuscript A, and Warren Parrish writing Book of Abraham Manuscript B. These two manuscripts, which I call the “twin manuscripts,” have some similar errors and corrections that seem to reflect scribes taking simultaneous dictation from a speaker who stumbles and changes his mind and makes corrections in midstream. Williams takes dictation of verses up until our Abraham 2:5. For some reason, Parrish stopped after Abraham 2:2.

Vogel explains that the twin manuscripts from Williams and Parrish provide clear evidence that shows Joseph’s translation process at work as he tells scribes what character to write and then dictates the translation. It is live “revelation” and reveals that what Joseph was doing was completely wrong and a total fraud, for the characters on JSP XI have nothing to do with Abraham.
Here the Latter-day Saint apologist might offer a typical response by saying that this process of placing English text next to characters need not mean that Book of Abraham manuscripts reflect live creation of new scripture but may reflect copying from an existing manuscript. Vogel believes the evidence of similar errors and corrections proves that dictation was underway, and what else could that mean but Joseph Smith dictating new scripture on the fly? Vogel has a seemingly plausible timeline, apparent evidence of translation occurring, and “smoking gun” evidence that seems to give us a direct window into how and what Joseph translated.

As for the possibility of contrary evidence, Vogel tells us that there is none. Regarding Nibley’s theory expressed in 1975 that the scribes were matching up existing revelation with Egyptian characters to try to show their own skills with Egyptian, Vogel says, “There is no evidence that such an event ever took place” and states that the evidence shows just the opposite (8). Later he reminds us that “[t]here is no evidence to support the existence of a now-lost original text from which the Parrish and Williams documents were copied” (15–16). He repeats this claim twice more later (19–20, 24). For Vogel, we need to understand that “there is no evidence” means “OK, there may be something that looks like evidence, but I’ve got arguments against it.” It’s a subtlety in his methodology that may confuse some readers at first.

Several reasonable objections to this overarching paradigm remain unanswered in Vogel’s treatment. Fortunately, one important objection is not only mentioned, but answered in a truly clever way that I consider a highlight of the book.

**A Clever Explanation for the Most Direct Evidence of Scribes Using an Existing Translation in Making the Book of Abraham Manuscripts**

One of the most important of the “no evidence” evidences against Vogel’s paradigm is the presence of dittography (a mistaken repetition of text) in Williams’s Book of Abraham Manuscript A in which he copies Abraham 2:3–5 twice. The dittograph occurs on the last surviving page of Williams’s Book of Abraham Manuscript A, which can be examined in detail on the Joseph Smith Papers website (but note that


The transcript there misses some details that are caught in the finalized version published in the printed volume\(^{11}\). Surely Joseph Smith did not lose track in his on-the-fly story line and forgetfully jump back and once again make up three large verses matching the previous dictation word for word. Dittography is a very common scribal error when scribes are copying existing text from a written document and accidentally jump back to a previous spot in the document. This can easily occur if the place a scribe is looking for in the document has an identical or similar word that also occurs in an earlier spot on the page, as it does in this case. Abraham 2:2 and 2:5 both end with “Haran” in our text, or with “Haron” in Williams’ equivalent of vs. 2, so after writing “Haran” in the final sentence of vs. 5, he could have looked back to the document being copied to find his next starting point after “Haran” and, seeing a line end with “Haron” at the end of our vs. 2, thought he had found his target and picked up his copying with the following verse, Abraham 2:3, which he had already copied. This huge mistake, along with many other less dramatic clues, seems to require copying from an existing manuscript. Vogel does not overlook this evidence and provides an impressive solution in favor of his model.

The large dittograph in Manuscript A is visual evidence that Williams was copying from an existing manuscript. If so, how can we accept the theory that he was taking live dictation of newly created scripture from Joseph Smith? Here Vogel truly shines with a creative and almost elegant model that he has devised to overturn the impact of the dittograph of Abraham 2:3–5, handily turning evidence for an earlier manuscript of at least part of the Book of Abraham into “no evidence” at all.

Vogel suggests that when Williams and Warren Parrish allegedly took simultaneous dictation from Joseph to create the similar “twin manuscripts” (Book of Abraham Manuscript A and Manuscript B, respectively), Williams for an unknown reason wrote an extra paragraph of dictation that Parrish did not write (our current Abraham 2:3–5). Parrish later copied that extra text from Manuscript A into Manuscript C, along with the text Parrish had from his own Manuscript B. Manuscript C had been started by W.W. Phelps and originally just had Abraham 1:1–3. It would become what Vogel sees as the “translation book” creating the key record for the early Book of Abraham translation. Then, maybe a week later in late November 1835, Parrish took more dictation of newly translated text from Joseph Smith for Abraham 2:6–18.
For some reason, Williams later wanted to add some of the new material to his own manuscript, according to Vogel. Since his manuscript originally ended with the word “Haran” at the end of Abraham 2:5 in “Therefore he continued in Haran,” he searched for “Haran” in Parrish’s document (a word that occurs multiple times) and found the wrong place, Abraham 2:2, ending with “the daughter of Haran.” Williams thus began copying for a second time our current Abraham 2:3 and continued copying a full paragraph of material he had already written, not noticing the duplication.

This is a clever explanation. It is important enough that I will quote directly from Vogel (28–31):

There is a reconstruction of the events that best explains how the dittograph occurred, and once understood, it becomes clear that this repetition in no way threatens the oral dictation theory.

When Parrish and Williams recorded from Smith’s dictation, probably on 19 and 20 November 1835, Williams wrote one more paragraph than Parrish. Parrish drew the last hieratic character, but left the remainder of the page blank.

Next, Parrish copied the English text onto seven pages of the translation book following the half page Phelps had previously scribed, making some slight changes. After skipping a line, Parrish then copied the paragraph that had been dictated in his absence from the Williams document. At this point, Parrish again began writing from Smith’s dictation directly into the book, which, as previously discussed, is evident from the in-line corrections made in his new English text. This possibly occurred on 24 and/or 25 November 1835, which are the last two entries in Smith’s Kirtland journal in which translation is mentioned.

Later, Williams wanted to copy the new text from the translation book into his manuscript to make it complete. The paragraph that Williams last wrote ended with the word “Haran” on a line by itself. As he turned the pages of the translation book looking for a paragraph that ended with that word, Williams would first have come to the top of page 7 and would have accidentally begun copying the paragraph that he had already recorded from Smith’s dictation. He was
apparently unaware that the next paragraph also ended on the following page with “Haran”.

What may have added to Williams’s confusion was the blank line before the paragraph and the possibility that either Parrish’s or Williams’s document or both did not have the characters in the margin next to the paragraph. As previously mentioned, Parrish had evidently copied the characters into the margin before copying the English text but, having miscalculated the number of lines, found it necessary to scrape off two groups of characters on page 7, precisely where the dittograph occurs.

Because he was no longer a scribe recording from oral dictation and was merely recording a second copy of a text that had already been entered into the translation book, Williams saw no need to copy the characters or to maintain the margins and paragraphing.

We may not know exactly how Williams introduced a paragraph-long dittograph into his document, but the scenario I have proposed explains more of the evidence and facts than Gee’s assertion that the entire document is a copy based on a repeated paragraph at the end. Gee’s explanation cannot explain the presence of clear evidence of simultaneous recording from dictation that appears in the document prior to the dittograph. Nor can it explain the change in Williams’s method of recording that occurs at the point of the dittograph.

The resolution is brilliant. Yes, of course there is a dittograph, and of course it was created by copying from the wrong place in an existing manuscript. But the existing manuscript was one based on his own Manuscript A that was copied by Parrish into Manuscript C that had added translation from Joseph. Williams wanted a copy of the new material, but accidentally started copying a long passage that he had just copied a few days earlier.

This explanation seems reasonable and has apparently convinced some people, but I’m afraid that those who were convinced failed to ask some of the basic questions that need to be raised about Vogel’s scenario.

First, note that the “change in Williams’s method of recording” refers to the visible drift in his left margin that occurs partway into the repeated material. Williams no longer holds the left margin open for characters and doesn’t add the characters he had previously written. Vogel says,
“Because Williams changed his method of recording at the point where the repeated paragraph appears, it would be a mistake to conclude the entire document is a visual copy based on the unusual dittograph at the end” (28). I agree that a dittograph on page 4 does not necessarily mean that copying from an existing manuscript occurred on pages 1–3, but it certainly means copying occurred on page 4. But Vogel is suggesting that the change in the margin should be taken as evidence in favor of his theory of later copying from what Parrish copied from Williams into Manuscript C instead of an existing manuscript being used in the original session when the first instance of Abraham 2:3–5 was written. Is that reasonable?

There are a variety of reasons why one’s margin might drift or characters might not be copied. Perhaps something has changed, but what? The dittograph and margin drift happens with the verses that Parrish did not copy in his manuscript, which ends at Abraham 2:2. If both scribes were copying at the same time, could the departure of Parrish have resulted in a change? I have previously offered the proposal that simultaneous dictation could have been occurring, but not of new scripture by Joseph Smith — but by someone else reading from an existing manuscript.

Spelling clues also call for an existing manuscript, one that Parrish seems to have been able to see when he was writing names. Parrish is not a great speller, giving us “preist,” “sacrafice,” “fassion” (fashion), “patraarch,” “governmnt,” “pople” (people), “Idolitry,” “deliniate,” “runing,” and “smiten,” something that can happen when copying an existing manuscript as the mind recalls a string of multiple familiar words just read, and then writes the recalled words using one’s own spelling, not paying attention to the details of how they were spelled on the document. But in spite of his weakness in spelling, Parrish spells names with remarkable consistency, even when there are silent consonants or otherwise difficult spellings. All three occurrences of “Mahmachrah” are spelled that way, though the first occurrence is not capitalized. All 3 occurrences of “Zibnah” are the same. Of the eleven occurrences of “Pharaoh,” a difficult word that many people get wrong, he has it correct eight times. Once he drops the final “h,” once he inverts the “ao,” and once he has an extra vowel in “Pharoah.”

While spelling errors of proper nouns in Manuscript B suggest that Parrish could see a manuscript that was being copied, Kyler Rasmussen has made further observations. The nature of the misspellings of other words in Parrish’s Manuscript B and in Manuscript C, when we know he was copying from existing manuscripts, are consistent, indicating both manuscripts are based on visual copying rather than live dictation.\(^\text{13}\)

Based on spelling clues, I have argued that Parrish could see the spelling of difficult names while Williams could not for much of his document, and that perhaps Parrish was reading aloud before writing lines down to help Williams in also making a copy.\(^\text{14}\) Or another person could have been reading to both, but perhaps with the manuscript close to Parrish for easy copying of difficult names. Parrish may have been giving guidance on the placement of characters, and with his departure, Williams didn’t know where to place them or didn’t care. Alternatively, he may have just grown weary and impatient after four pages of scribal work. A drifting margin and failure to copy characters does not require a different setting on a different day. That’s the real issue: did this happen in the complex way Vogel proposes involving different days, with Williams copying from Parrish’s copy of his own prior work, or did Williams just copy from the same source that he used the first time he wrote Abraham 2:3–5?

Vogel fails to consider two important questions: (1) is there textual evidence that Williams is copying from Parrish’s entry in Manuscript C, which has some differences compared to what Williams wrote the first time for Abraham 2:3–5; and (2) does the handwriting and ink flow on the manuscript point to a later second session for the dittograph, or does it appear that the dittograph was done at the same time as the preceding text? Both of these questions lead to answers that stand strongly against Vogel’s model, creative as it is.

I suggest there are three tests we can consider for Vogel’s proposal, apart from any problems in the chronology:

Does the duplicate text, perhaps written several days later, show use of a different ink, different pen, different ink flow, different spacing or

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\(^\text{14}\) Lindsay, “A Precious Resource with Some Gaps.”
slant of the text, or does it look as if it were written in the same session as
the immediately prior text?

Does the first occurrence of Abraham 2:3–5 show clear signs of oral
dictation and essentially no signs of visual copying?

Does the second occurrence of Abraham 2:3–5 show signs of copying
from Parrish’s document rather than copying from what may have been
(in the model of some Latter-day Saint apologists) the document that
was the source of the first occurrence (and the entire manuscript)?

Vogel failed to ask these questions. It’s not enough to offer a clever
but convoluted argument that in theory could account for some details
when other important details clash with the proposal. Let’s consider the
three factors. Note that I am using the transcript from JSPRT4, which
is considered the final version with some differences relative to the
preliminary transcript on the Joseph Smith Papers website. Both have
errors, but the transcript in the book is more detailed and catches some
things that weren’t noticed when the website version was done. Most of
the corrections I mention for this passage are not shown on the website,
only in the book.

1. Different appearance? As Williams begins the dittograph, the
ink flow, the appearance of the ink, the spacing and slant of his text
all continue exactly as before, as far as I can see. I find it difficult to
believe that this is in a new session several days later, now in the new
mode of copying from a manuscript when all was oral dictation before.
A change does crop up when Williams abandons the left margin he had
been following, but that only occurs after he has copied for a few lines.
Regardless of why he allows the margin to drift, his style and ink are
indistinguishable from the text above. In 1835, without the benefit of
mass-produced consistent ball point pens, the appearance of the ink
could easily vary from one session to the next, and, of course, details of
handwriting could vary. Looking at the writing of various individuals
in the photographs of documents in the Joseph Smith Papers helps us
see just how much the appearance of a scribe’s writing can vary. For
Manuscript A, it strongly appears that the dittograph occurred in the
same session as the first instance.

2. Signs of visual copying in the first occurrence? Yes, there
are indications of making a visual copy in the first occurrence of the
duplicated text, just as there are throughout the rest of the preceding
text. For this specific passage, these apparent copying errors include
(1) writing “the” instead of “thee,” an easy copying mistake to make
(dropping one or more letters from a word occurs in both Williams and
Parrish, with two more examples of this in the 2nd occurrence when we know that Williams is copying visually — there he drops two letters in “kindred” and more in writing “bro” for “brother’s”); (2) writing an “r” to begin the word “land” before changing it to an “l” (this is indicated in the printed book, not the website); (3) initially writing “dem” and changing it to “deno” followed by “minated” to create the word “denominated” (also not indicated on the website’s transcript); and (4) initially writing an “s” and then changing it to a “d” for the word “dwelt,” which can make sense as a copying error (cursive “s” with an elongated upper peak can look like a “d”) but not as a likely error in oral dictation (also not indicated on the website’s transcript).

Further, this passage has much more punctuation than is typical of scribes, including Williams specifically, when taking dictation of revelation from Joseph Smith. In this short passage, we have by my count (relying on the printed transcript) six commas, one period, two colons, and three semicolons. It’s more heavily punctuated than some other parts of Williams’s manuscript. Both the errors and the punctuation mark this passage as one more typical of a visually copied text than a scribe taking oral dictation from Joseph Smith, though the punctuation is not always consistent with how it was done the first time.

3. Is the dittograph copied from Parrish’s Manuscript C?15 I find this issue especially interesting. Parrish’s version of Abraham 2:3–5, presumably copied from Williams, has some notable differences relative to the first occurrence written by Williams. For example, both instances of “therefore” in Parrish follow a comma, not the colons that Williams has, and both are in lowercase, while in Williams both are capitalized. So what happens when Williams allegedly copies the text from Parrish to unknowingly create his dittograph? The result is closer to his first occurrence. Both occurrences of “therefore” are still capitalized: one follows a colon and the other a line break where a colon may have been overlooked. Williams’s initial colon after “idolitry” and before “Therefore” may have been inserted, according to the transcript in the book, and is missing in the dittograph, but there is a line break there followed by the capitalized “Therefore.” Parrish, on the other hand, has “unto his Idolitry, therefore … ;” which differs twice in capitalization and once in punctuation.

Also significant is the difference between Williams and Parrish in writing the phrase we now have as “thy father’s house” in Abraham 2:3. In Manuscript C, Parrish writes “house” in copying from Williams, and it’s clear, with an unmistakable “s.” Williams, on the other hand, has “home” each time he writes that verse. The editors of the Joseph Smith Papers volume on the Book of Abraham transcribe both instances as “home,” but add footnotes to both suggesting that the word might be “house.”

It is unclear at first glance. However, detailed examination of Williams’s handwriting shows that the word in both cases is “home” with very little justification to read it as “house.”

Whatever motivated Williams to write “home” the first time again motivated him to write “home” in the dittograph. He most likely is not copying from Parrish as he makes the dittograph, but rather continues using the same existing manuscript he used the first time.

If Williams were copying from Manuscript C for the dittograph, why did he fail to copy the character in the margin where the dittograph began? Later, why did he fail to follow Parrish’s paragraph break that is followed by “But I Abram” and also fail to use the character in the margin that Parrish has there? At the place where Parrish has stopped writing, Williams creates a dittograph and stops using characters — perhaps they were working together in some way and things changed when Parrish quit and perhaps left (that was a consideration in my prior proposal that Parrish may have been reading aloud to help Williams in making his copy for a while). It may be possible that the original manuscript he was copying from lacked characters, and that instructions for character placement had been provided by Phelps to Parrish who oversaw character placement while he was present with Williams (if the two scribes were present and possibly collaborating as they began making their copies), so Parrish’s departure could have left Williams unsure of what to do regarding characters. There are many possibilities here, including the scenario proposed by John Gee in which Williams wrote his copy first, and then Parrish copied it, in some cases preserving the manuscript errors and corrections as if initially seeking to make an accurate copy of the original document, warts and all. Gee’s analysis also includes

16. JSPRT4, 201n106–107, 240.
consideration of all the errors and corrections in the twin manuscripts, which he concludes strongly weigh against Vogel’s scenario.\textsuperscript{18}

In any case, it simply does not look like Williams has been copying from Parrish, but he rather appears to be using the same source (a source that may have lacked characters), though his punctuation is inconsistent. For example, a colon in his initial “many flocks in Haran:” becomes a comma in the dittograph, with “many flock in Haran,” and “many” being inserted above the line. Williams may be getting tired at this point, as he is making a large number of errors, such as dropping the word “after,” writing “bro” for “brothers,” writing “sarah” instead of “Sarai,” skipping “many” and having to insert it, dropping the “s” in “flocks,” and, when he gets to some of the allegedly new material on Parrish’s document with a very clear “but I Abram and Lot,” dropping the very visible “I” of Manuscript C to render “but Abram and Lot.” Fatigue and growing errors make sense if this were all a continuation of a lengthy session, reaching the end of page 4, versus starting fresh to write down a short passage of new material from Manuscript C. Page 4 of his manuscript, though, is probably not the end of that session since it ends in the middle of a sentence. Surely there was a page 5 and perhaps more, but no more has survived. Many relevant documents in the translation may have been lost or destroyed, not just a significant portion of the original scrolls but also the text that Williams and Parrish were using to make their copies.

Why were they making copies in the first place? Perhaps to continue helping Phelps by adding new speculative material to his Grammar and Alphabet, which I see as the apparent purpose indicated by the headers on both of the twin manuscripts that refer to the “sign of the fifth degree of the second part.” That’s not the kind of header we would expect from Joseph creating scripture, but it fits in perfectly with the unfinished content of the Grammar and Alphabet of the Egyptian Language. It is direct evidence that Williams and Parrish saw their manuscripts not as new live revelation of the translation of the Book of Abraham, but as an effort to use the existing translation to further translate “an alphabet to the Book of Abraham” (the phrase used in Joseph’s journal entry of July 1835\textsuperscript{19}) meaning they were seeking to link existing English


\textsuperscript{19.} The journal entry can be seen at “History, 1838–1856, volume B-1 [1 September 1834–2 November 1838],” Joseph Smith Papers, https://www.josephsmithpapers.org/paper-summary/history-1838-1856-volume-b-1-1-
text to characters to be used for the unfinished section of the second part of the GAEL dealing with the “fifth degree” of those characters. Vogel, unfortunately, makes no mention of the apparent meaning of that heading or why it may be significant to apologists.\^{20}

Vogel’s hypothetical scenario is interesting but seems to fail basic criteria that we might expect if it were true. Persistent evidence points to the use of an original manuscript during the creation of Book of Abraham Manuscript A prior to the obvious copying that occurred in the dittograph. The source for Williams’s scribal work doesn’t appear to have changed when the dittograph occurs. The details of the dittograph do not point to Parrish’s work in Manuscript C as the source used by Williams. And the appearance of page 4 of Williams’s manuscript suggests a continuous session, perhaps with an increasingly weary Williams, rather than a fresh session several days later.

The dittograph and the rest of the twin Book of Abraham manuscripts do not fit with Vogel’s complex model, offering too much evidence for the use of an existing manuscript and a dittograph that occurred in a continuation of the same session as the original occurrence of Abraham 2:3–5. The dittograph still stands as compelling evidence against Vogel’s paradigm. But there may be even bigger hurdles for Vogel’s theory.

A Moot Theory? Overlooked Hurdles

Arguments over the textual details of the twin manuscripts, which Vogel dates to November 1835, are irrelevant when one considers the more serious barriers to Vogel’s theory. In fact, in light of these hurdles,

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Vogel’s creative discussion of the twin manuscripts and the dittograph may be simply moot.

First is the textual evidence from what supposedly represents the beginning of Joseph’s dictation of revealed text, the verses of Abraham 1:1–3 penned by W.W. Phelps in Book of Abraham Manuscript C. Like the twin manuscripts, it provides compelling textual evidence that it does not represent live dictation but was derived from an existing manuscript.

Consider the general nature of the text, which has the appearance of a finished manuscript with careful punctuation, unlike the typical results of scribal work when Joseph is dictating scripture. The editors of one volume of the Joseph Smith Papers series, Documents: Volume 5, January 1835–October 1838, made this observation when they noted why Book of Abraham manuscripts A and B were likely copied from an existing manuscript: “Textual evidence suggests that these Book of Abraham texts were based on an earlier manuscript that no longer exists.”21 The supporting footnote explains:

Documents dictated directly by JS typically had few paragraph breaks, punctuation marks, or contemporaneous alterations to the text. All the extant copies, including the featured text, have regular paragraphing and punctuation included at the time of transcription as well as several cancellations and insertions.22

In addition to an abundance of seemingly careful punctuation (17 commas, 10 semicolons, 1 colon, and 1 period, by my count using the transcript23), there are also corrections made that are consistent with copying from an existing manuscript, unlike Joseph’s revelatory diction. The first is writing “desiring one” and then wiping off “one” and then writing “to be one who possessed great Knowledge.” After writing the phrase “a greater follower of righteousness,” Phelps apparently had skipped the phrase “a possessor of greater Knowledge.” Perhaps this happened because he had just written something very similar and, believing he was looking at a phrase he had already written, continued

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22. Ibid., 74–75n323.
23. JSPRT4, 219.
with the following phrase, “a father of many nations,” only later noticing what he had skipped. The missing phrase is then inserted above the line.

The next correction appears to be changing a comma to a semicolon after “prince of peace,” the kind of correction that is atypical of scribes recording Joseph’s dictation and much more consistent with copying an existing manuscript. Later Phelps writes “through fathers” and later inserts the missing “the” between those words, a mistake consistent with visual copying, though scribes taking dictation can get behind and miss words as well.

Of particular importance in Phelps’s writing are the footnotes he inserts that link two characters to very small blocks of English text. The first footnote occurs before the phrase “In the land of the Chaldeans,” and the second footnote before “Abraham.” It looks almost as if a footnote may have originally been intended before the next word “Saw” after “Abraham” and may be related to the scratching out of something in the margin replaced by the number 2. Then another character occurs halfway down in Phelps’s writing without a footnote or a paragraph break. It’s as if Phelps began with associations to specific words or phrases, then wrote the next character of interest without knowing how to associate it to anything specific, and then stopped. The twin manuscripts continue where Phelps left off but begin with headers that link the copies to the GAEL. They associate new characters not found in the GAEL with blocks of more text from the Book of Abraham, while also showing the same textual features that point to use of an existing manuscript in addition to some common errors and corrections that could be consistent with oral dictation from someone reading a manuscript, but less likely as live creation in the mind of Joseph Smith of new scripture.

Before we can entertain a theory about Manuscripts A and B representing live dictation of new scripture, we need to first address the evidence from the earlier work of Phelps on Manuscript C that points to the use of an existing translation. Phelps appears to begin by searching for connections between a couple of characters in the GAEL and an existing text with detailed punctuation. The specific connections stop after two characters, and his work stops after three verses and three characters. Williams and Parrish are obviously continuing whatever Phelps had begun, labeling their documents as being related to the fifth degree of the second part in the GAEL. It would seem most logical to infer that they are seeking to assist Phelps with creation of the GAEL, treating new characters that have not been considered yet, but their effort gets nowhere, and the new characters considered are never entered
into the GAEL. The abundant textual evidence contrary to Vogel’s paradigm is not considered, which is unfortunate for a book purporting to explore the positions taken by Latter-day Saint defenders of the Book of Abraham.

In addition to the textual evidence, further barriers to Vogel’s theory come from highly relevant historical documents that are ignored or poorly considered. Vogel’s model has Joseph first exerting great efforts to create the GAEL as a tool to assist in his translation, translating in a method entirely different than occurred for the Book of Mormon, the translation of the Bible that gave us the Book of Moses by revelation, and the translation of a lost record given in D&C 7. In Vogel’s model, Joseph begins translation in November 1835, producing the verses from Abraham 1:1 to 2:18, and then moving on to the rest of the text in 1842. Unfortunately, this does not square with the historical record, both in terms of how Joseph translated but especially when he translated.

Here Vogel overlooks the import of repeated statements of direct and indirect witnesses who unanimously describe Joseph translating by revelation, not by an apparent academic method relying on the GAEL. Warren Parrish said, “I have set by his side and penned down the translation of the Egyptian Hieroglyphicks [sic] as he claimed to receive it by direct inspiration from Heaven.” Vogel quotes this in his book but misses its significance. This was said after Parrish had become an enemy of the Church and easily could have mocked the bizarre scenario of Joseph trying to use the GAEL as a dictionary he had made up to translate the Book of Abraham, with one character evincing as many as 200 words. But there is never a mention of Joseph using the method Vogel presents as “obvious.” No witness speaks of Joseph translating by use of a strange “academic” method with the GAEL. It was simply by revelation.

It did not take months of impossibly creating a translation tool to translate. Rather, translation began almost immediately. Vogel acknowledges that Oliver Cowdery said Joseph translated a few characters right away and this impressed Michael Chandler, the entrepreneur who brought the papyri to Joseph, but Vogel asserts that “whatever Smith said to convince Chandler [of his power to translate], it

had nothing to do with Hebrew Bible patriarch Abraham” (ix). Rather, he speculates that perhaps Smith spoke about magic amulets and zodiac symbols or astronomy when he saw Facsimile 2, which may have jibed with something Chandler had heard earlier from scholars.

One important relevant document that Vogel does not cite comes from the recollections of John Riggs:

Arriving in Kirtland with his Egyptian artifacts, Chandler stayed at the Riggs hotel and requested an audience with Joseph Smith. According to a later recollection of John Riggs, he “was present when the Prophet first saw the papyrus from which is translated the Book of Abraham.” In examining the papyrus, the Mormon prophet was struck by what he perceived as a similarity between some of the Egyptian characters and characters of “Reformed Egyptian” that he had previously copied from the gold plates. Smith was given permission to take the papyrus home; and “the morning following Joseph came with the leaves he had translated.”25

Translation of something had begun, and there was more than just a word or two — there were multiple pages. The historical record shows that Joseph could translate rapidly and did not need to first create translation tools. The record shows that he almost immediately began translation, not just commentary on the alleged zodiac-like nature of Facsimile 2 (Vogel’s suggestion that its astronomical associations are something obvious that Joseph could see is based on hindsight). He did not need to and would not wait until November 1835 to translate Abraham 1 nor wait until 1842 to translate Abraham 3 and beyond. We know this for many reasons, such as the use of Shinehah of Abraham 3:13 in 1835, as well as other factors, such as these provided by Kerry Muhlestein and Megan Hansen26:

- Oliver’s use of language from the first few verses of Abraham 1 in a patriarchal blessing he recorded in September 1835,

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which must have been drawing upon a July translation, since no translation occurred in August or September.

- Joseph Smith’s reference in a letter to the Church in 1839 to “the Sun Moon or Stars, all the times of their revolutions, all the appointed days, months and years, and all the days of their days, months and years, and all their glories, laws, and set times shall be revealed,” echoing the discussion in Abraham 3 of the “times and seasons in the revolutions” of Kolob in verse 4 and the various “set times” of verses 6, 7, and 10.

- Joseph’s 1838 sermon in which he “instructed the Church, in the mysteries of the Kingdom of God; giving them a history of the Planets &c. and of Abrahams writings upon the Planettary system &c.” Muhlestein observes that “the specific phrase ‘writings upon the Planettary system’ strongly suggests that the Prophet was preaching about Abraham 3; nothing else in his revelations match that description.”

Against the latter two points, Vogel argues that the GAEL must be what Joseph meant when he mentioned the astronomical items (164). He has a reasonable argument. The GAEL does describe celestial bodies, including Kolob (a late addition by Warren Parrish). It mentions revolutions and governing powers and has many concepts and names that sometimes seem closely related to Facsimile 2. It speaks of some bodies rotating more slowly than others, as in Abraham 3, but does not use the distinctive term “set time.”27 The question is whether these astronomical matters were derived from existing translation or were used for translation later in 1842. The GAEL, in my opinion, does not provide anything that looks like the kind of coherent narrative implied by “Abraham’s writings” on the planetary system. Joseph wasn’t speaking about entries in a dictionary or alphabet, but about the translation of Abraham’s text. Abraham 3 coupled with Facsimile 2, seems to provide a reasonable foundation for the astronomical material that could have been used to create the fragmented statements in the GAEL, complete

27. The GAEL transcript and photographs of the text can be examined and searched online at “Grammar and Alphabet of the Egyptian Language, circa July–circa November 1835,” Joseph Smith Papers, https://www.josephsmithpapers.org/paper-summary/grammar-and-alphabet-of-the-egyptian-language-circa-july-circa-november-1835/7. To search or rapidly explore the text, click on the button “View Entire Transcript” that is visible after scrolling to the bottom of the text window on the right of the screen.
with “bulls-eyes” such as associating Figure 1 with “the first creation,” Figure 4 (the bird in a ship) with the expanse of the heavens, Hathor the cow associated with the sun, etc., for which the GAEL could not serve as a source. It’s easy to see how the Book of Abraham material could have sparked some of the related entries scattered in the GAEL and very difficult to explain how that material could have been brought together to create the coherent narrative in the Book of Abraham.

**Missing Evidence That Could Fill a Book or Two**

While Vogel does mention some of the arguments in favor of the Book of Abraham, especially older works where some statements may have missed the mark, what has been overlooked is far more than a few nuggets like *Shinehah*. *Book of Abraham Apologetics* suffers not just from the failure to treat some relevant evidence, but also from a basic failure to recognize the hurdles that Vogel’s paradigm faces, including missing questions that need to be asked and issues that need to be addressed if the work is meant to be scholarly.

To be clear, though, there’s much to appreciate in the work Vogel has done to compile his arguments in a comprehensive form. It would be better, though, if Vogel didn’t claim it was an objective, dispassionate work of historical scholarship and instead simply said that he was just presenting the best arguments he could find against the Book of Abraham.

**A Missing Hurdle from a Missing Portion of Facsimile 2**

One of the surprising missing issues involves Joseph Smith’s comments about some of the Egyptian characters on the right side of Facsimile 2, characters that come from the very papyrus fragment that Vogel claims has been absolutely proven to be the source of the Book of Abraham “translation.” Tim Barker carefully examined this issue in an important presentation at the 2020 FairMormon Conference in “Translating the Book of Abraham: The Answer Under Our Heads.” The key point here is that a large gap on the damaged Facsimile 2 was filled in with Egyptian

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characters in preparation for publication, and those characters were taken from JSP XI, the papyrus fragment that was the source of most of the characters used in the margins of the three Book of Abraham manuscripts, said to be telltale evidence that Joseph Smith was using those characters as the source for his bogus “translation.” About half of the characters from the Book of Abraham manuscript margins were used in filling in the gaps on Facsimile 2. Reuben Hedlock did this under the guidance of Joseph Smith, as Barker shows.

The inserted characters are in three lines on the central right panel, labeled as Figures 13, 14, and 15 in our printing of Facsimile 2, and the inserted characters in the rim, labeled as Figure 18, are all treated the same in Joseph’s comments. The explanations for those characters “will be given in the own due time of the Lord.” That declaration is followed by this statement that refers to all the comments made regarding Facsimile 2: “The above translation is given as far as we have any right to give at the present time.”

Whatever the scribes of those puzzling Book of Abraham manuscripts with characters in the margins thought they were doing with Egyptian characters added to portions of Joseph’s revealed text, the explanations on Facsimile 2 strongly suggest that Joseph had not used characters from JSP XI as the source for the book of Abraham translation. “Joseph clearly indicates that he did not translate JSP XI,” Barker explains.

This is one of the first and most important hurdles to clear for Vogel’s thesis. Will he jump over it, knock it over, or step around it? We won’t know in this book, because he runs his race on a track where that hurdle is nowhere in sight.

As happens in many heated debates on controversial issues, a single piece of evidence rarely creates a slam dunk argument and can often be attacked in various ways. Here one can wonder if Joseph really authorized the choice of characters (the record does indicate supervision by Joseph in this) and even if so, whether it’s possible that Joseph didn’t recognize which papyrus fragment he had translated (that seems unlikely) or didn’t recognize the characters he supposedly had scrutinized for months back in 1835 (if the characters were presented to him without telling him which papyrus Reuben Hedlock selected as a source, I suppose that could be a problem). So of course arguments can be raised against this piece of evidence. But this is still vital evidence to consider if one wishes the book to be viewed as comprehensive and dispassionate, and if one wishes to address the most important arguments from Latter-day Saint defenders of the Book of Abraham.
In objecting to missing elements, I am not saying that Vogel deliberately left them out to mislead readers. He may simply be so close to his own point of view that objections to his arguments are found unworthy of attention. But that perspective is one of blindness and undermines the claims he makes.

More Missing Issues

Strangely, Vogel seems to simply ignore much of what Latter-day Saint apologists have identified as among the most relevant documents and most important arguments for understanding the meaning of the papers related to the Book of Abraham. Besides those related to Joseph’s comments on characters from JSP XI, the name Shinehah, and other issues previously discussed, other omissions include:

- The Egyptian Counting Document, one of the earliest documents in the Kirtland Egyptian papers that were relied on in the GAEL. This document gives us important clues about what was and was not being “translated” as well as clues related to the purpose of the project. Although the importance of this document was raised in at least one of the sources Vogel cites, he’s silent on this issue. It shows W.W. Phelps exploring purely non-Egyptian characters as “Egyptian,” possibly for his interest in exploring the “pure language” of the ancients. Some of these non-Egyptian characters are imported into the Egyptian Alphabets and GAEL. Clearly something other than or in addition to translating real papyri is at play. Why not let us know about this important document and the way it fits pro-Book of Abraham paradigms?

- Muhlestein’s discovery that the owner of the Joseph Smith Papyri, an Egyptian priest named Hor, would be from the time and place (Thebes, ca. 200 B.C.) where Egyptian priests had ready access to and a fascination with Jewish lore. The idea that a priest from Thebes in Hor’s era had an Egyptian document adapted to convey information featuring Abraham’s

29. Lindsay, “A Precious Resource with Some Gaps.”
life is remarkably consistent with Egyptian history. Call it just another lucky coincidence, but it’s certainly a basic factoid of interest in Book of Abraham apologetics not to be found in Vogel’s book.

- The manuscripts from Oliver Cowdery and Frederick G. Williams, both showing two pairs of Egyptian-like characters presumably from the Book of Mormon project beneath a pair of English phrases: “(The Book of Mormon)” and “(the interpreters of languages).”  
  
  Assuming that the English corresponds to a translation, the characters are compact but not ridiculously so, still having a logical relationship in which each pair of characters represents only two significant words, apart from “the” and “of.”

- The abundant use of “translated” material in the GAEL that is taken from documents not closely related to the Book of Abraham, including many already existing revelations in the Doctrine and Covenants that are obviously alluded to or cited in portions of the GAEL. While several LDS writers have mentioned this, the greatest buzz came about 10 years ago in a presentation by William Schryver, in the course of arguing that the GAEL may have been intended to be a reverse cipher for encoding revelations to hide information from enemies of the Church. The theory has some gaps, as do all theories trying to explain what the GAEL was intended to do, but Schryver’s theory should also have been cited as one of the


several possibilities Latter-day Saints have raised regarding the strange GAEL. But whether Schryver’s theory is mentioned or not, Vogel should at a minimum have engaged with the data Schryver and others have presented about the influence of material from unexpected sources on the GAEL.

- The evidence from several documents showing that Joseph had provided at least some of the astronomical material related to the Book of Abraham during 1835.

Vogel does tackle some important arguments and evidences. One of these is the evidence from the Egyptian Alphabets, where Joseph’s manuscript shows signs that he’s not the ringleader behind the basic approach of having columns for characters, sounds, and translations. Joseph simply ignored the columns for sounds and wrote over them. Further, the insertions at the beginning show us right away that he was not leading the effort, but probably copying or drawing upon another document. The documentary evidence points to Phelps as the mastermind behind the projects. Vogel mentions part of this evidence but dismisses it too hastily (89–92).

Vogel does have a chapter (Chapter 8) that explores some of the evidences that Book of Abraham defenders have used to suggest the book has ancient origins. Here he shows relatively more engagement with Latter-day Saint apologists, though almost exclusively John Gee and Kerry Muhlestein. For example, he argues that some of the evidences for antiquity in the Book of Abraham could have been known to Joseph Smith since they could be found in various books in Joseph’s day. It’s a fair argument. He also delves into the proposal that Abraham was using an ancient geocentric astronomical model, not one from Joseph’s environment, which we consider later.

Much more interesting than the details of any physical model Abraham or a redactor had in mind is the purpose of treating astronomy in the first place, and here we come to what I consider to be the most important evidentiary finding in Gee’s analysis of the issue.33 Gee notes the Egyptian wordplay inherent in Abraham’s discussion in Abraham 3, where the word for “stars” can also mean “spirits,” and Abraham’s teaching that the planetary bodies have an order with a grand body, Kolob, being above them all. He points out that Abraham is paving the way to teach Pharaoh from the principles of astronomy that the same

order applies to spirits, and the Lord is above them all — meaning that Pharaoh is not the grandest, but God is. It’s a teaching that Abraham could not blurt out directly without inviting capital punishment, but he could teach it indirectly; in describing astronomy and then making the connection to the nature of souls as well, Pharaoh could be taught an important truth about God somewhat obliquely. What once seemed like a disjointed, illogical development in Abraham 3 — suddenly jumping from astronomy to the nature of premortal souls — in light of a linguistic insight that could only come from an Egyptologist, we can now see that Abraham 3 is surprisingly reasonable in a way that Joseph could not have knowingly fabricated. On this issue, however, Vogel is silent. There’s no awareness of this important aspect of Gee’s argument on astronomy in the Book of Abraham.

While Vogel takes on some of the evidence used to support the Book of Abraham, his scope is surprisingly narrow and far too much is overlooked. The Pearl of Great Price Central website\textsuperscript{34} has been offering a series of posts and videos on evidence pertaining to the Book of Abraham and the Book of Moses. These don’t seem to have come into Vogel’s crosshairs. While Vogel is focused on what Gee and Muhlestein have to say, that focus is quite selective. One can get a feel for how little of the work of Latter-day Saint apologists has been considered by comparing Vogel’s book to an August 2020 review of recent developments related to the Book of Abraham by Kerry Muhlestein. In “Scholarly Support for the Book of Abraham,”\textsuperscript{35} Muhlestein summarizes some of the works that provide support for historicity of the text as well information on how to approach the facsimiles and the translation process. Important findings published by Kevin Barney, Quinten Barney, and Stephen Smoot listed in that paper are not mentioned by Vogel. Kevin Barney, for example, provides evidence that the pagan god Elkenah mentioned in the Book of Abraham corresponds well with the god El of the Canaanites.\textsuperscript{36} Quinten Barney’s analysis of the ancient crocodile god of Egypt shows that it aligns perfectly with Joseph Smith’s comment on the crocodile in

\begin{footnotes}
\footnotetext{34}{Pearl of Great Price Central (website), https://www.pearlofgreatpricecentral.org/}
\end{footnotes}
Facsimile 1 as the idolatrous god of Pharaoh.\textsuperscript{37} This is one of the more commonly cited evidences in favor of the Book of Abraham, but there is no mention by Vogel. One of the articles by Stephen Smoot should have been cited in Vogel’s treatment of one of the evidences he does tackle: the claim that the ancient place Olishem mentioned in the Book of Abraham has now been confirmed by archaeology to actually have existed in the right time and place, as Gee argues, at a northern Ur location (while some scholars prefer a southern location).\textsuperscript{38} Vogel critiques Gee by citing an old criticism of Gee’s proposal that was based on the reasons used to favor a more southern Ur, but those arguments are carefully considered and rebutted by Smoot.\textsuperscript{39}

Muhlestein’s partial list of important sources relevant to the defense of the Book of Abraham should have been considered by Vogel, but only a small portion seems to be given any attention. Also neglected are all 36 cited articles from Pearl of Great Price Central and a reference from John Gee and Stephen Ricks that is described as “the most comprehensive methodological approach to evaluating the historicity of the Book of Abraham,”\textsuperscript{40} which also points to key issues such as Sobek, the crocodile god.

As for the crocodile god in Facsimile 1, Vogel does note that Joseph associated the crocodile with Pharaoh (it would be more accurate to say that Joseph called the crocodile “the idolatrous god of Pharaoh”). However, once again Vogel does not explain why this is viewed as an important piece of evidence among Book of Abraham defenders. As with his evasive treatment of the Shinehah evidence, he does not cite any references here that could help the reader understand why some of us consider Joseph’s statement about the crocodile to be evidence for

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the Book of Abraham, but he cautiously tries to neutralize that uncited evidence for those who may encounter it by suggesting that Joseph may have obtained the idea for the crocodile-Pharaoh association from Adam Clarke’s biblical commentary (232). Recently there have been claims that Joseph relied heavily on Adam Clarke in preparing his Inspired Translation of the Bible, though careful analysis has shown those claims to be without merit, with no evidence of Clarke influencing Joseph in that project. Vogel’s proposal seems to have slightly more merit. He notes that in discussing Exodus 1:11, Clarke indicates that the title Pharaoh “signifies crocodile, … a sacred animal among the Egyptians” (232, emphasis original). Even if Joseph had carefully studied Clarke’s massive multi-volume work, is a statement about the meaning of the name of Pharaoh enough to guide Joseph to the bullseye of identifying a crocodile not as a symbol of Pharaoh, but as “the idolatrous god of Pharaoh”? The phrasing is a perfectly accurate description of the role of Sobek, the crocodile god directly associated with Pharaoh. Again, Vogel tries to diminish an argument without admitting that there is potentially impressive evidence at hand. It is just a random borrowing from Adam Clarke, he says, just as Shinehah was nothing more than borrowing a random code name from the Doctrine and Covenants.

Particularly unfortunate is overlooking one of Gee’s most impressive finds published in his “Four Idolatrous Gods in the Book of Abraham.” Gee presents evidence for the authenticity and plausibility of the Book of Abraham’s names given for each of the four gods under the lion couch in Facsimile 1 and named in Abraham 1:6. Many more evidences could be cited, such as Joseph properly identifying Figure 6 in Facsimile 2 as related to “the four quarters of the earth,” properly recognizing the significance of many more aspects of Facsimile 2, and much more, including some fascinating finds compiled by Robert F. Smith that merit more attention.


No Geocentrism in Abraham’s Day?

One of the few evidences for the Book of Abraham’s ancient plausibility that Vogel tackles is the proposal that information about astronomy in Abraham 3 is given in geocentric terms in order to help Abraham converse on astronomy with Pharaoh’s court. After stating that a knowledge of Egyptology is not necessary to address the issues regarding the Book of Abraham, he critiques Latter-day Saint Egyptologists several times for their statements about ancient Egypt. While I believe amateurs should be able to challenge scholars and that good can come from anyone’s reasonable critique or analysis of past scholarship, we amateurs should also recognize that those with formal training in their field may know what they are doing, so our critiques need to be backed with good evidence or logic and still may be wrong. Vogel’s critique of the views of John Gee and others regarding the astronomical content in the Book of Abraham strikes me as highly flawed.

Several Latter-day Saint scholars have noted that the astronomical model in the Book of Abraham may relate to ancient geocentric cosmologies. In 1991, Kevin Christensen, drawing upon Nibley’s observations on the facsimiles, linked the cosmology in Abraham 3 to the motion of the stars perceived from the earth and the long-term drift of stars and constellations.44 Later, John Gee, William J. Hamblin, and Daniel C. Peterson proposed that the astronomical model that Abraham would use to teach Pharaoh some important spiritual truths makes the most sense when viewed as a type of geocentric model, one that Pharaoh could accept.45 The Lord seems to have given Abraham more advanced knowledge as well, as J. Ward Moody proposes in his evaluation of the mix of astronomical information present in the Book of Abraham,46 but

much of the discussion seems couched in terms of what one observes from the earth and with principles that could relate well to the geocentric views of the Egyptians and fulfill the purpose stated by the Lord in Abraham 3:5 for this information: “Abraham, I show these things unto thee before ye go into Egypt, that ye may declare all these words.”

In “Abrahamic Astronomy,” Gee makes the basic case for a geocentric model that Abraham could have used in talking with the Egyptians:

The astronomy in the Book of Abraham uses as its point of reference “the earth upon which thou standest” (Abraham 3:3, 5–7). It mentions various heavenly bodies, such as “the stars” (Abraham 3:2), among which is Kolob (Abraham 3:3–4). These provide a fixed backdrop for the heavens. Among the stars are various bodies that move in relation to the fixed backdrop, each of which is called a “planet” (Abraham 3:5, 8) or a “light” (Abraham 3:5–7), though since the sun and moon and certain stars are each also called a “planet,” we should not think of them as necessarily being what we call planets. Each of these planets is associated with “its times and seasons in the revolutions thereof” (Abraham 3:4). These lights revolve around something, and that is the fixed reference point, “the earth upon which thou standest” (Abraham 3:3, 5–7). The Book of Abraham thus presents a geocentric astronomy, like almost all ancient astronomies, including ancient Egyptian astronomy.

Each heavenly body, with its revolution, is associated with something called a “set time” (Abraham 3:6, 10) or “the reckoning of its time” (Abraham 3:5), which seems to be its revolution around the earth and for the earth, its rotation. The greater amount of time is associated with a higher orbit and thus being “above or greater than that upon which thou standest in point of reckoning, for it moveth in order more slow; this is in order because it standeth above the earth upon which thou standest” (Abraham 3:5). The higher orbits are larger and take more time to traverse; thus, the longer the time of revolution, the higher the light is above the earth.

The ancient Egyptians associated the idea of encircling something (whether in the sky or on earth) with controlling apparent motion relative to the earth, while “set times” refers to the actual motion in space.
or governing it, and the same terms are used for both. Thus, the Book of Abraham notes that “there shall be the reckoning of the time of one planet above another, until thou come nigh unto Kolob, … which Kolob is set nigh unto the throne of God, to govern all those planets which belong to the same order as that upon which thou standest” (Abraham 3:9, emphasis added). The Egyptians had a similar notion, in which the sun (Re) was not only a god but the head of all the gods and ruled over everything that he encircled. Abraham’s astronomy sets the sun, “that which is to rule the day” (Abraham 3:5), as greater than the moon but less than Kolob, which governs the sun (Abraham 3:9). Thus, in the astronomy of the Book of Abraham, Kolob, which is the nearest star to God (Abraham 3:16; see also 3, 9), revolves around and thus encircles or controls the sun, which is the head of the Egyptian pantheon.

The conversation between Abraham and the Lord shifts from a discussion of heavenly bodies to spiritual beings. This reflects a play on words that Egyptians often use between a star (ach) and a spirit (ich). The shift is done by means of a comparison: “Now, if there be two things, one above the other, and the moon be above the earth, then it may be that a planet or a star may exist above it; … as, also, if there be two spirits, and one shall be more intelligent than the other” (Abraham 3:17–18). In an Egyptian context, the play on words would strengthen the parallel.47

With an interesting Egyptian wordplay, the purpose of the astronomical material being given to Abraham becomes apparent. By teaching Pharaoh about the order seen in astronomy, with one star near God governing all others because it is in order most high with the longest time of reckoning, so can the same principle be implied when it comes to souls, with God being higher than all. Using this roundabout astronomical approach to lay a metaphorical foundation, Abraham can help Pharaoh see that there is a God higher even than the Sun, higher than the Egyptian pantheon, and higher than Pharaoh. Speaking such things directly could be seen as an attack on Pharaoh and Egyptian religion, a capital offense, but the astronomical analogy could help Pharaoh learn the principle without getting Abraham killed.

Vogel is not impressed. He begins a rather meandering discussion of astronomical issues with this:

However, the model they use to interpret Abraham Chapter 3 requires the earth to be spherical with the sun, moon, and planets revolving in concentric circles around it, a model that, in fact, dates many centuries after Abraham. Indeed, all (but one) of the authors’ examples range from the third century BCE (Greek philosophers) to fourteenth-century CE Italy (Dante). (133–34, emphasis added)

This is an unfortunate misreading of Gee, Hamblin, and Peterson. Their argument absolutely does not require the advanced Ptolemaic version of geocentrism and, in fact, is compatible with flat earth models from ancient Egypt. Vogel’s footnote at this point adds another argument or two:

The exception [the alleged “one” example relied on by Gee, Hamblin, and Peterson not dating to many centuries after Abraham] is the Egyptian belief that the earth, personified by the god Geb, and sky, personified by the goddess Nut, are separated by Shu, god of air. While Gee et al. state that this concept of the cosmos “goes back at least as far as the Middle Kingdom (and thus to the approximate time of Abraham),” they do not explain that in the Egyptian cosmos the earth is flat and instead emphasize an Egyptian text which says the “Sun-disk encircles, that which Geb and Nut enclose” (Gee et al., “And I Saw the Stars,” 7). Thus they imply that Egyptians believed the sun revolved around the earth. In their description of the first of the four types of geocentricity, they state that the “sun, moon, stars, planets, etc. — surrounded and encompassed the earth in a single undifferentiated heaven” (ibid., 5). In the footnote they reference the “view of the heavens from the tomb of Seti I,” which clearly shows the earth as flat with the heavens over it. The ancient Egyptians believed the sun (Ra) traveled on a barge at night to emerge in the east the next morning, and not that the sun revolved around the earth. (134n42)

Vogel seems to assume that a flat earth model is contrary to a geocentric view, perhaps because he assumes that “geocentric” must

refer to the latest, well-known versions of geocentrism with heavenly bodies acting as if connected to revolving spheres moving around a spherical earth. But more primitive flat earth models can accurately be described as geocentric. If it is the sun literally moving across the sky rather than the earth rotating on its axis, and if the motion of the stars each night is due to their motion relative to the earth, we clearly have a geocentric model, regardless of how the sun gets back to its starting point each morning.

Vogel chastises Gee, Hamblin, and Peterson for only considering one piece of evidence from ancient Egypt. Here he has not carefully read the article he criticizes. Speaking of the ancient Egyptian views on astronomy, the authors state that “numerous references make it clear that their worldview was fundamentally geocentric” (emphasis added). Their footnote here cites James P. Allen’s *Genesis in Egypt: The Philosophy of Ancient Egyptian Creation Accounts*, a work that considers the astronomical implications of 16 Egyptian sources. It has significant evidentiary value in support of the point made in “I Saw the Stars.” (I discuss some of the details of that work and some later publications on Egyptian astronomy elsewhere.)

While Vogel protests the citing of only one reference on ancient Egypt supporting geocentrism, the most appropriate rejoinder is not that the reference cited treats multiple ancient texts, but rather, the basic features of the ancient Egyptian model are so widely attested and well known that only one reference is appropriate. Indeed, it is almost common knowledge that the ancient Egyptians believed the sun moved across the sky each day and was reborn in the east the next morning. While language describing the sun moving over the earth is abundant, one can also find many references to the sun “encircling” the earth, though this need not mean a perfectly circular Ptolemaic orbit. For example, an item of jewelry dating to 1887–1878 B.C., likely near the time of Abraham, has this inscription: “The god of the rising sun grants life and dominion over

49. Ibid., 7.
all that the sun encircles for one million one hundred thousand years [i.e., eternity] to King Khakheperre [Senwosret II].”

One of the most familiar aspects of ancient Egypt, the use of a cartouche to encircle the names of royalty, is a symbol related to the sun encircling the earth. From the UCLA Encyclopedia of Egyptology, we read:

The cartouche derives from the Egyptian *shen*-ring, a hieroglyphic sign depicting a coil of rope tied at one end, meaning “ring, circle,” the root *Sn* (*shen*) expressing the idea of encircling. Symbolically, the cartouche represents the encircling of the created world by the sun disc — that is, the containment of “all that the sun encircles.”

Having the sun and the stars move around the earth, encircling it, is even more specific than the geocentric argument Gee et al. require for their point regarding geocentric elements in Abraham 3 and its suitability for presentation to the Egyptian court (simply having the sun move across the sky should be enough). Incidentally, in the above passage about the cartouche, we are again reminded of part of the Egyptian etymology of *Shinehah*, involving the “the root *Sn* (*shen*) expressing the idea of encircling,” exactly as Nibley explains. In fact, Nibley notes that the Egyptian term *Shinehah* refers to the sun, but it can also mean “one eternal round,” the name of his important but neglected book. Paying attention to Nibley’s work would have helped Vogel recognize just how well grounded if not well rounded the geocentric argument is.

Vogel goes on to propose that Joseph Smith in his revelations was just borrowing from the modern cosmology expressed by authors such as Thomas Dick, an argument that is no more reasonable now than when Fawn Brodie proposed it decades ago and that has been treated by Latter-day Saint defenders.

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I have responded elsewhere in more detail to Vogel’s arguments against the geocentric features in the Book of Abraham proposed by Gee et al.\(^{56}\) I note that in light of the reverence the Egyptians gave to certain stars, especially the “immortal” (never setting) circumpolar stars near the pole star in the sacred northern part of the sky — stars that rotated much more slowly than other stars and never set — statements in Abraham 3 relating slower moving stars to the deity and governance of the cosmos actually fit in beautifully with ancient Egyptian mythology. That framework, couched in part with geocentric terminology, would have been a brilliant way for Abraham to engage with the Egyptians in terms they could understand, teaching about astronomy as a steppingstone to teaching spiritual principles, aided with the Egyptian wordplay between “soul” and “star” that John Gee has discussed.

Stars associated with souls and gods, with governance and glory, with set times and revolutions, with hierarchy and order, all were part of ancient Egyptian concepts and nicely fit the Book of Abraham. The ancient astronomy of the Book of Abraham, coupled with some extra information the Lord showed Abraham, cannot be dismissed as Joseph merely drawing upon his environment.

There’s more to understand and discover here, but it will most likely come from scholars with expertise in Egyptology and the ancient world, not by the approach Vogel feels is sufficient for managing all that comes from Latter-day Saint treatments of the Book of Abraham.

**Just Another Ordinary Funerary Text?**

For decades, critics of the Book of Abraham have been asserting that the Joseph Smith Papyri and the facsimiles show that what Joseph had was nothing more than a perfectly ordinary funerary text. Vogel does the same (xv–xvi, 183–85). And because we know these are ordinary funerary texts, we can naturally know what was on the missing portions — obviously just more traditional, ordinary Egyptian funerary materials, which, of course, rules out any hope for a “missing scroll” theory. And because the facsimiles are perfectly ordinary documents, we can be sure they aren’t part of anything unusual (even if there are unusual elements). It all smacks of a circular argument. Latter-day Saint scholars from Nibley on have explained that there are unique elements consistent with the idea that well-known Egyptian vignettes could have been adapted to

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56. Lindsay, “Geocentric Astronomy in the Book of Abraham?”
tell a unique story. Failure to address that possibility and the uniqueness of the facsimiles is another void in Vogel’s treatment of his topic.

For example, regarding Facsimile 1, Muhlestein offers these considerations:

Some have suggested that it is a typical embalming scene. Yet it is at least as different from embalming scenes as it is similar. The only similarities are that a person is on a lion couch with another person standing nearby. Others would suggest that the closest parallels of this scene are in the temple of Denderah and that the figure on the couch ought to be associated with Osiris. Recently John Gee has closely examined these Denderah depictions. He has noted that only one of these has a winged figure in it, somewhat similar to Facsimile 1. This scene is accompanied by a text which says that Bastet, an Egyptian goddess not even pictured in the scene, “is your protection every day; she commands her messengers to slaughter your enemies.” Thus we find a perfect textual sibling for the closest iconographic match to Facsimile 1 in that both are about someone who was in danger and received protection. There are other similar texts accompanying similar scenes in Denderah. Other lion couch scenes at the temple include scenes of Anubis and the Sons of Horus defending someone from his adversaries, or list Shesmu, a god associated with human sacrifice, as part of the scene. Accompanying texts describe the person on the altar being killed, his confederates being stabbed, and “his flesh being ashes, the evil conspirator destined for the lion couch/slaughterhouse, in order that he will no longer exist.” I remain unconvinced that the scenes at Denderah are real parallels to Facsimile 1, though they may be. Yet if critics insist on associating the two, they must also be willing to associate them with the sacrificial elements of the Denderah scenes — which only corroborate Joseph’s interpretation of this facsimile.

However, it should be noted that Facsimile 1 is unique in many ways. In this scene the figure is neither in mummified form, nor naked, as is the case in most of the supposed parallels. The figure on the couch has two hands raised, in a position that almost certainly denotes a struggle. And while one cannot tell this from the printed facsimile, on the original papyrus it is clear that the priest is standing between the altar and the legs
of the person on that altar. In other words, the person on the altar is only part way on, because the priest is occupying the space between both of the victim’s legs and the altar. I can imagine no reason for this unless the person on the altar was trying to get off. If the priest were helping him get on the altar, he would not be between his legs. Clearly this depiction is unique, and denotes some kind of movement that is not found in any parallel.57

I would also add the simple observation that the stance of Abraham on the altar, with one leg forward and two arms up, beautifully represents the Egyptian hieroglyph meaning to pray or supplicate, perfectly consistent with the Book of Abraham text that describes Abraham praying to God while on the altar. This is not an ordinary embalming scene.58

More Unanswered Questions to Consider

Vogel leaves unanswered important questions that have long been raised by defenders of Joseph Smith, such as why should we think the GAEL was used by Joseph to any degree to produce the Book of Abraham or to translate Egyptian:

1. when so much of it is not Egyptian,

2. when all but three of the Egyptian characters allegedly translated from JSP XI are generally not even present therein,

3. when the English “translations” in the GAEL show a slight relationship with (arguably a dependency from) a few verses in the Book of Abraham but come nowhere close to being useful for translating the text,

4. when the characters allegedly used to create the translation are explicitly said by Joseph on Facsimile 2 to not have been translated,


5. when the GAEL shows no involvement of Joseph Smith, being entirely in the handwriting of W.W. Phelps apart from a few lines from Warren Parrish,

6. when Joseph’s other efforts at translation show no relationship at all with the model Vogel thinks Joseph used,

7. when Joseph showed that he could translate some of the papyrus by revelation essentially as soon as he received the scrolls and could see that there was information related to Abraham (so why would painstaking efforts to create an alphabet first and then a grammar be needed to continue with a revealed translation?), and

8. when significant material in the GAEL is drawn from other existing materials such as the Doctrine and Covenants?

The complex nature of the GAEL may defy any simple theory for whatever Phelps was doing, whether it was reverse translation, coming up with clues to the “pure language,” or something related to Schryver’s reverse cipher theory (not mentioned at all by Vogel). But the important issue is that drawing upon material from the Doctrine and Covenants raises valid questions about translation of Egyptian being the goal, especially in light of the non-Egyptian material in the characters.

Many questions also remain on other basic topics that should also be raised in such a book:

1. Does the historical record about where Joseph and the scribes were on various dates fit the paradigms offered?

2. In any of the revelatory/translation scenarios Joseph had, did he do anything that corresponds with Vogel’s model, i.e., first creating an alphabet with a small group of characters, then developing a grammar, and then working out the translation of characters that generally were not in the alphabet or the grammar?

3. Is there any reason anybody would pursue a translation the way Joseph allegedly did? Isn’t the idea of creating an alphabet before anything is known of a language and then using that to create a grammar and then a translation so ridiculous that his peers would be anything but impressed and, at least for those who left the Church, would surely call foul? Can this really be explained as a scheme to impress peers and brainstorm to come up with a story line?
4. Does Vogel’s model comport with the most basic statement in Joseph’s journal about his work with the alphabet, namely, that it was an alphabet “to” the Book of Abraham, as if it were a guide or index related to existing translated material from the Book of Abraham, not an impossible translation key “for” translating the Book of Abraham? This quote is virtually a foundation for Vogel’s approach, yet he fails to consider arguments about why Joseph said “to” rather than “for.”

5. Given that there actually was a sizeable collection of materials that were sold after Joseph’s death and apparently were destroyed in the Great Chicago Fire, how can we be sure that nothing related to the Book of Abraham could have been in that collection? We are supposed to accept that it would necessarily just be more perfectly commonplace Egyptian funerary documents, but can we really be confident that materials we don’t have were entirely ordinary, especially when the facsimiles are not? Of course, defense of the authenticity of the Book of Abraham need not rely on a missing scroll. The key is that the translation, from whatever source, was given through revelation.

The omission of so many aspects of the defense of the Book of Abraham leaves Vogel’s hypothesis running only on the hurdle-free parts of the track. This work does provide a valuable service by pointing to genuine gaps in some of the responses of defenders and by highlighting areas for more scholarship, but it would be unfair to believe that Vogel’s polemical objective has been achieved and the irrationality of the Book of Abraham exposed. Maybe that will be done in a sequel, but for now, I believe that Joseph’s abilities to reveal ancient text by the power of God did not evaporate when he acquired the papyrus scrolls.

However the revelation was done, I think the most reasonable approach is to see the GAEL and related documents to be the intellectual derivatives of some early Saints seeking to understand more on their own based on clues from a revealed text. Whatever project was underway, it was aborted quickly, leaving us virtually no explanation about what the Kirtland Egyptian Papers were all about. The confusion of mortals puzzling things out on their own should not trump the power of revelation and the ancient text we have been given.

59. Lindsay, “An Alphabet TO the Book of Abraham.”
Conclusion

From beginning to end, Vogel’s approach is informed by a firm belief that Joseph is a fraud who used the GAEL to create a story line for his “translation” of the Book of Abraham. That belief, unfortunately, drives him, perhaps subconsciously, to overlook so much that can’t be made to fit his theory. He offers a clever hypothesis that becomes a rigid paradigm to explain a few details on the Book of Abraham manuscripts, but this paradigm collapses when tested for validity.

Vogel frequently treats his hypotheses as settled facts and relies on them repeatedly, not letting the reader know how many assumptions are being made. For example, he describes how Joseph did such and such in the GAEL, always making Joseph Smith the author and architect, stating that as if it were an unassailable fact. He begins with his conclusions taken for granted and moves from there to create the image of overwhelming evidence and victory against shady apologists.

Vogel begins by intoning how he will rely on the purest historical methodology to yield “clear-headed understanding” with a “balanced, dispassionate analysis” of the “relevant historical documents” (xvii), just moments after he has demonstrated mystical mind-reading skills as he tells us what Joseph Smith was thinking when he first saw the papyri: “Smith saw an opportunity to translate an ancient text that would confirm some of his recent doctrinal developments as well as be available for public inspection” (vii). This statement, like most of Vogel’s insertions of opinion, is given as if simply a dispassionate academic observation. Again, Vogel seems too close to his own paradigms to distinguish dispassionate analysis from his enduring passion for polemics, or to distinguish careful scholarship from personal opinion. “Relevant documents” may mean “documents that I can use to support my views.”

The book’s promise to survey the apologetic arguments for the Book of Abraham swiftly devolves to nitpicking a few works where he feels he has good attacks, ignoring many critical evidences and much vital scholarship that would raise uncomfortable questions about his views.

In saying this, I am not saying that the evidence pointed to by defenders of the Book of Abraham adequately answers all difficult questions, for there is simply so much we don’t know given the paucity of information regarding the translation and the many related documents, including the original scrolls. Many key documents are simply missing, as are explanations from the scribes for what we do have.

Vogel also does point out some valid flaws in old arguments and raises some reasonable points. But he does not apply the dispassionate
methodology he claims to follow and does not play fairly in his review of the apologetics of the Book of Abraham. Too much is ignored or handled with troubling levels of bias, with the disappointing and misleading treatment of Shinehah being a relevant example. The apologists he engages in battle are hardly represented except as shadows who offer a few quotes that can be nitpicked, sometimes with good reason. But the meat of their work, the most salient arguments and publications, are generally not to be found. In the end, Vogel stands victorious on a strangely quiet and empty battlefield.

Overall, *Book of Abraham Apologetics: A Review and Critique* is an intriguing book, but it doesn’t live up to its claims or even its title. There is plenty of critique, but a severe shortage of review.

**Jeffrey Dean Lindsay** recently returned to the United States after almost nine years in Shanghai, China. Jeff has been providing online materials defending the Church for more than twenty years, primarily at JeffLindsay.com. His Mormanity blog (https://mormanity.blogspot.com) has been in operation since 2004. He is currently vice president for The Interpreter Foundation and co-editor of Interpreter: A Journal of Latter-day Saint Faith and Scholarship. Jeff has a PhD in chemical engineering from BYU and is a US patent agent. He is currently senior advisor for ipCapital Group, assisting clients in creating intellectual property and innovation. From 2011 to 2019 he was the head of Intellectual Property for Asia Pulp and Paper in Shanghai, China, one of the world’s largest forest product companies. Formerly, he was associate professor at the Institute of Paper Science and Technology (now the Renewable Bioproducts Institute) at Georgia Tech, then went into R&D at Kimberly-Clark Corporation, eventually becoming corporate patent strategist and senior research fellow. Jeff served a mission in the German-speaking Switzerland Zurich Mission. He and his wife Kendra are the parents of four boys and have eleven grandchildren.
THE GOOD GOD HERMENEUTIC:  
A RECONSIDERATION OF RELIGIOUS VOCABULARY

Garrett R. Maxwell


Abstract: Fiona and Terryl Givens once again deliver a book worthy of the comparatively wide readership they have gained within Latter-day Saint circles. Their orderly treatment of individual gospel concepts in this book can rightly be seen as a distillation and unification of their previous work, boldly attempting to awaken us from our ignorance of the sheer novelty and vitality contained in the Restoration vision of God and humanity. They convincingly argue that the historically wrought semantic baggage that comes with the most basic religious vocabulary we use must be consciously jettisoned to fully appreciate and articulate the meaning of the Restoration.

The work of Fiona and Terryl Givens — dynamic duo and lay theologians of the Restoration — reaches its apogee in this new volume, ambitious in title and in scope. But one might ask, what need is there for a “rethinking” in the restored gospel? Has not sin, salvation, and everything in between already been rethought and rearticulated in the revelations of Joseph Smith? This volume is the Givenses’ effort to energetically answer in the affirmative but also to move beyond a mere affirmation to outline and illuminate the ways in which the Restoration has indeed made “all things new.”

Referring to the poignant observation of renowned Christian theologian Freidrich Schleiermacher, they write:
[He] describes the situation well. He wrote that one can believe and teach that “everything is related to the redemption accomplished by Jesus of Nazareth” and yet that redemption can be “interpreted in such a way that it is reduced to incoherence.” His diagnosis is the subject of this book. (3)

The “incoherence” the Givenses seek to rectify here has much to do with a dilemma nearly as old as Christianity itself: how do we reconcile the idea of a loving, benevolent Father in heaven portrayed in some parts scripture with the despotic, tempestuous, and violent God portrayed in other parts of scripture? How can a God intent on saving His children and desirous to “wipe away all tears from their eyes” (Rev. 21:4) also damn them to eternal punishment? This dilemma has sometimes taken the form of pitting the Old Testament against the New Testament, or as Marcion of Sinope (85–160 AD) thought, a malevolent demiurge pitted against the real, higher God. Others such as famous psychoanalyst Carl Jung perceived a temporal development in God, who, after being morally bested by Job, became incarnate as man in order to catch up with His creature who had surpassed Him in consciousness and morality.¹

No 188-page book could think to solve this issue once and for all, and in reality there is no way to harmonize the dizzying variety of the accounts of God given in scripture. It never was and was never intended to be a homogenous corpus. Rather than attempting to take this head on, the Givenses are instead proposing a new hermeneutic — the hermeneutics of a good God, built on Restoration ideals. Their experience with the youth and young adults of the Church across the globe has convinced them that there is a looming problem with the words we use to talk about, as the title would suggest, sin, salvation, and everything in between. It is not that the words themselves are the problem — discarding or swapping them out would be nigh impossible. The problem lies in the thousands of years’ worth of baggage they have accumulated over Christian history. The English language was thorny soil to begin with, and the Givenses propose that careful attention is needed to keep the life-giving abundance of the Restoration from choking on the words that inevitably mediate its message.

For them, it was the “double catastrophe” of Augustine and the Reformation that burdened these words (salvation, heaven, fall, obedience, sin, justice, repentance, forgiveness, atonement, grace,

worthiness) with meaning that has continually been injurious to both the greater Christian worldview and to individuals of faith. In the Givenses’ estimation, an Augustinian (and by extension Lutheran and Calvinist) God has been deeply codified in the most basic of our religious vocabulary, the prevailing characteristics of these theologies being the utter depravity of the human race and the utter sovereignty of God — at the expense of his love (see Chapter 2).

A pertinent example to Latter-Day Saints is the discussion in Chapter 13 of Atonement theology. As it stands, the word *atonement* is heavily couched in what is called the “penal substitution model.” In this model, Christ is a shield, an animal for slaughter, standing between the human race and the implacable wrath of a God offended at our vileness. Conceived in this way, criminality and punishment become the overriding concerns of Atonement. There is no place for healing in this model, only fear and guilt. Not only this, but the Father and the Son are at odds in this model. Carl Jung found this idea of Atonement so absurd that it made more sense to him for the Atonement to be a “reparation for a wrong done by God to man.”

While the noxious weed of Original Sin may be a prevailing Christian orthodoxy, it is not in keeping with the Restoration recapitulation of the Fall and its much more ennobling depiction of Eve and human nature (see Chapter 7). And while a God untouched by human misery and devoid of “body, parts, or passions” is codified in the Protestant creeds, it is not in keeping with the character of God revealed in the Restoration: the God who weeps (Moses 7). If, then, these most fundamental concepts of religion — the nature of humankind, the nature of God — are completely at odds, then the task of extricating ourselves from the vocabulary inherited from our forebearers is both necessary and urgent.

Why all the fuss about words though? As Robert MacFarlane so succinctly puts it, “language does not just register experience, it produces it” (front flap). In Chapter 4, the Givenses elaborate on this:

What we believe to be true of our deepest nature, and what we believe to be true of God’s nature, has real-world consequences. How we understand God, and the quality of Their love, conditions our own ability to receive and reciprocate love. Conceptions of human sin and worthiness profoundly impact every relationship into which we enter. Confidence — or lack of confidence — in the destiny toward which Heavenly

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Parents are guiding us cannot help but to determine our levels of joyfulness or anxiety. How we understand words like proving and testing infuses our lives with a sense of adventure or of dread, of beauty or of scrupulosity. (77)

Citing the undeniable reality of a rising generation staggering under the weight of rampant depression, anxiety, OCD, and a host of other mental health problems (see p. 50–56), and considering this together with the growing scholarly realization that Augustine may very well have single-handedly reinvented Christianity, the Givenses conclude that the last thing the Saints need is more reasons to continue down ever prevalent paths of pathological self-degradation and self-hatred that plague the human race. After all, “men [and women] are, that they might have joy” (2 Nephi 2:25).

The twin dangers of this inherited religious vocabulary are on one hand the inevitable stultification of human potential via shrunken horizons imposed by a pessimistic anthropology and on the other (which we now see in record numbers), mass exodus from organized religion. Again citing problematic Atonement theologies, the Givenses echo a growing number of scholars who are acknowledging the growing “embarrassment among Christians” at these doctrines in modern times. These religious concepts, determined as they are to indict the human race and turn God into a capricious monarch, are increasingly failing to resonate with people’s deepest yearning and sentiments in modern times. Christian Wiman asks the striking question:

Does the decay of belief among educated people in the West precede the decay of language used to define and explore belief, or do we find the fire of belief fading in us only because the words are sodden with overuse and imprecision, and will not burn? (77)

This book would side with the latter option. The language needs renovation, renewal … restoration. A brief look at this volume’s chapter subtitles will give a glimpse into how our vocabulary might be reconceived in the womb of the Restoration:

Salvation: From Rescue to Realization
Heaven: From “Where” to “with Whom
Fall: From Corruption to Ascension
Obedience: From Subject to Heir
Sin: From Guilt to Woundedness
Justice: From Punishment to Restoration
Repentance: From Looking Back to Looking Forward
Forgiveness: From Transactional Love to Absolute Love
Atonement: From Penal-Substitution to Radical Healing
Grace: From Declaring Righteous to Becoming Righteous
Worthiness: From Merit to Miracle
Judgment: From Court to Waystation
Apostasy: From Total Eclipse to Wilderness Refuge
Restoration: From Ex Nihilo to Out of the Wilderness
Church: From Reservoir of the Righteous to Collaborators with Christ

It is clear that Fiona and Terryl are driven by a high anthropology, substantiated by the Latter-day Saint regeneration of the Eden story and its heroic Eve, alongside the stunning doctrine of our eternal existence as intelligences alongside God. This scripturally warranted vision of human potential is gracious and magnanimous. It is encouraging and exulting. But their strong universalist bent may leave some readers uncomfortable with some of their conclusions. Universalism holds that eventually the entire human race will be reconciled to God and that all will eventually be saved (or better, healed). For them, as with Origen, other early Christians, and in our day Eastern Orthodox theologians like David Bentley Hart, none will be left in hell. Eternal punishment for sins, as traditionally understood, is an incoherent idea according to the tenets of universalism. Hell, if it exists, is non-eternal and remedial, more akin to purgatory.

Visions such as these can be breathtaking, but to some can feel quite hollow when confronted with the hinterlands of human evil. If one were to read Aleksander Solzhenitsyn’s The Gulag Archipelago or Elie Wiesel’s Night followed by this book being reviewed, the dissonance would be deeply felt and deeply real. How could the whole human family possibly be reconciled after the recent horrors of the twentieth century? The only answer we can attempt to give to the Auschwitzes of human history might simply be the concomitantly terse and voluminous never again. Humanity’s horrors are without a doubt the results of malevolent and depraved ideas about the inherent worth of humans that are “Other,” whether they be Jews, Rohingyas, Tutsis, or otherwise. The ideas that possessed men in power were carried out to their horrifically bloody ends.

Thus, it stands to reason that rehabilitating the ideas in circulation can have a profound impact on the course of human destiny. Offering a new theodicy can go only so far. At the risk of passing over the dark
side of humanity in silence, the Givenses focus instead on this side of the historically vexing coin. What kind of vision of humanity and God might facilitate the maximal flowering of human potential, goodness, and healing? That the Restoration provides this is their contention.

This optimistic vision of final and ultimate reconciliation is admittedly not readily self-evident in the scriptures, insistent as they are on the endless durations of final states. While the Doctrine and Covenants ultimately unveils a plan of salvation more generous than anything before it, opening the doors to all those who have come before, its soteriological picture differs from that of the Book of Mormon, not to mention the rest of the canon. In other words, the general tenor of this book will not always feel like it matches the tenor of the scriptures. But then again, the tenor of the scriptures can change like the tide. A more universalist vision does shine through on occasion (1 Timothy 2:3–4, 1 Corinthians 15:22, Romans 5:18, Romans 11:32, D&C 76, D&C 137).

Here the Givenses’ most radical move comes in. But it is not a novel move, they carefully explain; it is a move grounded in the élan of the Restoration. Given the intractableness of scriptural inconsistency, the “plain and precious” things lost (1 Nephi 13:32), and the nature of Joseph Smith’s revelatory prophethood, one thing becomes abundantly clear: we do not believe in scriptural infallibility, or *sola scriptura*. They cite Joseph Smith’s striking comment that there are “many things in the Bible which do not … accord with the revelation of the holy Ghost to me” (66), as well as C.S. Lewis in one of his moments of brilliance: “The ultimate question is whether the doctrine of the goodness of God or that of the inerrancy of scriptures is to prevail when they conflict. We think the doctrine of the goodness of God is the more certain of the two” (68). This is the hermeneutic through which the Givenses have done all their work. It is also the assent to or dissent from this hermeneutic that will determine the response readers have to this book.

It is a jarring proposition. We are much more keen to attempt to harmonize inconsistencies or justify Biblical genocide than we are to think twice about the nature of scripture. But does not the very fact that it is only on Restoration grounds that this hermeneutic can be built speak to its merit? *Sola scriptura* is not our only option. If scripture was sufficient, then the Restoration was merely superfluous.

The more difficult question then arises. Even if the Bible is understandably flawed, what about the Restoration scripture? Does it not have a higher degree of metaphysical purity and stability? The authors and I would answer in the affirmative. But these are ponderous questions
and to what *degree*, neither the Givenses nor I pretend to have the final say on the matter. They quote Brigham Young, who once remarked that I will even venture to say that if the Book of Mormon were now to be re-written, in many instances it would materially differ from the present translation. According as people are willing to receive the things of God, so the heavens send forth their blessings. (71)

As for what this might mean, it is a loose end. The thrilling metaphysical pathos of an “ongoing restoration” is captured in part by these thoughts. After all, what is the Restoration if not a rebuttal of revelatory finality: “For my works are without end, and also my words, for they never cease” (Moses 1:4).

What this book does persuasively elucidate is a powerful insight into religious psychology and practical discipleship. Cognitive scientists Daniel Simons and Christopher Chabris became famous for their Invisible Gorilla experiment, testing what is called “selective attention.” Participants were asked to watch a video of two teams passing a basketball to each other while milling around in the same small area, one team in white shirts the other in black, with the goal of counting how many passes were made by the team in white. While the correct answer is fifteen passes, Simons and Chabris discovered that half of the participants did not even see the costumed gorilla that walked on screen, beat its chest, and nonchalantly strolled off. The insight provided by this experiment and many others since is that we most readily register that which we are looking for and are sometimes blinded to that which we are not. Our intuitions can deceive us.

To put it more concretely, given our proclivities for “selective attention,” might it not be ultimately more productive and more Christian to direct that attention to weal rather than woe? If we understand the Atonement to be the ultimate aim of God’s creation, the literal at-one-ment or one-ing of the human family rather than a brutal confrontation between implacable divine wrath and human defilement, might we not more readily expend our mortal energies toward this aim of mutual reconciliation rather than channeling it toward pious self-interest? If we understand heaven to be exalted relationality rather than a final destination to be achieved, might we not more readily

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cultivate our relationships here and now, exalting each other along the way to our heavenly home?

There is far more going on in the world than any individual could possibly register and comprehend. There are more stimuli than there are senses with which to process them. The human eye is only designed to take in 0.0035% of the light spectrum, being completely blind to the rest. The question continually put to us as striving Christians, then, is to what spectrum we will choose to attune our religious eyes? What will we look for in the world and in others? Will we look for human depravity or nobility? Will we look for a vindictive and violent God or a compassionate Father in Heaven? Ideas matter. Words matter. We act out the ideas that possess us. We act out the ideas that occupy the top spot in our moral hierarchies. This book is a welcome invitation to let the more benevolent ideas take the reins, to see the world with more generous and compassionate eyes, and to see the image of God in others. In other words, to see the world through God’s eyes, if we are to believe that God is good.

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The People of Canaan: A New Reading of Moses 7

Adam Stokes

Abstract: Moses 7 is one of the most famous passages in all of Restoration scripture. It is also one of the most problematic in regard to its description of the people of Canaan as black (v. 8) and as a people who were not preached to by the patriarch Enoch (v. 12). Later there is also a mention of “the seed of Cain,” who also are said to be black (v. 22). This article examines the history of interpretation of Moses 7 and proposes an alternative understanding based on a close reading of the text. In contrast to traditional views, it argues that the reason for Enoch’s not preaching to the people of Canaan stems not from any sins the people had committed or from divine disfavor but from the racial prejudice of the other sons of Adam, the “residue of the people” (vv. 20, 22) who ironically are the only ones mentioned as “cursed” in the text (v. 20). In looking at the implications of this passage for the present-day Restoration, this article notes parallels between Enoch’s hesitancy and various attitudes toward black priesthood ordination throughout the Restoration traditions, including the Community of Christ where the same type of hesitancy existed. This article argues that, rather than being indicative of divine disfavor toward persons of African descent, this tendency is a response to the racist attitudes of particular eras, whether the period of the Old Testament patriarchs or the post-bellum American South. Nevertheless, God can be seen as working through and within particular contexts and cultures to spread the gospel to all of Adam’s children irrespective of race.

[Editor’s Note: We are pleased to publish this article from an author outside The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, but from a related Restoration faith tradition. Adam Stokes was formerly with the Community of Christ and currently is an ordained Apostle and Elder in The Church of Jesus Christ with the Elijah Message—The Assured Way]
of the Lord. Adam notes that “while the Book of Moses is not officially part of my church’s canon, my own personal beliefs still accept the Joseph Smith translation/Inspired Version as inspired and sacred scripture and I read it often.” We are grateful for the faithful insights Elder Stokes kindly provides for the Book of Moses.

Moses 7 is one of the most beautiful passages in the entire scriptural corpus of the restored Church of Jesus Christ. Its description of the heavenly Zion, a place of perfect peace where God himself dwells — in opposition of the earthly domain full of violence and bloodshed — is a powerful attestation to the necessity of God’s presence in the world and the consequences of rejecting God in our lives. The significance of Moses 7 is seen not only in its inclusion in the Pearl of Great Price but also in its inclusion in the Community of Christ’s (formerly the Reorganized Church of Jesus Christ of Latter Day Saints) edition of the Doctrine and Covenants (Doctrine & Covenants 36). It is one of only two texts from the Prophet’s Old Testament revisions included in the RLDS Doctrine and Covenants, the other being Moses 1.

At the same time, the history of interpretation of Moses 7, in conjunction with material from the Book of Abraham (both of which are part of the Church’s standard works), has been highly problematic within Latter-day Saint circles. Of particular concern is the text’s treatment of the issue of race and the question of whether skin pigmentation is a sign of divine disfavor. Such theories have, fortunately, been officially disavowed by the Church,¹ but questions remain about the meaning of some passages of scripture once used to justify disavowed theories or racist folk doctrine. In contrast to the Book of Mormon (e.g., 2 Nephi 5:21) where the first part of the construct phrase “skin of blackness” has a semantic range that does not necessarily imply physical pigmentation due to genetics,² black ethnicity (and, consequently, pigmentation) appears to be linked to a specific group, or perhaps two groups (the “seed of Cain” and “people of Canaan”) in Moses 7.

First, I must acknowledge that the Hebrew names of Cain and Canaan have different roots and thus give no evidence of a linguistic relationship based on the apparent similarity in the names. The “seed of Cain” and the people of Canaan may also be widely separated in time, though both groups seem to be antediluvian, having no known connection with the much later Canaanites of the Old Testament or Canaan, the son of Ham. But as presented in Moses 7, it is possible that the two groups are related. In Moses 7:4, we see the Lord showing Enoch a vision of “the world for the space of many generations” in which he sees the people of Canaan, who are despised by others after having a “blackness” come upon them (Moses 7:6–8). Later, in v. 22, Enoch sees the “seed of Cain” and notes that they “had not place among” the other sons of Adam, “for the seed of Cain were black.” This may indicate that these two groups are related, though whatever the blackness was that “came upon” the people of Canaan suggests they did not originally possess that blackness. The existence or absence of a relationship between the two groups does not affect the overall argument presented in this paper. In any case, as discussed later, both groups are identified as “black” and appear not to be under the same criteria for judgment as the other children of Adam to whom the Gospel was preached and who, consequently, had no excuse for their rejection of it.

One could argue that the seed of Cain and the people of Canaan in Moses 7 are so far removed from our own history that it is difficult to identify them and their descendants with any ethnic group currently in existence. However, the material in Moses 7 has been influential for common views in the Church on matters of race and, more specifically, for how the Church has understood the status of persons of African descent related to its ministry, and thus enhanced understanding of the issues in Moses 7 could be helpful to us today.

The history of interpretation of these verses in Moses 7 and other relevant passages of our scriptures has been noted and discussed extensively by those both within and outside of the Church. These include Armaud Mauss’ groundbreaking work, All Abraham’s Children: Changing Mormon Conceptions of Race and Lineage, the recent 2018 edition of Newell Bringhurst’s Saints, Slaves and Blacks: The Changing Place of Black People within Mormonism, and Richard Abanes’ explicitly polemical, anti-church work One Nation under Gods: A History of the Mormon Church. As these researchers have noted, for well over

3. A discussion of Smith’s alleged initial rationale for translating the Book of Abraham and its connection to uncovering the origins of the black African race
a century, many defenders of the Church turned to Moses 7 and other sacred texts to argue for persons of African descent as a “cursed race” and, consequently, unworthy and unable to receive the priesthood. Even post-1978, with President Kimball’s revelation on the priesthood, the text has continued to provoke discussion both among adherents to the faith as well as opponents and critics. This paper will provide an alternative reading of Moses 7 which in some ways complements and counters standard Latter-day Saint views. Four arguments are made in this paper:

1. Moses 7 both reflects and challenges the prevailing understanding of race and ethnic prejudice in the ancient


4. I am referring here only to The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints and several more fundamentalist offshoots who trace their teachings to Brigham Young. Some Book of Mormon belief traditions, including the Community of Christ, Bickertonites, and Fettingites, ordained persons of black descent to the priesthood from their inception. For a discussion of the history of black membership and participation within the Community of Christ, see, Roger D. Launius, Invisible Saints: A Study of Black Americans in the Reorganized Church (Independence, MO: Herald Publishing House, 1988); Mark A. Scherer, “From Reaction to Proaction?: African-Americans in the History of the Reorganized Church,” The John Whitmer Historical Association Journal 20 (2000): 111–32.

It should also be noted that several men of African descent were ordained to the priesthood in Joseph Smith’s lifetime. Benjamin E. Park deals with this phenomenon extensively in his book, Kingdom of Nauvoo: The Rise and Fall of a Religious Empire on the American Frontier (New York: W.W. Norton, 2020). Park focuses specifically on the person of Elijah Able and notes that “Able was evidence, at least to Smith, that racial uplift was possible” (140). At the same time Parks argues that Smith “also planted the seeds for future conflict. The Book of Abraham, published the previous year, claimed that the descendants of Ham — a cultural code name for those with African ancestry — were ‘cursed’ with regard ‘to the priesthood. But the tether between priesthood authority and racial lineage remained tenuous, at least for the time being’ (ibid., emphasis added).
world (yes, concepts of race and prejudice, though vastly different than ours, did exist in antiquity).

2. The “people of Canaan” of Moses 7 are never mentioned as being cursed in the text. Rather their blackness is the result of God cursing something else (i.e., the land).

3. The only people mentioned as cursed in Moses 7 are the “residue of the people” (vv. 20, 22, 28) which, as the text itself notes, does not include the “seed of Cain” (7:20, 22). In contrast to the prevailing reading of Moses 7, the text implies condemnation not of the seed of Cain/people of Canaan but of this “residue of the people” due to both their hatred of the people of Canaan and their general rejection of the gospel message preached by Enoch.

4. Enoch’s rationale for not preaching repentance to the people of Canaan in Moses 7 is not due to any personal animosity toward them or from the view that they are cursed. In other words, his rationale, as the text explains, is different from common interpretations and readings in the Latter-day Saint tradition.

This paper focuses solely on the material found in the Prophet’s revisions to the book of Genesis and will bring in parallel material from the Hebrew text of the Old Testament only when necessary and relevant. Joseph Smith’s revisions to the Old Testament were understood by the Prophet as restoring lost concepts and doctrines (removed in past centuries by those institutions controlling the Bible’s reception). This includes addressing issues and concerns that the Hebrew Bible, in the form we currently have it, is largely (though not entirely) silent about, such as ethnicity and race. In this regard, the Prophet’s revisions, while of course related to and informing us about the biblical text, must and should be examined on their own terms.

**History of Interpretation**

In addressing the interpretive history of Moses 7, it is first necessary to ask how much influence this segment of Joseph Smith’s revisions would have had on Latter-day Saint understandings of race from the mid-nineteenth century to the present. While the record, particularly the revelations found in the Book of Commandments and the later Doctrine and Covenants, makes it clear that the Prophet was inspired to revise
the Bible during his lifetime, these revisions did not gain prominence or a major audience until long after the Prophet’s death, when they were published as part of the Pearl of Great Price in 1851. Even then, the majority were not included in the Pearl of Great Price.

In contrast to the Community of Christ, for whom the revisions would become the Inspired Version and the official Bible of that church via Emma Smith, The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints re-affirmed the status of the King James Version as the authoritative Bible for the Church. Yet, the placement of a portion of the revisions


6. Many of Joseph Smith’s revisions were included in the 1979 and later in the 2013 Latter-day Saint editions of the Bible, in the footnotes to actual books of the Bible and as an appendix (“Selections from the Joseph Smith Translation”). However, these selections are not taken from any official edition of the Inspired Version but stem from handwritten notes and copies of an early manuscript taken by one of the members of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints. An excellent and very thorough history of these selections and their usage in the church can be found in Joseph Smith’s New Translation of the Bible: Original Manuscripts, eds. Scott H. Faulring, Kent P. Jackson, Robert J. Matthews (Provo, UT: Religious Studies Center, Brigham Young University, 2005). The BYU Religious Studies Center also has a very informative article written by W. Jeffrey Marsh on its website dealing with the inclusion of new passages from the Joseph Smith Translation in the official 2013 edition of the church’s Bible. See, W. Jeffrey Marsh, “Revisions in the 2013 LDS Edition of the King James Bible,” Religious Educator 15, no. 1 (2014): 69, https://rsc.byu.edu/vol-15-no-1-2014/revisions-2013-lds-edition-king-james-bible. Marsh writes:

By far the most doctrinally significant changes in the Bible are found in the expanded JST appendix. The typeface has been enlarged for easier reading and a new introduction has been written for the JST appendix; numerous new JST entries have been added or revised; the title of this section is now “Selections from the Joseph Smith Translation.” This is a significant change. Some readers of the LDS edition of the Bible may have assumed that the 1979 “Joseph Smith Translation” section, and the other JST footnotes, contained every one of the inspired revisions the Prophet Joseph Smith made to the Bible; however, from June 1830 to July 1833, Joseph Smith was inspired to revise 3,410 verses in the Bible, of which only 1,111 (by my count) are noted in the LDS edition (about 33 percent). By changing the title of this section to read “Selections from the Joseph Smith Translation,” students of the scriptures will know that there are other JST changes to search out and savor.

7. As Philip Barlow notes, for most of the history of Mormonism, Latter-day Saints have upheld the superiority of the King James Version over and above any other translation of the Bible (and even over the Book of Mormon itself). Hence,
in the Pearl of Great Price as part of the Book of Moses assured that members would have access to them. With the canonization of the Pearl of Great Price as a standard work in 1880, these portions of the Prophet’s revisions likewise gained canonical status as sacred scripture. Other revisions to the Old Testament made by Joseph Smith would be included, one century later, in the 1979 and 2013 official Latter-day Saint versions of the Bible in its appendix and footnotes. At a minimum, the revisions, while perhaps not being viewed with the same authority as the Genesis stories in the King James Bible, have been highly influential in how Latter-day Saint readers have interacted with and interpreted the biblical text and the primeval history (Genesis 1–11) in particular.

By itself, Moses 7 contains no material relevant to the issue of black African descent and the priesthood. However, in conjunction with other scriptures there later emerged a racialist interpretation of the text. The Book of Mormon contains reference to a “curse” placed upon a group of people, the Lamanites, for their sins (2 Nephi 5:20–24; Alma 3:6–7). Though never identified as black Africans, this curse appears to be...
associated with skin pigmentation and hence implies dark skin as a sign of divine disfavor. The Book of Abraham, another standard work in the Church, then mentions the Egyptian-Canaanites. From the opening of the text, these Canaanites are viewed as adversaries of Abraham and are identified as descendants of the biblical patriarch Ham:

Now this king of Egypt was a descendant from the loins of Ham, and was a partaker of the blood of the Canaanites by birth. From this descent sprang all the Egyptians, and thus the blood of the Canaanites was preserved in the land. The land of Egypt being first discovered by a woman, who was the daughter of Ham. (Abraham 1:21–23)

The text then goes on to note that this woman, by means of her Hamite lineage, was responsible for creating “that race which preserved the curse in the land” (Abraham 1:24). This verse, when taken by itself, implies that the land rather than a particular group of people is cursed, paralleling statements in Moses 7. However, the larger context of the chapter does clarify the content of this curse as seen in its description of the first Egyptian Pharaoh:

Pharaoh, being a righteous man, established his kingdom and judged his people wisely and justly all his days, seeking earnestly to imitate that order established by the fathers in the first generations, in the days of the first patriarchal reign, even in the reign of Adam, and also of Noah, his father, who blessed him with the blessings of the earth, and with the blessings of wisdom, but cursed him as pertaining to the Priesthood. (Abraham 1:26)

As Restoration theology developed in the decades after the Prophet’s death and as various voices attempted to provide an explanation for the priesthood ban to persons both within and outside of the Church,
Abraham 1:26 was linked to the material in Moses 7 as a proof text. In the process of this merger, the “Canaanites” of the Book of Abraham (presumably identified by the Prophet as the same Canaanites mentioned in the Old Testament who inhabit the promised land) became fused with the “people of Canaan” mentioned in Enoch’s vision. One example of this can be found in the writings of Joseph Fielding Smith, who wrote:

Not only was Cain called upon to suffer [for killing Abel], but because of his wickedness he became the father of an inferior race. A curse was placed upon him and that curse has been continued through his lineage and must do so while time endures. Millions of souls have come into this world cursed with a black skin and have been denied the privilege of Priesthood and the fulness of the blessings of the Gospel. These are the descendants of Cain. Moreover, they have been made to feel their inferiority and have been separated from the rest of mankind from the beginning. Enoch saw the people of Canaan, descendants of Cain, and he says, “and there was a blackness came upon all the children of Canaan, that they were despised among all people.

In the spirit of sympathy, mercy and faith, we will also hope that blessings may eventually be given to our negro brethren, for they are our brethren — children of God — notwithstanding their black covering emblematical of eternal darkness.\(^\text{10}\)

Here, Smith combines the material in Moses 7 with the Canaanite priesthood ban in Abraham even though his only explicit quotation of scripture comes from Moses 7, which contains no reference to a priesthood ban connected to black skin. Smith’s explanation would become common in the Church until the 1960s. In dialogue with the civil rights movement, Latter-day Saint voices would later reject the notion of a divine curse upon persons of African descent (ironically, such a rejection is a correct reading of Moses 7) while at the same time upholding the priesthood restriction.\(^\text{11}\) From the time of the 1978 revelation onward, Church doctrine highlighted the superior status of

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\(^{11}\) Sterling McMurrin, author of the 1963 statement on civil rights released by the Church, quoted President David O. McKay as saying, “There is not now, and there never has been a doctrine in this Church that Negroes are under a divine
Official Declaration 2 over earlier theological discussions of race and the priesthood. Hence, Elder McConkie’s famous statement:

It doesn’t make a particle of difference what anybody ever said about the Negro matter before the first day of June 1978. It is a new day and a new arrangement, and the Lord has now given the revelation that sheds light out into the world on this subject. As to any slivers of light or any particles of darkness of the past, we forget about them. We now do what meridian Israel did when the Lord said the gospel should go to the Gentiles. We forget all the statements that limited the gospel to the house of Israel, and we start going to the Gentiles.¹²

Notwithstanding, some scholars and writers highlighting the post-1978 dispensation of the priesthood to all worthy male members of the Church reflected the earlier standard scriptural interpretation in their discussion of the topic. For example, David Ridges in his commentary on the Pearl of Great Price writes:

One of the great blessings of our day is that we live in the long-awaited time when the gospel is going forth into all the world. The priesthood is available to all worthy males. This is according to the revelation that President Spencer W. Kimball received in 1978.¹³

Ridges is commenting on Moses 7:22, which in and of itself does not mention the priesthood in relation to blacks. That he discusses Official Declaration 2 presupposes a reading of Moses 7 in conjunction with the statements on the priesthood in Abraham.

Furthermore, within some Book of Mormon belief traditions this merged, racist reading of Moses 7 persists, as seen in the recent statements made by the now excommunicated Denver Snuffer. In his book Passing the Heavenly Gift, he argues that Official Declaration 2 represents a theological about-face to Joseph Smith’s original teachings as contained in his Bible revelations and the pre-1978 Church. As he puts it, rejection of the Church’s traditional interpretation of Moses 7 as curse.” Gregory A. Prince and Wm. Robert Wright, David O. McKay and the Rise of Modern Mormonism (Salt Lake City: University of Utah Press, 2005), 79.


¹³. See David J. Ridges, Your Study of the Pearl of Great Price Made Easier (Springville, UT: Cedar Fort, 2009), 99.
supporting the priesthood ban “may have fulfilled an ominous prophecy about latter-day Gentile rejection of the fullness of the Gospel.”

A far more explicit and nefarious interpretation is evident in the teachings and writings of convicted FLDS leader Warren Jeffs. Though he does not explicitly cite chapter and verse of Moses 7, it is clear that he is drawing on a tradition of racist readings of it as seen with his connection of Cain to the black race. It should also be noted that for all fundamentalist Mormons (i.e., polygamist sects) the Inspired Version, compiled from Joseph Smith’s Old Testament revisions, is the Bible over and above the King James Version or other English translations. To provide a couple of Jeffs’s quotes:

[Cain was] cursed with a black skin and he is the father of the Negro people. He has great power, can appear and disappear. He is used by the devil, as a mortal man, to do great evils.

If you marry a person who has connections with a Negro, you would become cursed.

It is important to note that Jeffs and his views have been thoroughly denounced by all mainstream Book of Mormon believing traditions. My contention here is that racialist interpretations such as his are not the only possible way to read Moses 7 and, furthermore, that they represent an inaccurate way of reading the text.

**Moses 7 in Dialogue among Different Racial Perspectives Prevalent in the Ancient World**

Critics and opponents of the Church often point to Moses 7 as an example of modern racist thought in a text purporting to be ancient. As such, they argue, the text is in fact not ancient at all but reflects the social and ideological influences on Joseph Smith in the early-to-mid nineteenth century. As much as my academic context often restrains me from

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16. As seen, most recently, on the attacks on the Joseph Smith Translation from some notable ex-Mormons such as Bill Reel and John Dehlin. See also Haley Wilson Lemmon, interview by John Dehlin, *Mormon Stories*, “Haley Wilson Lemmon — The BYU Undergrad Who Discovered Joseph Smith’s Plagiarisms in his Bible ‘Translation,’” Podcast No. 1338, July 19, 2020, Apple, Mormonstories.libsyn.com; and Jim Bennett interview by John Dehlin, *Mormon Stories*, “Belief After the
doing so, I cannot prevent the apologist in me from responding to this accusation. To summarize something that I could go into much further depth about, I firmly believe — as the Prophet himself stated — that he was divinely inspired to restore many plain and precious truths to the Bible lost throughout the centuries.

We can debate profusely on what the term “inspired” means in the context of Joseph Smith’s Old Testament revisions, but for myself this means that the Prophet was given the means to interact with what was indeed an ancient and lost text/version of the Bible. Furthermore, the discussion of race in Moses 7 points to the ancient nature of the text — a text in dialogue with other perspectives on race in the ancient world. This stands in contrast to the prevailing anti-Mormon view that the Book of Moses, like the *Aquarian Gospel of Jesus the Christ* or the *Oahspe Bible*, is merely another example of American (-created) biblical apocrypha.

When one hears the term “racism” today in the West one almost automatically thinks of prejudice based on the color of a person’s skin. In the United States, anti-black racism immediately comes to mind for most of us. However, even this understanding of racism, as Benjamin Isaac notes, does not encompass modern examples of racism in their fullest

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17. As much as I admire and love this scholar’s work, here I disagree and depart from Thomas Wayment, who argues that the Joseph Smith translation is a conflagration of what Joseph considered to be “revealed” content as well as Joseph’s own interaction and dialogue with prominent Bible commentaries and scholars of the early nineteenth century. In this way, Wayment is able to counter the criticism of John Dehlin regarding the Prophet’s supposed use and knowledge of Adam Clarke’s Bible commentary while making his revisions to the Bible (something that is shocking and scandalous to Dehlin but that Latter-day Saint scholars and researchers have known about and mentioned in their works for decades). For notable examples of his work on the Prophet’s revisions, see Thomas A. Wayment, *The Complete Joseph Smith Translation of the Old Testament: A Side-by-Side Comparison with the King James Version* (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 2009). However, note that a careful comparison of Joseph’s translation work with the Bible and Adam Clarke’s commentary shows that there is no meaningful evidence that Joseph relied on material from Adam Clarke. See Kent P. Jackson, “Some Notes on Joseph Smith and Adam Clarke,” *Interpreter: A Journal of Latter-day Saint Faith and Scholarship* 40 (2020): 15–60, https://journal.interpreterfoundation.org/some-notes-on-joseph-smith-and-adam-clarke/.

Furthermore, it represents a form of racism that would have been largely unknown to persons prior to 1600 CE and incomprehensible to the ancients. In other words, “racism” as we define the term today is a relatively if not exclusively modern innovation.

This is not to say that racial prejudice did not exist, but as Isaac also points out, it was a prejudice unconnected to skin color. Rather, the ancients promulgated the idea of inferior and superior peoples irrespective of their pigmentation. Hence Aristotle viewed non-Greeks as “inferior” peoples, though admittedly the Greeks living in the era of his pupil, Alexander the Great, had an appearance similar to the Persians that he and other Greeks despised.

At first glance, this ancient form of racial prejudice may seem to run counter to what we find in the book of Moses. Yet, later in the Greco-Roman era there does emerge a negative association between blackness and black skin color. It is important to note here that blackness at this time is not yet equated with inferiority. Rather this association stems from Greco-Roman dualism, which equates light with good and dark with bad/evil. Hence, to give one example, in *The Life of St. Antony*, a late Christian Roman text, the devil appears to Anthony as a black African man, not because black Africans are viewed as inferior, but because their skin color links them with the attribute of darkness (and consequently evil). Again, it is only in the seventeenth century and

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20. Ibid., 45.

21. For scholarly discussion of the skin pigmentation of the ancients and how both the archaeological and textual evidence suggests that pigmentation was nearly one and the same for various different ethnic and social groups, see Tim Whitmarsh, “Black Achilles,” *Aeon*, May 9, 2018, https://aeon.co/essays/when-homer-envisioned-achilles-did-he-see-a-black-man. Whitmarsh’s article was written in response to the controversy surrounding the casting of a black South African as the Greek hero Achilles in the recent Netflix miniseries *Troy: Fall of a City*.

22. In section 6 of *The Life of St. Antony*, we read:

At last when the dragon could not even thus overthrow Antony, but saw himself thrust out of his heart, gnashing his teeth as it is written, and as it were beside himself, he appeared to Antony like a black boy, taking a visible shape in accordance with the colour of his mind. And cringing to him, as it were, he plied him with thoughts no longer, for guileful as he was, he had been worsted, but at last spoke in human voice and said,
beyond that this view of darkness as evil is linked with racial inferiority leading to the emergence (but not exclusiveness) of the color-based racism that presently exists.

Moses 7 presents a dualistic connection between skin color and good/evil similar to what we find in other ancient texts. The blackness that comes upon the children of Cain as an after-effect of the Lord cursing the earth seems to be interpreted by the other groups mentioned in the text as a negative attribute and something worthy of ridicule. At no time is it said in the text that the other nations view the children of Cain as inferior but only that they hate them because they are now black when, presumably, they were once white or fairer skinned. Hence, one of the most prominent features of racist thought in modern times — the connection of skin color to inferiority — is lacking and absent in Moses 7. This is to be expected if we are indeed dealing with an ancient text that in some way was revealed to and interpreted by Joseph Smith. At the same time, in contrast to what one finds in ancient Greco-Roman literature, this association of blackness with evil is clearly condemned in the Lord’s rebuke of the other nations for having hatred in their heart for their black brethren. As other scholars have noted and as we will address

‘Many I deceived, many I cast down; but now attacking thee and thy labours as I had many others, I proved weak.’ When Antony asked, Who art thou who speakest thus with me? he answered with a lamentable voice, ‘I am the friend of whoredom, and have taken upon me incitements which lead to it against the young. I am called the spirit of lust. How many have I deceived who wished to live soberly, how many are the chaste whom by my incitement I have over-persuaded! I am he on account of whom also the prophet reproves those who have fallen, saying, “Ye have been caused to err by the spirit of whoredom.” For by me they have been tripped up. I am he who have so often troubled thee and have so often been overthrown by thee.’ But Antony having given thanks to the Lord, with good courage said to him, ‘Thou art very despicable then, for thou art black-hearted and weak as a child. Henceforth I shall have no trouble from thee, “for the Lord is my helper, and I shall look down on mine enemies.”’ Having heard this, the black one straightway fled, shuddering at the words and dreading any longer even to come near the man.

later, this finds parallel with the condemnation of racism presented in other restoration scriptures, such as the Book of Mormon.

**Moses 7: Human Sanctioned Prejudice against The People of Canaan or the Seed of Cain**

Thus far we have dealt extensively with the subject of how various persons have engaged with the Moses 7 text from the mid-nineteenth century to the present. It is now time to look at the content of the text in and of itself and on its own terms. From henceforth, all references to Moses 7 will be taken from transcription of the original revisions as presented in the Joseph Smith Papers Project.

No mention of the priesthood is explicitly made in regard to the people of Canaan (nor the seed of Cain) in Moses 7 though admittedly the text does suggest that they do not receive the full dispensation of the Gospel since Enoch did not preach to the people of Canaan (v. 12). The majority of our information about the black people of Canaan comes from Moses 7, which provides an expanded narrative on the biblical patriarch Enoch. Whereas there is only a single mention of Enoch in the Hebrew text, the revelatory material provided in these chapters gives an account of Enoch’s youth and prophetic calling. At the beginning of Moses 7, Enoch has a vision of two clans of people, which reads:

> it came to pass <that> I beheld in the valley of Shum and lo! a great people which dwelt in tents which were the people of Shum and again the Lord said unto me look and I looked towards the North and I beheld the people of Canaan which dwelt in tents and the Lord said into me prophecy and I prophesied saying behold the people of Canaan which are numerous shall go forth <forth> in battle array against the people of Shum and shall slay them that they shall utterly be destroyed and the people of Canaan shall divide themselves in the land and the land shall be barren and unfruitful and none other people shall dwell there but the people of Canaan (Moses 7:5–7)


In the following verse, the people of Canaan are explicitly identified as being black:

for behold the Lord shall curse the land with much heat and the barrenness thereof shall go forth <forth> forever and there was a blackness come upon all the Children of Canaan that they were dispised among all people (Moses 7:8)²⁵

It is important to note here the object of God’s wrath. It is not the people of Canaan themselves but rather the land/earth that is cursed by God.²⁶ Their “blackness,” according to the text, is a result of environmental factors that arise in the aftermath of this curse.²⁷ The

²⁵. Ibid. It should be noted that a variant reading of this verse exists in RLDS editions of the Doctrine and Covenants from the late 1960s that reads “a blackness came unto them” rather than upon them. This suggests that the blackness is spiritual (perhaps to be equated with the “blackness” of Satan in Moses 1/JST Revelation to Moses) and approaches the Canaanites rather than physical blackness as a result of the earth being cursed with scorching heat. To my knowledge, no scholarship has been done on the source of this variant and I have not been able to determine this source myself. In my view, the variant is deliberate and represents an attempt to tone down language deemed racially problematic during the civil rights era of the 1960s.

²⁶. It can be argued that the “land” in this passage is to be understood as a reference to the people who inhabit it. If this reading is accepted, then it would indeed indicate that the people of Canaan themselves are cursed. Against this view, it is important to note that the Prophet makes very clear distinctions between curses directed toward the land and those directed toward particular people or groups of people. See, for example Moses 5:52 with 5:56:

Moses 5:52: Wherefore the Lord cursed Lamech, and his house, and all them that had covenanted with Satan.
Moses 5:56: And God cursed the earth with a sore curse.
Moses 7:48-49: And it came to pass that Enoch looked upon the earth; and he heard a voice from the bowels thereof, saying: Wo, wo is me, the mother of men; I am pained, I am weary, because of the wickedness of my children. When shall I rest, and be cleansed from the filthiness which has gone forth out of me? When will my Creator sanctify me, that I may rest, and righteousness for a season abide upon my face? And when Enoch heard the earth mourn, he wept, and cried unto the Lord, saying: O Lord, wilt thou not have compassion upon the earth?

²⁷. I note here that this is what the text says rather than my own view about the origins of race, if, as modern geneticists and biologists would argue, such a category can even be said to exist. The notion of environmental factors as creating race is a thoroughly nineteenth-century concept that, for critics of the Prophet (and Mormonism in general), may call into question the “inspired” nature of his Bible revisions. However, very ancient texts also understood environmental
heat and barrenness in the land produces a physical change to the people of Canaan, namely black skin, but the “blackness” itself is not a curse. In other words, a distinction needs to be made between the object(s) of the divine curse, the land, and the victims of the negative effects of this curse, namely the people of Canaan.

It should also be noted that the theme of divine wrath toward the land in the aftermath of human violence parallels what one finds elsewhere in both the Hebrew text of the Old Testament and in the Prophet’s Old Testament revisions. In the Genesis flood story, for example, the violence of humanity results in the land becoming corrupted (nišhatâ in Genesis 6:12) and eventually destroyed. Prior to Enoch’s vision in Moses 7, it is said that “God cursed the earth with a sore curse” because of the wickedness of the people (Moses 5:56). The theme of human wickedness brings us to our next observation, namely, the identity of the people who are explicitly mentioned as “cursed” in Enoch’s vision.

The Accursed People: Not the People of Canaan

There is only one reference to a “cursed” people in Moses 7. This reference follows the description of Zion, God’s utopian city. As Moses 7:19 informs us, Enoch builds the city at God’s command and calls it “the City of Holiness.” Enoch is so impressed with the city and its glory that he boasts, “Surely Zion shall dwell in safety forever” (Moses 7:20). Enoch’s boast is met with the following reply from the deity: “Zion have I blessed, but the residue of the people have I cursed” (Moses 7:20).

Who are the “residue of the people”? We have a clear identification of them a few verses later in Moses 7:22, which reads:

and Enoch also beheld the residue of the people which were the sons of Adam and they were a mixture of all the seed of Adam save it were the seed of Cain for the seed of Cain were black and had not place among them.28

In other words, this “residue” cursed by God includes everyone except the black people of Canaan. They are the other peoples on the earth who have engaged in wickedness and unrighteousness facilitating factors as connected to race origin. See, for example, the origin of the Ethiopians in Greek Mythology where Phaethon’s chariot burns the African continent (and consequently makes the African people dark). Such parallels suggest in my view that the Prophet did indeed have access to an ancient, if scientifically flawed, text, though this is a topic for a different paper.

the need for a global flood so that humanity can restart as noted in Moses 8. This identification is reinforced in Moses 7:23, which notes that after “Zion was taken up into heaven, Enoch beheld, and lo, all the nations of the earth were before him.” In other words, this “residue” does not consist of the righteous who have been granted access to Zion and taken into heaven but the wicked who remain on the earth and who comprise all peoples or races (from our modern perspective) with the exception of the black people of Canaan.

**Enoch’s Prohibition against Preaching to the Black People of Canaan and the Community of Christ’s Doctrine and Covenants 116**

Shortly following the description of the people of Canaan at the beginning of Moses 7, we are presented with this passage regarding Enoch’s prophetic ministry:

> [A]nd it came to pass that Enoch continued to call upon all the people save it were the people of Canaan to repent. (Moses 7:12)

Traditionally, Latter-day Saint voices generally before 1978 appealed to this verse in support of the position that missionary work should not be undertaken among black communities either in the United States or globally. In conjunction with other scriptural passages such as Abraham 1, this reading implied that persons of black African descent were themselves culpable for the circumstances behind the prohibition. Yet, an examination of the larger context of Moses 7 reveals a deeper issue and provides us with insight into the reasons for Enoch’s interdiction.

First, the prohibition against preaching to the people of Canaan is not described as a divine injunction. Nowhere in the book of Moses does the Lord command Enoch not to preach to the people of Canaan. The prohibition, then, may stem from Enoch’s own concerns and not from God. This leads us, however, to the question of why Enoch himself instituted it. Clues to his rationale can be found at the end of Moses 7:8, which notes that after receiving their “blackness,” the people of Canaan were “despised among all people.” Later, in Moses 7:22, which mentions the accursed “residue of the people,” it is noted that the seed of Cain were absent because “the seed of Cain were black, and had not place among them.”

29. Ibid.
Might it be that Enoch’s choice or commandment to not preach to the people of Canaan does not stem from anything that the people of Canaan themselves have done but from the prejudice of the other sons of Adam toward them? Might it be possible that if Enoch had attempted to preach to the people of Canaan, the hostility that he had already encountered from his fellow human beings would have been intensified making it impossible for him to succeed in his prophetic ministry? Though other possible explanations exist for the hatred incurred upon the people of Canaan by the rest of humanity, the rest of Moses 7 strongly supports this view and suggests God’s own disapproval of the racial hatred of the other sons of Adam toward the black people of Canaan. In Moses 7:29, Enoch asks the Lord “How is it that thou canst weep, seeing thou art holy, and from all eternity to all eternity?”

The Lord’s reply provides us with one of the most powerful repudiations of prejudice in all of the scriptures:

> behold these thy breatheren they are the workmanship of mine own hands and I gave unto them their knowledge in the day I created them and in the garden of Eden gave I unto man his agency and unto thy breatheren have I said and also gave commandment that they should love one another and that they should cho[o]se me their father but behold they are without effection and they hate their own blood and the fire of mine indignation is kindled against them (Moses 7:32–34)

In short, the racial hatred that the sons of Adam displayed toward the black people of Canaan, a hatred condemned by God himself, may have been so strong and prevalent that it would have interfered with Enoch’s preaching had he attempted to direct his message to the people of Canaan. This would also explain why the Canaanites are not part of the races actually cursed by God, the non-black sons of Adam. They are not culpable for rejecting the Gospel given that it was not offered to them by Enoch. Of course, in the modern dispensation, at a time when

30. There is a significant textual variant here. Old Testament Revision 2 reads that Enoch cried over the fallen state of humanity and its corruption of the earth, whereas Old Testament Revision 1 reads that God himself wept, which is what we have in both the Inspired Version and Pearl of Great Price. For a comparison of the different Bible revision manuscripts (OT 1 and 2), see, Thomas Wayment, The Complete Joseph Smith Translation of the Old Testament (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 2009), 37.

racial issues, however bleak at times, have improved overall, the Gospel is available to all of the children of Adam.

Enoch’s reluctance to preach unto the black people of Canaan parallels a situation within my own former tradition, the Community of Christ. In the Community of Christ Doctrine and Covenants, a specific revelation, Doctrine and Covenants 116, was given to Joseph Smith III regarding ordaining and ministering to persons of African descent. In this respect, the revelation is similar to Official Declaration 2 found in the Latter-day Saint scriptures. At the same time, the Community of Christ revelation implies a situation similar to Enoch’s during the antediluvian period as rationale for this reluctance. It reads:

Be not hasty in ordaining men of the Negro race to offices in my church, for verily I say unto you, all are not acceptable unto me as servants, nevertheless I will that all may be saved, but every man in his own order, and there are some who are chosen instruments to be ministers to their own race. Be ye content, I the Lord have spoken it. (Community of Christ Doctrine and Covenants 116:4)

In modern versions of the Community of Christ’s Doctrine and Covenants, the introduction to Doctrine and Covenants 116 notes that the revelation, given in 1865, “should be studied against the background of the American Civil War and with the social and educational status of the American Negro of that period in mind.” While the revelation as a whole approves of black membership and ordination into the Church, its message and context seem to suggest that being “hasty” in accepting and ordaining blacks may result in hostility. As with the Enoch material in Moses 7, this hostility does not come from black opposition or unwillingness to accept the Gospel but rather the cultural and social context of the time. At the end of the Civil War, black Americans were only beginning to be recognized as American citizens, and the fierce opposition to the idea of black citizenship would continue into the Reconstruction era and beyond. Hence, caution was necessary if the spreading of the restored gospel was to be successful.

33. Ibid.
Conclusion

In this article, I have attempted to provide an alternative exegetical reading of Moses 7 dealing with the black people of Canaan. I have proposed that this passage of scripture never curses the people of Canaan with black skin but that this “blackness” is the result of another object incurring divine wrath, namely, the earth itself which, as in the Hebrew flood story, is cursed due to the violence of the people inhabiting it.

I have also argued that Enoch’s decision not to preach to the people of Canaan stems not from any personal animosity toward them but likely from concerns that the hatred of the other sons of Adam toward the people of Canaan would hinder people from accepting the gospel message. When read in this light, Moses 7, far from being a racially problematic text, presents a progressive racial message in which God himself condemns the prejudice and cruelty of the other sons of Adam. It is this cruelty, in conjunction with their rejection of the gospel, that results in the “residue of the people” being cursed, a curse from which the people of Canaan themselves are spared.


Belnap persuasively and effectively argues that while the negative statements about the Lamanites in the Book of Mormon have been highlighted both by the book’s advocates and opponents, the text ultimately and primarily presents them in a highly positive light. As such, the Book of Mormon ultimately promotes a radical egalitarian and anti-racist ethic which elevates the “dark,” blackened Lamanites over and above their “pure” and “white” Nephite counterparts.\footnote{35. Ibid., 212.} He notes that in the majority of instances that the Lamanites are mentioned in the Book of Mormon it is either as equal or better than the Nephites and
that in many cases the Lamanites are presented as spiritually superior to the Nephites.36

There are obvious and immediate differences between how the Lamanites are depicted in the Book of Mormon and the depiction of the people of Canaan in Moses 7. The latter text provides little explicit information in regard to the spiritual state or standing of the people of Canaan. At the same time, Moses 7 infers that while excluded from Enoch’s preaching they are under no condemnation themselves and they are not convicted of the same sins that their counterparts — the other sons of Adam — are judged and condemned for. The hatred for them comes from purely human sources reinforcing the idea that racial hatred then and now is a human problem, not a divine one.

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36. Ibid., 226–27.
AN EARLY CHRISTIAN CONTEXT FOR THE 
BOOK OF MOSES

David Calabro

Abstract: This study argues that the Book of Moses was an early Christian text. The book’s language, literary genre, and references to its own production could fit with a date in the late first century AD. Further, the study argues that a possible ritual context of the book was a baptismal ritual, as suggested by the detailed description of Adam’s baptism in Moses 6. A comparison between the content of the Book of Moses and early Christian sources on baptism shows some close resemblances, which may suggest that the Book of Moses was read aloud, and perhaps portrayed as a ritual drama, on sacred space during a baptismal ritual.

[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.

1. Introduction

Many readers of the Book of Moses have been impressed by its ancient literary style and motifs. Even so, ever since it was revealed by the Prophet Joseph Smith in 1830–31, the book’s ancient context has been an enigma. Joseph Smith never explained, at least as far as available documents allow us to determine, what ancient community read the book or in what context the book was used.

Biblical scholarship has addressed questions like these in its search for the \textit{Sitz im Leben}, the “setting in life,” of biblical texts. Many of the Psalms, for instance, are now thought to have been sung as part of the ancient Israelite temple liturgy, thus showing continuity with modern Jewish and Christian communities that use the Psalms in synagogue and church liturgies. Despite the fact that the Bible’s link to the past is abundantly documented, the \textit{Sitz im Leben} of biblical texts is not a given but must be reconstructed based on careful study of the texts’ contents and language and on comparison with other ancient sources. The Book of Moses can be analyzed in similar ways.

In 2016, I published an article arguing that the Book of Moses was crafted to serve as the text for an ancient ritual.\textsuperscript{1} The book’s discourse frames and narrative structure suggest that the book was recited as part of a dramatic performance of the creation, the events in the Garden of Eden, and the redemption of Adam and Eve. The performance included the Aaronic Priesthood ordinances of sacrifice and baptism, which are the foci of chapters 5 and 6 respectively. In both of these chapters, a divine commandment to perform the ordinance is given, instruction is provided on the way in which the rite is to be performed, the meaning of the rite in connection with the Atonement of Jesus Christ is explained, and the opportunity to perform the ordinance is opened to the audience.

In that article, I point out that the expulsion from the garden and the focus on sacrifice and baptism seem to correspond to three features of the Temple of Solomon: the temple doors (which were decorated with images of cherubim), the altar of sacrifice, and the giant laver or “sea” (which stood on the backs of twelve cast oxen, like the modern temple baptismal font). However, there is need for further investigation of the ancient ritual context of the Book of Moses. Specifically, an investigation taking into account the language of the book, its contents, and comparison with ancient sources is needed to illuminate the book’s most likely historical setting and appropriate ritual context. This further investigation is the purpose of this study.
I will begin with an examination of the features of the Book of Moses that point to a performative ritual context, paying particular attention to aspects that may help determine the context. Then I will discuss evidence for the historical setting in which the Book of Moses belongs. In contrast to my 2016 study, in which I assumed an ancient Israelite origin, I will argue that the Book of Moses was most likely an early Christian text. The ritual context, rather than being situated at the Temple of Solomon, was most likely part of early Christian practice. I will then discuss how the stages of the book’s narrative might relate to the historical and ritual context of the book. Overall, the scenario that fits best with the internal evidence of the Book of Moses and with comparative evidence from early Christian sources is that the book was the text of a ritual drama performed at the baptism of catechumens. The physical setting of the rite was most likely a house of worship that functioned as a temple; thus, the connections with the Temple of Solomon noted in my previous study are not coincidental, but they belong to the conceptual framework of the book’s performance.

2. A Performative Context

In the ancient world, in which literacy was much less common than it is in modern Western society, religious texts were frequently meant to be read aloud and heard. Often, this enunciation of the text took place within a ritual context. For instance, portions of the Gospels were read on designated occasions in the liturgical calendar as part of the “liturgy of the word,” a portion of the Eucharist rite. The ancient church also produced an extensive array of liturgical books that prescribed the actions to be performed by the clergy, the hymns to be chanted by the choir, and the prayers and refrains to be enunciated by the congregation. Even non-liturgical texts would be read on ceremonial occasions, when saints would be honored through a recitation of their stories, or when doctrine would be explained through the reading of written homilies. Whitney Shiner suggests that the Gospel of Mark was designed to be recited at the water’s edge after an all-night vigil as part of a baptismal service, so that the reading of the resurrection scene would dramatically coincide with the break of dawn. Theatrical performances were another means by which narrative texts were presented. Religious narratives were performed in the sacred spaces of the synagogue and the church; some may also have been performed in the public theater.

Some ancient liturgical poetry uses the technique known as *ekphrasis*, which involves explicit reference to the physical setting as
a way to enhance the experience of the audience. A good example of ekphrasis is a Syriac hymn composed in honor of the domed cathedral in Edessa around the sixth century. This hymn is a *soghitha*, a specific kind of hymn that was sung as part of the liturgy; an extensive description of the cathedral’s features and of their symbolic meanings is framed as a prayer offered by the participants in the ritual.¹

Unlike liturgical poems that use ekphrasis, the Book of Moses does not explicitly reference the physical context in which it was meant to be read. This makes the identification of the context harder.

The text itself provides some clues that indicate a performative context. At the conclusion of each major section of the book are statements that relate the narrative to a contemporary audience. These asides to the audience, each of which ends with the word *amen*, can be examined for what they may imply about the context in which the Book of Moses was meant to be read.

> These words were spoken unto Moses in the mount, the name of which shall not be known among the children of men. And now they are spoken unto you. Show them not unto any except them that believe. Even so. Amen. (Moses 1:42)

> And these are the words which I spake unto my servant Moses, and they are true even as I will; and I have spoken them unto you. See thou show them unto no man, until I command you, except to them that believe. Amen. (Moses 4:32)

> And thus the Gospel began to be preached, from the beginning, being declared by holy angels sent forth from the presence of God, and by his own voice, and by the gift of the Holy Ghost. And thus all things were confirmed unto Adam, by an holy ordinance, and the Gospel preached, and a decree sent forth, that it should be in the world, until the end thereof; and thus it was. Amen. (Moses 5:58–59)

> And thus he was baptized, and the Spirit of God descended upon him, and thus he was born of the Spirit, and became quickened in the inner man . . . and thus may all become my sons. Amen. (Moses 6:65–68)

The word *thus* at the beginning of Moses 6:65 introduces a summary like that at the end of chapter 5. The liturgical refrain “amen,” rather than belonging to the speech of the “voice out of heaven” to Adam (Moses 6:66–68), is best understood here as a paratextual conclusion of this passage, as it is in the preceding conclusions of sections. The phrase
“and thus may all become my sons” at the end of Moses 6:68 seems to apply Adam’s experience didactically to a wider audience. This didactic opening-up may be multilayered: As part of Enoch’s speech, it refers to the audience to which Enoch is preaching. But it could also refer to the audience of the Book of Moses itself.

What do we learn from these asides to the audience? First, they seem to indicate a performative context in which the text was recited to an audience of believers. We see, for instance, a shift from a general narrative voice, with God spoken of in the third person, to narration in which God speaks in the first person. The shift is evocative of a dramatic context in which a single person plays the double role of actor and narrator. The verbs used in the asides to the audience are also significant: “These words were spoken unto Moses in the mount . . . and now they are spoken unto you. Show them not unto any except them that believe . . . And these are the words which I spake unto my servant Moses . . . and I have spoken them unto you. See thou show them unto no man . . . except them that believe.” These verbs imply that the audience of the book is expected to experience the text aurally, as Moses did. They also imply that the text exists in written form, such that one might “show” the words to another outside of the performative context (an action that the audience is cautioned about).

Second, the fact that these asides to the audience are placed at the ends of major sections of the text suggests that they mark transition points in the performative context. What kind of transition could have taken place here? It is significant that a major shift of scene occurs in the narrative after each of the asides. After Moses 1:41–42, the text transitions from Moses’s dialogue with God on the mountain to God’s account of the creation of the earth and the events of the Garden of Eden. The aside in Moses 4:32 occurs at the point where God drives Adam and Eve from the Garden of Eden. Moses 5:58–59 marks a shift from an account of the wicked posterity of Cain, who were “shut out from the presence of the Lord” (Moses 5:41), to an account of Adam and his righteous posterity. And Moses 6:65–68 marks a return from Enoch’s account of Adam’s baptism to the narrative about Enoch, including his own vision comparable to Moses 1. Further, Moses 5 and 6 feature different rituals performed by Adam, each of which is explained doctrinally to Adam, taught to his posterity, and applied to a wider audience: chapter 5 features sacrifice (Moses 5:4–12, 18–21, 58–59), and chapter 6 features baptism (Moses 6:51–68). These asides could therefore mark shifts of scene in the performative context, points at which the audience would...
move to a different location and, in some cases at least, participate in a ritual specific to that location.

3. The Book of Moses as an Early Christian Text

The Book of Moses belongs to at least two historical contexts. The modern context in which Joseph Smith revealed the book is relatively well-documented and uncontroversial. However, the book is not simply a modern revelation but also a restoration of ancient scripture. It purports to belong originally to an ancient context. An approach to the ritual setting of the Book of Moses depends on an understanding of this original context.

Most Latter-day Saint scholars who have written on the original time period of the Book of Moses have placed it in a preexilic Israelite context. An important study by Noel B. Reynolds argues that the version of Genesis found on the Brass Plates, and thus influencing the thought and language of Book of Mormon prophets, was similar to the Book of Moses, from the content of the narrative down to the level of the words and phrases used. This would imply that the Book of Moses dates to sometime before 600 BC. Kent Jackson has discussed instances of Hebraisms in the original manuscripts of the Book of Moses; he concludes that these portions of the Joseph Smith Translation are restorations of text originally found in the ancient Hebrew version of Genesis. Some studies focusing on Moses 1 have posited for this chapter an ancient Israelite origin within the broader context of the ancient Near East. Recently, a study by John W. Welch and Jackson Abhau argues that the text of the Book of Moses derives ultimately from a record composed by Moses himself, although the evidence assembled in that study could also suggest an origin contemporary with the biblical priestly source (known in biblical scholarship as P), thus making the date more ambiguous. Many studies of the Book of Moses, including the extensive works by Jeffrey Bradshaw, show that the Book of Moses incorporates ancient traditions but leave open the question of the book’s precise place relative to these traditions.

The idea that the Book of Moses belongs to a preexilic Israelite context is natural in light of the fact that the Book of Moses is part of Joseph Smith’s inspired translation of the Old Testament. If the intent of this translation was to restore things that were originally part of the text, then the Book of Moses, along with the rest of the Joseph Smith Translation of Genesis, should date to the time of the original composition of Genesis. This was my assumption when I began my
own scholarly investigation of the Book of Moses, as is evident from my previous study on the Book of Moses as a ritual text. However, this is not the only possible approach, and there is reason to believe, on the contrary, that what Joseph Smith restored in his translation of Genesis was something other than the original ancient Israelite form of the text. Based on my continued investigation, it seems that at least the first seven chapters of the work (i.e., Moses 1–7) represent a form of the text that fits best in an early Christian context.

3.1. New Testament Language

One of the most salient indicators of an early Christian origin of the Book of Moses is the frequent appearance of phrases found in the New Testament and in other sources from the same period but absent from the Old Testament (excluding the Joseph Smith Translation). The following list of examples is not comprehensive, but it is sufficient to show that the most natural fit for the literary context of the book is an early Christian context.


“transfigured before” God (Moses 1:11): see Matt. 17:2; Mark 9:2

“get thee hence, Satan” (Moses 1:16): see Matt. 4:10

the Holy Ghost “beareth record” of the Father and the Son (Moses 1:24; 5:9): compare 1 John 5:7

“by the word of my power” (Moses 1:32, 35; 2:5): compare Heb. 1:3 (“by the word of his power”); the Lord explains in Moses 1:32 that the phrase “the word of my power,” as the means by which he created the worlds, refers to his Only Begotten Son, which recalls John 1:1–3

“full of grace and truth” (Moses 1:32; 5:7): see John 1:14; cf. John 1:17

“immortality and eternal life” (Moses 1:39): both terms are absent from the Old Testament but are relatively frequent in the New Testament: \textit{immortality} occurs six times, all in
Pauline epistles; *eternal life* occurs twenty-six times in the Gospels, Pauline epistles, epistles of John, and Jude; “*eternal life*” also appears elsewhere in Moses (5:11; 6:59; 7:45)\(^{13}\)

“them that believe” (Moses 1:42; 4:32): see Mark 16:17; John 1:12; Rom. 3:22; 4:11; 1 Cor. 1:21; 14:22; Gal. 3:22; 2 Thess. 1:10; Heb. 10:39; the contrasting phrase “them that do not believe” also appears (Rom. 15:31; 1 Cor. 10:27; 14:22)

“I am the Beginning and the End” (Moses 2:1): see Rev. 21:6; 22:13; compare also the usages “God . . . who is . . . the beginning and end of all things” (Josephus, *Antiquities*, 8.280); “God . . . the beginning, and middle, and end of all things” (Josephus, *Contra Apionem*, 2.190)\(^{14}\)

“Beloved Son,” as a title of Christ (Moses 4:2): see Matt. 3:17; 17:5; Mark 1:11; 9:7; Luke 3:22; 9:35; 2 Pet. 1:17; the phrase “beloved son” appears elsewhere in the New Testament (Luke 20:13; 1 Cor. 4:17; 2 Tim. 1:2) and in the Greek Septuagint of Gen. 22:2, but it is absent from the Hebrew and KJV Old Testament


“thy will be done” (Moses 4:2): see Matt. 6:10; 26:42; Luke 11:2

“the glory be thine forever” (Moses 4:2): compare Matt. 6:13 (“For thine is the kingdom, and the power, and the glory, for ever”); note the proximity of this phrase to “thy will be done” both in Moses 4:2 and in the Lord’s prayer in Matt. 6:9–13\(^{16}\)

“by the power of mine Only Begotten, I caused that [Satan] should be cast down” (Moses 4:3): compare Rev. 12:10, “Now is come . . . the power of his Christ: for the accuser of our brethren is cast down”; note that the Hebrew title Satan means “accuser”

“the devil” (Moses 4:4): sixty-one instances in the New Testament, translating the Greek word *diabolos*

“as thou hast fallen” (Moses 5:9); “Adam fell,” “and by his fall came death” (Moses 6:48); “the fall, which fall bringeth death” (Moses 6:59): use of the word *fall* in reference to Adam’s transgression, or to the sin of the human race, is not found in
the Old or the New Testament, but it occurs in apocryphal literature: Jubilees 12:25 (Jewish, ca. second century BC: “because it ceased from the mouth of all of the sons of men from the day of the fall”); 4 Ezra 7:48[118] (Jewish, first century AD: “O Adam . . . the fall was not yours alone, but ours also who are your descendants”); 3 Baruch 4:17 (Greek, first to third century AD: “by means of the fall . . . come forth . . . murder, adultery, fornication . . .”)

“carnal, sensual, and devilish” (Moses 5:13; 6:49): compare James 3:15 (“earthly, sensual, devilish”)

“Satan desireth to have thee” (Moses 5:23): compare Luke 22:31 (“Satan hath desired to have you”)

Perdition, as the title of a person (Moses 5:24): compare “the son of perdition” in John 17:12; 2 Thess. 2:3; the word *perdition* as an abstract noun meaning “destruction” (translating the Greek word *apōleia*) occurs elsewhere in the King James version of the New Testament (Phil. 1:28; 1 Tim. 6:9; Heb. 10:39; 2 Pet. 3:7; Rev. 17:8, 11)

“the Gospel” (Moses 5:58, 59; 8:19): eighty-three instances in the New Testament; the word *gospel* irrespective of the English definite article occurs 101 times in the New Testament but is not found in the Old Testament


“gift of the Holy Ghost” (Moses 5:58; 6:52): see Acts 2:38; 10:45 “anointing” the eyes in order to see (Moses 6:35, “anoint thine eyes with clay, and wash them, and thou shalt see”): compare John 9:6–7, 11 (Jesus anoints the eyes of a blind man with clay and commands him to wash in the pool of Siloam, and he “came seeing”); Revelation 3:18 (the Lord tells the church in Laodicea, “anoint thine eyes with eyesalve, that thou mayest see”); these are the only passages in the Bible that refer to anointing the eyes

“no man laid hands on him” (Moses 6:39): see John 7:30, 44; 8:20

“my God, and your God” (Moses 6:43): see John 20:17
“only name given under heaven whereby salvation shall come” (Moses 6:52): compare Acts 4:12

collocation of water, blood, and Spirit (Moses 6:59–60): see 1 John 5:6, 8


“the mysteries of the kingdom of heaven” (Moses 6:59, original text): see Matthew 13:11. The phrase “kingdom of heaven” is absent from the Old Testament; in the New Testament it is found only in Matthew (thirty-two occurrences), but it is frequent in rabbinic literature

“cleansed by blood, even the blood of mine Only Begotten” (Moses 6:59): compare 1 John 1:7 (“the blood of Jesus Christ his Son cleanseth us from all sin”)

“immortal glory” (Moses 6:59, 61): attested in a Greek inscription of the second century BC and in homilies by John Chrysostom (died AD 407); the adjective immortal is not found in the Old Testament

“the words of eternal life” (Moses 6:59): see John 6:68

eternal life “in the world to come” (Moses 6:59): see Mark 10:30; Luke 18:30; the phrase “world to come” is absent from the Old Testament but occurs five times in the New Testament; other than the two just quoted, see Matthew 12:32; Hebrews 2:5; 6:5

“by the Spirit ye are justified” (Moses 6:60): compare 1 Cor. 6:11; 1 Tim. 3:16

“the Comforter,” referring to the Holy Ghost (Moses 6:61): see John 14:16, 26; 15:26; 16:7 (translating the Greek word paraklētos)

“the inner man” (Moses 6:65): see Eph. 3:16; Rom. 7:22; 2 Cor. 4:16

“baptized with fire and with the Holy Ghost” (Moses 6:66): see Matt. 3:11; Luke 3:16

“They were of one heart and one mind” (Moses 7:18): compare Acts 4:32 (“And the multitude of them that believed were of
one heart and of one soul”—note that “soul” here translates Greek psyche, rendered in NIV as “mind”)

“in the bosom of the Father,” referring to heaven (Moses 7:24, 47): see John 1:18 (note that JST deletes this phrase in this verse, perhaps implying that it entered the text sometime after its original composition)

“a great chain in his hand” (Moses 7:26): see Rev. 20:1 (here the one holding the chain is an angel, unlike Moses 7:26, in which it is the devil)

commandment to “love one another” (Moses 7:33): see John 13:34, 35; 15:12, 17; Rom. 12:10; 13:8; 1 Thess. 3:12; 4:9; 1 Pet. 1:22; 1 John 3:11, 23; 4:7, 11, 12; 2 John 1:5

“without affection” (Moses 7:33): see Rom. 1:31; 2 Tim. 3:3 (translating the single Greek word astorgos)

“the Lamb is slain from the foundation of the world” (Moses 7:47): compare Rev. 13:8 (“the Lamb slain from the foundation of the world,” as a noun phrase); the term “the Lamb” is used as a title of the Messiah only in the New Testament and is distinctively Johannine (John 1:29, 36; twenty-seven instances in Revelation), and the words lamb and slain collocate only in Revelation (5:6, 12; 13:8)

“climb up” by a gate or door, as a metaphor of progression through Christ (Moses 7:53): see John 10:1

The phrases listed above are all absent from the Old Testament. Moreover, some of these phrases embody concepts that would be unexpected in an ancient Israelite historical context. For instance, the phrase “them that believe” is used in the Book of Moses to describe those who believe in the Gospel of Jesus Christ or who belong to the community of believers. The phrase is used to distinguish those to whom it is permitted to show the words of the book itself; this usage evokes an environment in which certain teachings have to be guarded, perhaps because of persecutions. This phrase would be unexpected in an ancient Israelite environment, in which faith in Jehovah was the national religion (for an ancient Israelite text, we would expect something more like “them that fear the Lord”—see, for instance, Pss. 15:4; 25:14). More broadly, the use of the word believe without a direct object or adverbial complement, which is relatively frequent in the Book of Moses (Moses 1:41; 5:15; 6:52; 7:1; 8:24) and in the New Testament, occurs in the Hebrew Bible
in only one instance: in Isaiah 7:9. But here, it is in reference to believing a specific prophecy; this cannot be the sense in which the word is used in the Book of Moses, since one would not know if a person believes the text without the person being shown it first. Interestingly, the word *believe* is also entirely absent from the Book of Abraham; the same is true of the word *faith*, attested in Moses 6:23; 7:13, 47. This underscores the great difference in language between these two ancient scriptures revealed by Joseph Smith.

Likewise, the phrase “carnal, sensual, and devilish” (Moses 5:13; 6:49) seems uncharacteristic of Israelite culture of the Old Testament period.\(^{23}\) A distinction between the flesh (as embodied in the word *carnal*) and the spirit, the former being regarded as sinful and impure, may be hinted at in some Old Testament passages (such as Gen. 6:3) but finds clear expression in literature only from the Hellenistic period onward. As listed above, the noun *devil*, on which the adjective *devilish* is based, is also absent from the Old Testament. The four adjectives *carnal, earthly, sensual*, and *devilish* are all absent from the Old Testament, but all are found in the New Testament:

- **carnal**: Rom. 7:14; 8:7; 15:27; 1 Cor. 3:1, 3, 4; 9:11; 2 Cor. 10:4; Heb. 7:16; 9:10; James 3:15
- **earthly**: John 3:12, 31; 2 Cor. 5:1; Phil. 3:19; James 3:15
- **sensual**: James 3:15; Jude 1:19
- **devilish**: James 3:15

The phrase “the mysteries of the kingdom of heaven” in the original text of Moses 6:59 is especially significant in relation to the performative context of the Book of Moses. This phrase, too, would be unexpected in an ancient Israelite context. The word *mystery* and its plural form *mysteries* are not found in the Old Testament, but together they are attested twenty-seven times in the New Testament. The meaning referring to induction into rites, as found in Moses 6:59, is characteristic of the Greek word *mustērion*, which also appears as a loanword with the same meaning in postbiblical Hebrew and Aramaic (*miṣṭērīn*).\(^{24}\)

Finally, the phrase “the inner man” (Moses 6:65; Eph. 3:16; Rom. 7:22; 2 Cor. 4:16) is characteristic of Greek philosophy; it appears in Judeo-Christian sources in the early centuries AD and would appear strange in a Hebrew text from the preexilic period.\(^{25}\)

There is, of course, much in the language of the restored portions of the Book of Moses that parallels the Old Testament. This does not weaken the assertion that the language of the text is of early Christian
date, since early Christian authors had access to the Old Testament and quoted from it frequently (this is abundantly evident in the New Testament itself). Following are some examples of Old Testament-like language, where New Testament parallels are either nonexistent or relatively infrequent.

- Speaking with the Lord “face to face” (Moses 1:2, 31; 7:4): see Ex. 33:11
- “Choose ye this day to serve the Lord God who made you” (Moses 6:33): compare Jos. 24:15 (“choose you this day whom ye will serve”)
- “They shall come forth with songs of everlasting joy,” in context mentioning Zion (Moses 7:53): compare Isa. 35:10; 51:11
- “God of heaven” (Moses 6:43): twenty-two instances in the Old Testament, found only twice in the New Testament (Rev. 11:13; 16:11)
- “There was no poor among them” (Moses 7:18): compare Deut. 15:4 (“save when there shall be no poor among you”)

Enoch’s speech in Moses 7:29–31 shows a high concentration of Old Testament-like language. This passage closely resembles the Psalms; indeed, the passage itself has a poetic character and may be dubbed the Psalm of Enoch. There is even a loose chiasmus at the beginning and end of the passage: the question “How is it [that] thou canst weep?” frames the whole passage, and the phrase “from all eternity to all eternity” occurs near the beginning and the end. However, the chiasmus is not as tight as we would expect were this a genuine preexilic Hebrew poem, and the use of parallel bicola, which is characteristic of most biblical poetry, is absent. Phrases in this passage that are parallel to the Psalms include the following:

- “From all eternity to all eternity” (Moses 7:30, 31): compare Pss. 41:13; 90:2; 103:17; 106:48
- “Thy curtains are stretched out still” (Moses 7:30): compare Ps. 104:2; Isa. 40:22
- “Naught but peace, justice, and truth is the habitation of thy throne” (Moses 7:31): compare Ps. 89:14
- “Mercy shall go before thy face” (Moses 7:31): compare Ps. 89:14
From the evidence of the New Testament-like phrases that appear in the text, we see that the revealed portions of the Book of Moses have the closest affinities with Johannine literature (the Gospel of John, the epistles of John, and the book of Revelation). However, the text is not simply Johannine, since some phrases are found in Matthew or other parts of the New Testament and are not characteristic of Johannine literature. In addition, some of these revealed portions show affinities with the Psalms and other parts of the Old Testament. This is broadly similar to Christian texts from the first to the third century. For example, in the Didascalia Apostolorum (composed around the early third century), Matthew and Proverbs are quoted with great frequency, and there are also quotations from John, the Johannine epistles, Isaiah, Jeremiah, and other parts of the Old Testament. Usually, quotations are explicitly signaled with phrases like “the Lord said” or “it is written,” but often the quotation is simply worked into the text with no overt signal. Although Didascalia Apostolorum is a different kind of text from the Book of Moses (it lays out rules for the church, like an early analogue to our modern Church Handbook, while the Book of Moses is narrative), this exemplifies the literary influences that were prevalent in early Christian writings.

The prominence of Johannine language in the Book of Moses is particularly significant in light of early Christian sentiments about the importance of the Gospel of John in ritual settings. The early post-Nicene Church father Ambrose discussed this in a homily on baptism:

 Yet in the book of the Gospel according to John — John, who with greater clarity than the others saw the great mysteries and recounted and explained them — the intention is to see in the blind man this mystery prefigured. Now all the evangelists are saints, and all the apostles, except the traitor [Judas Iscariot], are saints. Yet it was St. John, the last to write a gospel as the friend sought out and chosen by Christ — he it was who trumpeted forth the eternal mysteries in the clearest tones. Everything he has said is a mystery.\(^{27}\)

The context of this statement makes it clear that John’s Gospel featured prominently in the baptismal liturgy.

The dates of John’s Gospel and of Revelation are not universally agreed upon; however, a majority of scholars place the composition of both of these texts around the latter half of the first century AD. Considering the evidence of Semitic linguistic influence, the Book of Moses could therefore belong to a Jewish-Christian context around the late first or early second century.
Two alternate approaches could be cited in opposition to this analysis. First, one could posit that these phrases represent preexilic Hebrew (or, perhaps, a form of ancient Egyptian) despite their absence from the Hebrew Bible. This view begins with the observation that many of the passages and phrases in the Book of Mormon, including some which are quoted from the plates of brass, resemble parts of the Book of Moses. One example is the phrase “carnal, sensual, and devilish,” which appears in similar contexts in the Book of Moses and in the Book of Mormon (Moses 5:13; 6:49; Mosiah 16:3; Alma 42:10). These resemblances would seem to suggest that the Book of Moses (or something close to it) was found on the plates of brass. The similar phrases in the New Testament could then be explained as evidence that the New Testament writers also had access to the Book of Moses. Jeff Lindsay and Noel Reynolds have produced extensive studies along these lines.

The evidence brought forward by Lindsay and Reynolds is of great significance. It certainly demonstrates that there are intertextual connections between some of the contents of the plates of brass and the restored portions of the Book of Moses. However, the precise relationship between these texts cannot be adequately described without a systematic comparison of the language of the Book of Mormon, the Joseph Smith Translation of Genesis, and the New Testament. Such a comparison is beyond the scope of this paper, but some preliminary observations may be offered here.

One observation is that the use of New Testament-like language in the Book of Mormon involves a number of unique factors. The foundational revelation given to Nephi in 1 Nephi 11–14, which is explicitly linked to the Revelation of John (see 1 Nephi 14:18–27), may have proleptically introduced similar language into Nephite discourse. Further, most of the historical narrative in the Book of Mormon is an abridgment by Mormon and Moroni, who lived long after the ministry of Christ among the Nephites. During his ministry, Christ “did expound all things, even from the beginning until the time that he should come in his glory” (3 Nephi 26:3). The greater part of this discourse, which may have included material similar to the Book of Moses, was recorded on the large plates of Nephi (3 Nephi 26:7). It is therefore possible that the abridged account is influenced by the language of Christ’s teachings. Even quotations from the plates of brass found on the large plates may have been rendered into Christian language in the process of creating the edited text — after all, it is reasonable to imagine Mormon needing to translate the language of the nearly one-thousand-year-old plates of
brass into his own written idiom. Finally, the possibility of influence from native American languages and sources is a large unknown factor. It is not out of the question that native American expressions with no direct relationship to the New Testament were nevertheless close enough in meaning that they were translated into English using New Testament language. Thus, the parallel New Testament-like language in the Book of Mormon and the Book of Moses may be explained in various ways; it is not always necessary to conclude that one is derived from the other.

Even beyond the use of New Testament-like language, there are many similarities between the scriptures available to the Nephites and the Joseph Smith Translation of Genesis (including the Book of Moses). However, it should be noted that there are also significant differences. For instance, the prophecy of Joseph quoted by Lehi in 2 Nephi 3 is similar to Gen. 50 in the Joseph Smith Translation, but the two texts are far from being identical. Gen. 50 JST dwells more extensively on the ministry of Moses. Verse 29 mentions that Moses was “nursed by the king’s daughter,” a detail that diverges from the account of Moses being nursed by his mother Jochebed in Ex. 2:7–9 but that may be related to Stephen’s retelling in Acts 7:21, and verse 34 mentions that Moses “shall gather together my people, and he shall lead them as a flock,” which may allude to the description of Moses as a shepherd in Ex. 3:1 (compare the image of the Lord leading his people as a shepherd in Ps. 80:1; Isa. 40:11; John 10:3, 14; 1 Pet. 2:25). The version of the prophecy in 2 Nephi 3 lacks these details about Moses but includes more about the words that will be written by Joseph’s descendants, which words “shall cry from the dust” (compare Isa. 29:4). While Nephi mentions that his father quoted this prophecy from the plates of brass (2 Nephi 4:2), he does not specify that the prophecy was found in Genesis; indeed, Nephi describes this as one of multiple prophecies of Joseph on the plates of brass, perhaps implying that it was part of a separate book of prophecies. Nephite scriptures describing the primordial history show a similar degree of difference when compared to the Book of Moses, as I will explain in the excursus later in this study. These differences allow for the possibility that the Book of Moses, rather than being identical with the Genesis record found on the plates of brass, incorporates materials that are more distantly related to the contents of the plates.

An additional observation is that an overall view of ancient Hebrew literature makes it problematic to consider the Book of Moses the source of language common to the Book of Mormon and the New Testament. It would be strange if a preexilic biblical text should have such a heavy
influence on New Testament language but should leave no trace in the language of other parts of the Old Testament. Usage within the book also makes it unlikely that the Book of Moses is the ultimate source of this language, since some of the more distinctively Christian words and phrases are used without explanation, as if the audience should already be familiar with these terms. A good example of this is Moses 5:58: “And thus the Gospel began to be preached, from the beginning, being declared by holy angels . . . and by the gift of the Holy Ghost.” The usage here presupposes that the terms “the Gospel” and “the gift of the Holy Ghost” are already known to the audience; the text is concerned with expounding the primordial origins of these things, but it does not appear to be introducing them as new concepts.

Some of the New Testament-like phrases in the Book of Moses may be placed in a preexilic context by assuming an Egyptian origin or by tracing them to phrases with similar meaning in the Old Testament. According to Mosiah 1:4, Lehi’s knowledge of “the language of the Egyptians” enabled him to read the engravings on the plates of brass, which implies that the record, including its account of the primordial history, was written in Egyptian. By the same token, on the assumption that the Book of Moses is contemporary with the plates of brass, its language may have been Egyptian as well. Further, some of the language of the Book of Moses, such as the description of Christ as “full of grace and truth,” the commandment to “love one another,” and the reference to the Messiah as a lamb, may be traced to Old Testament antecedents with only minor differences in the wording; thus, it is possible that these phrases represent ancient Israelite language that has been rendered into English using New Testament style. These explanations could indeed account for some of the New Testament-like language of the Book of Moses. However, they are unlikely to account for all of it. For instance, the book’s prominent usage of the terms faith and believe is uncharacteristic not only of preexilic Hebrew literature but also of ancient Egyptian (in which equivalents of these terms are entirely unattested). There are also many longer pieces of text in which it is not just the constituent phrases but the overall sense that appears characteristic of the New Testament and/or of early Christian literature. As just one example, the statement “by the power of mine Only Begotten, I caused that [Satan] should be cast down” (Moses 4:3) would be evocative of Rev. 12:10 even if other words with the same meaning were used instead. Moreover, even if individual phrases can be traced to preexilic contexts, if we step back and view all
these phrases in the aggregate, the likelihood that they would occur together in a preexilic text seems small.

In short, while the evidence assembled by Lindsay and Reynolds shows that there is a relationship between the plates of brass and the Book of Moses, the precise nature of that relationship remains unclear. The Genesis account on the plates of brass likely contained material that is also preserved in the Book of Moses, as Lindsay and Reynolds suggest. It is possible that some of the New Testament-like phrases in the Book of Moses derive from this preexilic source. But none of this evidence unequivocally places the Book of Moses in a preexilic context. An early Christian context seems, in my opinion, to best explain the language of the book as a whole. The abundant concentration of so many New Testament-like phrases, in stark contrast to surviving Biblical Hebrew literature, tips the scales in favor of this later context.

Second, the New Testament language could point to Joseph Smith’s nineteenth-century context, since he was known to use Johannine language elsewhere. Of course, most scholars who do not accept the authenticity of the Book of Moses would assume that Joseph Smith drew the language from his own environment. However, this approach fails to account for the fact that the Book of Ether and the Book of Abraham, which are thematically similar to the Book of Moses, are quite different from it in the language they use. It does not work to say that Joseph Smith simply infused all his revelations with Johannine language. If Joseph Smith was the source of this language, then he was at least attentive to stylistic differences among texts from different historical environments. One might then wonder why he decided that a Johannine style was appropriate for the Book of Moses but not for other ancient scriptures.

Ultimately, the simplest explanation for the New Testament language in the Book of Moses is that the text comes from an early Christian historical context. Based on an initial analysis of the phrases used, the most likely date is around the latter part of the first century AD.

3.2. Hebraisms, Wordplays, and Proper Names

As an early Christian text, the Book of Moses would most likely have been transmitted in Greek, although many of the source materials and the overall cultural-linguistic background of the book would have been Semitic (Hebrew and Aramaic). Kent Jackson and others have noted what appear to be Hebraisms in the Book of Moses, including some particularly striking ones that are found in the original manuscript but
have since been edited out. Some have also noted apparent wordplays relying on Hebrew vocabulary. In addition, some of the new proper names in the text seem to be of Semitic origin. Each of these things have been put forward as evidence of an ancient Hebrew origin of the book. However, a careful consideration of each of these issues shows that a first-century origin is possible, and in some cases the evidence weighs in favor of the later date.

Apparent Hebraisms that have been noted in the Book of Moses text include “Behold I” in the original text of Moses 1:3 and 4:1, the use of the grammatical constructions “if . . . and” (Moses 6:52) and “as I was . . . and” (Moses 7:2), and the frequent use of the phrase “it came to pass,” in these cases, as with proposed Hebraisms in general, it is important to establish the periods of Hebrew in which the construction is found and whether the construction is also found in Aramaic or in Koine Greek. Aramaic is a Semitic language related to Hebrew and thus employs many of the same constructions found in Hebrew. The Greek of the Gospels and Acts shows significant influence from Hebrew and Aramaic, bearing witness to the books’ composition in a predominantly Semitic environment, by people whose first language was most likely Aramaic. Thus, what appear to be Hebraisms could potentially indicate an Aramaic or even a Greek origin.

The phrase “Behold I” in the original manuscript in Moses 1:3 and 4:1 is strikingly different from English usage:

And God spake unto Moses, saying, Behold I, I am the Lord God Almighty, and Endless is my name. (Moses 1:3, original manuscript)

That Satan, whom thou hast commanded in the name of mine Only Begotten, is the same which was from the beginning, and he came before me, saying—Behold I, send me, I will be thy son, and I will redeem all mankind, that one soul shall not be lost. (Moses 4:1, original manuscript)

Kent Jackson has suggested that the construction reflects the Hebrew word hineni. However, this word literally means “behold me.” A more exact parallel is the Aramaic hā ‘anā, literally “behold I.” The phrase appears in the Aramaic dialect of the Dead Sea Scrolls, which is likely the same literary dialect of Aramaic that was known to the writers of the Gospels. Also, the Greek phrase idou egō “behold I,” which is exactly analogous to the Aramaic hā ‘anā, is found in the Septuagint (translating
the Hebrew *hineni* in many instances, for example Gen. 22:1) and in the New Testament (Acts 9:10).

Other apparent Hebraisms are subject to similar considerations. The Hebrew-like grammatical constructions “if . . . and” (Moses 6:52) and “as I was . . . and” (Moses 7:2) are also found in the Aramaic of the Dead Sea Scrolls. The phrase “it came to pass” could represent the Hebrew word *wayhi*, but it could just as well represent the Aramaic *wahawā*. The equivalent Greek phrases *kai egeneto* and *egeneto de* appear in the Septuagint and in the New Testament; they are particularly common in Luke (although, interestingly, they are not characteristic of Johannine literature).

Matthew L. Bowen suggests that some passages of the Book of Moses may reflect wordplays in an underlying Hebrew text. Bowen points out that Moses 1:41 may involve a play on the Hebrew root *ysp* “add, do again,” thus alluding to Joseph Smith as the one who would restore the words taken away from the book. Moses 1 may echo a preexilic Hebrew account of Moses in which such a wordplay was present. But the fact that a Hebrew-based wordplay is possible in this passage does not necessarily mean that the immediate underlying text was in Hebrew. By way of comparison, Jesus’s declaration in John 14:6 that he is “the way, the truth, and the life” is alliterative in Latin and in Arabic; based on the Arabic, it is possible to suggest that Jesus’s original declaration in Aramaic was also alliterative. However, the Greek text of this passage, from which all the extant translations derive, does not show alliteration. The suggestion of a Hebrew-based wordplay in Moses 1:41 can thus coexist with the possibility of an immediate underlying text in Greek.

Bowen also proposes a wordplay between the name *Cain* (Hebrew *Qayin*) and the word *gain* (perhaps reflecting Hebrew *qinyan*, “thing got or acquired, acquisition”) in Moses 5:31. This proposal is especially attractive because it works both in Hebrew and in English. To be sure, the Hebrew word usually translated as “gain” in the King James Version is not *qinyan* but *besa‘* (*qinyan* is usually translated as “substance” in the King James Version). However, it is also noteworthy that the Hebrew word *qinyan* is most likely an Aramaic loanword. The word is found in various Aramaic dialects, including Jewish Palestinian Aramaic and Syriac. This proposed wordplay could, therefore, just as easily support a first-century Aramaic origin as an ancient Hebrew origin. The Greek verb meaning “to get gain,” *kerdainō* (James 4:13), is also similar in sound to the name *Cain* (Greek *kain*).
It is also possible to propose wordplays based on Greek in the Book of Moses. For instance, in Moses 5:58, we read, “thus the Gospel began to be preached . . . being declared by holy angels,” in Greek, the words for “Gospel” (euangelion) and “angel” (angelos) are related; for a speaker of Greek, the idea of angels declaring the Gospel would seem quite natural. The Greek word euangelion entered Christian Aramaic dialects as a loanword very early, but the word for “angel” in Aramaic and Hebrew was always mal‘ak; thus, the possible wordplay in Moses 5:58 would work in Greek but not in Aramaic or Hebrew. This example demonstrates that there is much further room for exploration of possible wordplays. In order for suggestions of wordplay to argue convincingly for a linguistic origin of the text, it would be important to conduct a thorough search and to compare the results after various possibilities are taken into account.

Many of the names found in the revealed portions of the text, such as Mahon (changed to Mahan in the current text), Mahijah, Mahujah, Shum, Sharon, and Hanannihah, seem to be rendered from Hebrew or Aramaic rather than Greek, since they contain sounds not found in the Greek alphabet. The name Mahon, found twice in Moses 5:31 in the original manuscript, could represent the Aramaic word makhwon, the plural of meḥā, “wound, blow.” The names Mahijah and Mahujah have been connected with the name MHWY that appears in the Aramaic Book of Giants; the similarity in the forms of these names is made more interesting by the fact that the character MHWY in the Book of Giants plays a role similar to that of Mahijah in the Book of Moses. However, the names could have been rendered from their original Semitic forms even if the source text was in Greek, just as the translators of the King James Bible used the forms Abraham and Bethlehem in the New Testament instead of the Greek forms Abraam and Bethleem.

Overall, the evidence of proposed Hebraisms, proposed wordplays, and proper names is inconclusive in establishing the original language of the Book of Moses. In some cases in which an ancient Hebrew origin has been assumed, the evidence could argue just as well or better in favor of a first-century Aramaic or Greek origin.

3.3. The Literary Milieu

The period from the third century BC to the second century AD saw the flourishing of Jewish and Christian apocryphal literature similar to the Book of Moses (see table 1). The book of Jubilees (Jewish, second century BC) and the Greek Life of Adam and Eve (Jewish, first
century AD) are both retellings of the early events of Genesis framed as revelations to Moses, exactly like the Book of Moses. The book of 4 Ezra is similar in style and visionary content to the Book of Moses; the Latin text also contains Christian expansions dating to about the third century. The Apocalypse of Adam is notable because it is a Gnostic work, incorporating Christian concepts, although it is very different from the Book of Moses in terms of doctrine. Jeffrey Bradshaw, David Larsen, and Stephen Whitlock have recently called attention to the close similarity between the Apocalypse of Abraham and Moses chapter 1. The Book of Moses fits very well among these texts in the literary milieu of the first to second centuries AD, when some Jewish apocryphal books were already circulating and others, including the Greek Life of Adam and Eve and the Apocalypse of Adam, were being produced.

Table 1. Selected apocryphal literature

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Title</th>
<th>Earliest languages</th>
<th>Approximate date</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1 Enoch</td>
<td>Hebrew (?), Aramaic, Greek</td>
<td>3rd c. BC to 1st c. AD</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Book of Giants</td>
<td>Hebrew (?), Aramaic</td>
<td>2nd c. BC</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jubilees</td>
<td>Hebrew, Greek</td>
<td>2nd c. BC</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Genesis Apocryphon</td>
<td>Aramaic</td>
<td>2nd c. BC</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Greek Life of Adam and Eve</td>
<td>Hebrew (?), Greek</td>
<td>1st c. AD</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Testament of Moses</td>
<td>Hebrew (?), Greek (?), Latin</td>
<td>1st c. AD</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4 Ezra</td>
<td>Hebrew or Aramaic (?), Greek (?), Latin</td>
<td>1st c. AD</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Apocalypse of Adam</td>
<td>Greek, Coptic</td>
<td>1st or 2nd c. AD</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Apocalypse of Abraham</td>
<td>Hebrew (?)</td>
<td>late 1st or early 2nd c. AD</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The book of 1 Enoch, the Book of Giants, Jubilees, and the Genesis Apocryphon—manuscripts of all of which were found among the Dead Sea Scrolls—are closely comparable in terms of content to Moses 5–7; many of the parallels have been noted already in scholarship on
the Book of Moses. Also found among the Dead Sea Scrolls were five manuscripts containing what has been termed “Reworked Pentateuch.” These manuscripts are particularly significant for comparison with the Book of Moses because they present a text that is essentially the same as the received biblical text but with some expanded portions and changes to individual phrases, much like the Book of Moses and the rest of the Joseph Smith Translation.

The production of apocryphal literature continued into the Middle Ages and beyond. Some of the medieval apocryphal literature is typologically similar to the Book of Moses in terms of its relationship to ritual practice, as I have discussed elsewhere. But in terms of the literary style, the Book of Moses is much closer to earlier apocryphal literature.

Therefore, the Book of Moses, as an expansion of the Genesis narrative with clear Christian elements, fits comfortably in the first century AD. This is not to say that an earlier date is impossible. Some of the Jewish and early Christian apocrypha clearly preserve elements dating back to much earlier periods (as but one example, in the Book of Giants, one of the giants is a literary reincarnation of the ancient Mesopotamian hero Gilgamesh). It is thus possible that similar parabiblical texts existed in earlier times. One also cannot exclude the possibility that the Book of Moses was *sui generis* at the time it was written. However, from an objective standpoint, the flowering of apocryphal literature that reached its height in the first century AD presents the most plausible known context for a literary production like the Book of Moses. In the many extant texts from this period, we can see numerous striking resemblances to the Book of Moses, many of which have already been documented. To date, earlier periods have not presented a single text of this kind. The weight of evidence thus favors a first-century context.

### 3.4. References to a Time of Wickedness

At the end of Moses chapter 1, the Lord commands Moses to write the things he is about to hear, thus providing a narrative framework for the chapters that follow:

> And now, Moses, my son, I will speak unto thee concerning this earth upon which thou standest; and thou shalt write the things which I shall speak. And in a day when the children of men shall esteem my words as naught and take many of them from the book which thou shalt write, behold, I will raise up another like unto thee; and they shall be had again among
the children of men—among as many as shall believe. These words were spoken unto Moses in the mount, the name of which shall not be known among the children of men. And now they are spoken unto you. Show them not unto any except them that believe. Even so. Amen.\textsuperscript{53} (Moses 1:40–42)

Immediately after this, as God begins to narrate the events of the creation to Moses (Moses 2:1), God reiterates the commandment to write his words.

The prophecy in Moses 1:41 of the corruption and restoration of Moses’s revelation is of fundamental importance in situating the book historically. The prophesied time when the book will be restored is correlated with the performative context of the book itself: at that time, according to verse 41, God’s words contained in the book will be had “among as many as shall believe,” and the audience hearing the narrative is accordingly told to show the words only to “them that believe,” in other words, the time when the revelation will be “had again among the children of men” is identical with the historical context in which the book was performed. The audience, by hearing the book, is thus fulfilling the prophecy.

A similar framing occurs in the book of Jubilees. In the introductory first chapter, God commands Moses to write the revelation so that his descendants will know of God’s righteous deeds (Jubilees 1:5–6). God also prophesies to Moses of a time of apostasy in which the people would forsake God, be scattered among the nations, and ultimately “forget all of my laws and all of my commandments and all of my judgments, and they will err concerning new moons, sabbaths, festivals, jubilees, and ordinances”—the very things expounded in the book of Jubilees (Jubilees 1:7–14). But after this time, the people would repent, and God would restore the temple and its ordinances (Jubilees 1:15–25). Moses is then commanded again to write the revelation, the observance of which is specifically situated in that future time of restoration:

And you write down for yourself all of the matters which I shall make known to you on this mountain: what (was) in the beginning and what (will be) at the end, what will happen in all of the divisions of the days which are in the Law and testimony and throughout their weeks (of years) according to the jubilees forever, until I shall descend and dwell with them in all the ages of eternity. (Jubilees 1:26)\textsuperscript{56}
Finally, as God begins to narrate the events of the creation at the beginning of chapter 2, he reiterates the commandment to Moses to “write the whole account of creation” (Jubilees 2:1).

The narrative framing of the Book of Moses and of Jubilees is similar not only in content but also in function. In both cases, the framing relates the restoration of the narrative to the situation of the audience, thus giving the audience a sense of participation in the salvation history described in the narrative. It also lends authority to the rituals revealed in the respective books, tracing these rituals to the lawgiver Moses, who received them from God on the mountain, and thence back to the primordial time when God instructed Adam.

The one like unto Moses mentioned in Moses 1:41 is thought by some interpreters to be Joseph Smith, the modern revealer of the Book of Moses. However, the prophecies of one “like unto Moses” elsewhere in scripture are usually interpreted as referring to Jesus Christ (e.g., Deut. 18:15–19; Acts 3:22–24; 1 Nephi 10:4–5; 3 Nephi 20:23–24; JS-H 1:40). An intended intertextual connection between the prophecy in Moses 1:41 and that in Deut. 18:15–19 is likely, given the similarity in language (with the verb “raise up”), the fact that the prophecy in Deuteronomy is uttered by Moses, and the evidence for the importance of the prophecy in early Christian historical memory relating to Moses (Acts 3:22–24; 7:37). If the prophecy as found in Moses 1:41 indeed refers to Jesus Christ as a restorer of the primordial history revealed to Moses, this would resonate with traditions of Jesus expounding primordial history during the forty-day ministry after his resurrection and before his ascension into heaven (Acts 1:3). After the Resurrection, according to Luke, Jesus appeared to two of his disciples, “and beginning at Moses and all the prophets, he expounded unto them in all the scriptures the things concerning himself” (Luke 24:27). The Arabic Apocalypse of Peter, or Book of Rolls, an apocryphal book attributed to Clement of Rome, recounts a revelation by Jesus to the apostles on the Mount of Olives before his ascension. The revelation starts with the creation and ends with the Second Coming, occupying about 800 pages in some manuscripts.

I would therefore suggest that the prophecy of one like unto Moses in Moses 1:41 is primarily a reference to Christ. Even so, it is possible to see here a multilayer prophecy. After all, the one being referred to is not named, which leaves the reference open to other interpretations, perhaps intentionally. The prophecy could refer primarily to Christ as the revealer of the text in its present form but also to Joseph Smith as the restorer of the text in the latter days. The reference to Jesus would be
primary not only in a chronological sense but also in terms of authorial responsibility, the use of the text, and the typology of prophethood. The content and phraseology would be attributable to Jesus; Joseph Smith, although he was the revealer of the English translation, would not be the author. The performative context in which the book was originally used would also belong to the time just after Jesus’s ministry; in our dispensation the book is no longer performed as a ritual text, although it certainly resonates with our modern ordinances. Finally, Joseph Smith as a revealer of the text may be understood as a type of Christ, but not vice versa.

Another reference to the historical context of the Book of Moses is found in Moses 1:23, which refers to things in the book that are not to be had elsewhere. After recounting Moses’s encounter with Satan on the mountain, the narrator comments to the audience, “And now of this thing Moses bare record; but because of wickedness it is not had among the children of men.” If we interpret this verse along with Moses 1:40–42 as part of the revealed ancient text, it would seem to correlate the future time of wickedness spoken of in verses 40–42 with the circumstances in which the book itself was performed anciently. These passages would make perfect sense in an early Christian context. They assert, in effect, that the present text is the complete account of what Moses saw on the mountain, in contrast to the book of Genesis circulating at the time. This effect is very similar to that achieved in the references to the recording of the revelation and the time of apostasy in Jubilees 1. As in Moses 1, the time of apostasy in Jubilees is spoken of as future, but for the second-century BC audience, it is already in the past and functions as part of the background for the book itself.61

3.5. Early Manuscripts of Genesis

Fifteen manuscripts containing substantial portions of the book of Genesis have been found among the Dead Sea Scrolls at Qumran. Seven of these cover the portions of Genesis that parallel the Book of Moses (see table 2). There is no evidence in any of these of a form of Genesis that matches the Book of Moses—or, for that matter, other portions of the Joseph Smith Translation of Genesis.62 For instance, the manuscripts 1Q Gen and 4Q Gen both contain Genesis 1:1, which starts at the beginning of the respective scrolls and reads with the familiar words, “In the beginning God created the heaven and the earth.”
Table 2. Dead Sea Scrolls manuscripts of Genesis

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Number</th>
<th>Name</th>
<th>Verses of Genesis attested</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>2Q1</td>
<td>2Q Gen</td>
<td>19:27–28; 36:6; 35:35–37</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4Q3</td>
<td>4Q Genc</td>
<td>40:12–13; 40:18–41:11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4Q4</td>
<td>4Q Gend</td>
<td>1:18–27</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4Q6</td>
<td>4Q Genef</td>
<td>48:1–11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4Q7</td>
<td>4Q Geneg</td>
<td>1:1–11, 13–22; 3:6–7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4Q8a</td>
<td>4Q Genh1</td>
<td>1:8–10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4Q8b</td>
<td>4Q Genh2</td>
<td>2:17–18</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4Q9</td>
<td>4Q Genei</td>
<td>41:15–18; 23–27; 29–36; 38–43; 42:15–22, 38; 43:1–2, 5–8; 45:14–22, 26–28</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4Q10</td>
<td>4Q Genk</td>
<td>1:9, 14–16, 27–28; 2:1–3; 3:1–2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6Q1</td>
<td>6Q Gen</td>
<td>6:13–21</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8Q1</td>
<td>8Q Gen</td>
<td>17:12–19; 18:20–25</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

This evidence from the Dead Sea Scrolls, bearing witness to the status of the book of Genesis around the first century BC, has several consequences for the historical contextualization of the Book of Moses. First, if the Book of Moses is the original form of Genesis, then the loss of Moses 1 and other portions of the text must have occurred long before the first century BC. Second, in this scenario, it is unlikely that the language of the New Testament could have been influenced by any direct connection with the Book of Moses, since the portions of the Book of Moses whose language is similar to the New Testament
would have been removed from the text long before the New Testament writers lived. Third, if the Book of Moses is the original form of Genesis, then the “plain and precious things” removed from scripture by the great and abominable church, as described in 1 Nephi 13:20–29, must refer to something other than the portions of the Book of Moses that were restored by Joseph Smith, since those portions were already lost long before the rise of Christianity and the formation of the great and abominable church.

However, the notion that the Book of Moses is an early Christian text accords both with the evidence of the Dead Sea Scrolls and with an identification of the “plain and precious things” referred to by Nephi as the expansive portions of the Book of Moses. Chronologically, the ancient composition of the Book of Moses would be situated after the Dead Sea Scrolls and before the time when a Bible “proceeded forth from the mouth of a Jew” to the Gentiles, containing “the fulness of the gospel of the Lord, of whom the twelve apostles bear record,” after which time the great and abominable church altered the text (1 Nephi 13:24–26). It should be noted that Nephi’s description of the book, quoting the words of the angel in his vision, implies that it was a specifically Christian form of the Bible. In altering the Old Testament portions of the book, the great and abominable church may have sought to reduce the text to what was found in Jewish manuscripts, thereby producing the form of the Old Testament that has circulated in Christendom until the present.

3.6. Joseph Smith on the Original Form of Genesis

In two sermons given in Nauvoo in 1844, Joseph Smith discussed the form of the first verse of Genesis “when the inspired man wrote it.” On both occasions the Prophet maintained that the Hebrew word bereshit, with which the text currently begins, originally lacked the preposition be, meaning “in.” According to the Prophet, the text originally began with a reference to the “head one of the Gods” bringing forth other Gods in a council before the creation of the world. The records of the two sermons preserve several different renderings of the verse itself, some of which appear to be paraphrases; the one that seems to accord best with the Hebrew as reconstructed by the Prophet goes as follows:

The head one of the Gods brought forth the Gods. (HC 6:307).

Some aspects of the Prophet’s reading of Gen. 1:1 are not clear (including the handling of the grammar in the latter part of the verse), but what is clear is that this reading does not match the beginning of the
creation account in the Book of Moses. The latter definitely reflects the preposition “in” found in the received text of Genesis:

I am the Beginning and the End, the Almighty God; by mine Only Begotten I created these things; yea, in the beginning I created the heaven, and the earth upon which thou standest.

(Moses 2:1; emphasis added)

This passage in the Book of Moses makes no reference to a divine council, and it includes other elements not mentioned by the Prophet in his two Nauvoo sermons. Interestingly, both readings agree on the doctrinal point that “the Beginning” (Hebrew reshit, interpreted by the Prophet in his Nauvoo sermons as “the head one”) is a title of God. They also agree in positing more than one divine being involved in the creation. But the language in the two readings is quite different. Moses 2:1 is clearly in a New Testament-like style (as discussed above), while the reading presented by the Prophet in his Nauvoo sermons is more evocative of ancient Near Eastern creation accounts.

The notion that the Book of Moses was an early Christian text reconciles these divergent readings of Genesis 1 by placing them in different historical contexts. The form of Genesis 1 described by the Prophet in his Nauvoo sermons would be the original form of the text when it was composed in the first millennium BC (or earlier). The Book of Moses was a different, revealed form of the text that was doctrinally similar but oriented to different historical circumstances.

3.7. Summary

On the basis of the language of the Book of Moses, the book’s similarity to apocryphal literature, the book’s references to its own historical context, the evidence for the book of Genesis in the Dead Sea Scrolls, and Joseph Smith’s statements regarding the original form of Gen. 1:1, I have argued that the Book of Moses is best understood as an early Christian text. A preexilic Israelite context cannot be definitely excluded, but from currently available sources, a historical setting around the end of the first century AD seems most probable.

I have focused here on the portion of the Joseph Smith Translation found in Moses 1–7, which I consider to be a distinct textual unit. However, it is possible that other portions of the Joseph Smith Translation of the Old Testament are susceptible to a similar analysis. Such a view would mean that the Joseph Smith Translation from beginning to end restored an early Christian version of the Bible, rather than individual
books restored to their points of origin. It is also possible that the Book of Moses, perhaps along with other long portions of the text that were restored (such as Genesis 14:25–40 JST), was originally revealed in its early Christian context in a manner analogous to the latter-day revelation of the text through Joseph Smith.

Thus, in the search for a context of the performance of the book, we may narrow the possibilities to those that fit with an early Christian environment.

4. The Book of Moses and Early Christian Baptism

Beyond the indications discussed so far, the only clues to the performative context of the Book of Moses are the places and events referred to within the narrative. We can inquire whether the setting within the narrative may correspond to something in the setting where the narrative is performed. Comparative evidence from other ancient sources can occasionally be adduced to show that a given scenario fits with the proposed historical context. Naturally, this is a very subjective process. The process is useful, however, because it draws our attention to details in the text that might otherwise escape notice, and it leads us to careful consideration of the possibilities in light of historical sources. The conclusions, although tentative, are nevertheless more valuable than casual speculation without attention to these things.

In the entirety of the Book of Moses, not a single indoor location features explicitly in the narrative. The events of the narrative take place on mountaintops, in the Garden of Eden, in a field (Moses 5:32), at an unspecified body of water (Moses 6:64), and in several other unnamed locations. This is certainly suggestive; it could, for instance, imply an early Christian context in which worshippers might gather in outdoor locations due to their poverty or to escape persecution. However, some more subtle features of the text caution against jumping to this conclusion. Three times the text uses the phrase “shut out” with reference to being separated from God’s presence; this phrase seems to imply some sort of door or gate.65

And they heard the voice of the Lord . . . and they saw him not; for they were shut out from his presence. (Moses 5:4)

And Cain was shut out from the presence of the Lord, and with his wife and many of his brethren dwelt in the land of Nod, on the east of Eden. (Moses 5:41)
And men have become carnal, sensual, and devilish, and are shut out from the presence of God. (Moses 6:49)

Also, events in the latter part of Moses 7 may implicitly take place in the built environment of Enoch’s Zion, perhaps in a temple. Thus, it would be unwise to give too much weight to the apparent preference for outdoor locations in the narrative; it could be that the performance of the narrative took place in an indoor setting but that participants were meant to imagine the outdoor locations described in the text.

As for the specific ritual context of the book’s performance, there is one ritual in early Christianity that fits well with the internal evidence of the book, and that is the baptism of catechumens. The prominence of Adam’s baptism in Moses 6, which is doctrinally explained and then described in minute detail, certainly suggests that baptism is the most appropriate fit among Christian rites. Various links between the Book of Moses text and the early sources on baptism support this idea, as I will attempt to show.

Unlike baptism as performed in The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints today, early Christian baptism consisted of a whole sequence of initiatory rites. In our dispensation, baptisms are relatively simple services performed in meetinghouses. New converts may receive confirmation on the same day as the baptism or in the next sacrament meeting. They partake of the sacrament of the Lord’s Supper in a service separate from the baptism. One year after confirmation, converts may receive initiatory ordinances and the endowment in the temple.

In the early centuries AD, however, candidates for baptism (called catechumens) underwent a long period of instruction and testing before being deemed ready for baptism. They then received baptism together with initiatory ordinances and their first Eucharist, all in a single service. This service may also have included elements similar to the modern endowment.

No liturgical book describing baptism in detail has survived from the early centuries of Christianity. To reconstruct the specifics of the rites, we must rely on several different types of sources. First, we have the early Christian Church orders, which are handbooks outlining church doctrine and procedures, similar to our modern General Handbook. Among these, the Didache (probably composed in Syria in the late first or early second century), the Didascalia Apostolorum (Syria, early third century), and the Apostolic Tradition ascribed to Hippolytus of Rome (a composite text of which parts may date to the third century) briefly describe parts of the baptismal ritual. Early Church fathers of the second and third centuries, including Justin Martyr, Tertullian, and Cyprian,
also make reference to baptism in their writings. Also among these early
texts are two apocryphal stories from the early third century, namely the
Acts of Judas Thomas and the Acts of Xanthippe and Polyxena, which
contain brief descriptions of baptism in the course of their narratives.\(^68\)

In addition to these sources dating from the period before the
transformation of Christianity into an imperial religion under
Constantine, a group of sermons by the post-Constantinian Church
fathers Cyril of Jerusalem, Ambrose, John Chrysostom, and Theodore
of Mopsuestia are especially notable because they describe the rites in
detail, being designed to instruct recent converts about the meaning of
the rites they had received.\(^69\) Although these sermons contain elements
that are likely late additions to the rites, all four agree on core aspects, and
some of these core aspects happen to agree with the pre-Constantinian
sources.

Almost all the sources agree that baptism consisted of four basic
stages. Listed in order, the four stages are as follows:

1. Prebaptismal rites (reading and instruction, renunciation of
   Satan, profession of faith in Christ)
2. Baptismal rites (including immersion in the water)
3. Anointing rites (laying on of hands for the gift of the Holy
   Spirit, anointing, clothing in white baptismal garment)
4. Eucharist (kiss of peace, hymns, prayers, communion of
   bread and wine)

The list above mentions only the most frequently attested rites
within each stage. Edward Yarnold has attempted a more detailed
reconstruction.\(^70\) However, his reconstruction is of the post-Nicene
form of the rites; some aspects are also uncertain, particularly the
order in which the rites were performed (which varies from one source
to the next). My own reconstruction, which is given below, applies to
the earliest form of the rites. Table 3 indicates the sources attesting to
each rite.

It should be emphasized at the outset that details of this
reconstruction, beyond the four basic stages of the ritual and the rite of
baptism by immersion itself, are subjective. The process of extrapolating
these details from the sources and deciding how these rites may have
changed over time unavoidably involves educated guesswork. This is
particularly true of the order in which the rites were performed within
each stage. Nevertheless, each of the details described below is grounded
in ancient sources and makes sense in terms of the overall development of the liturgy.

First, the bishop, priests, deacons, and members would gather with the candidate at a sacred place for an all-night vigil. The candidate would be read to and instructed. Then, while the candidate was engaged in prayer, the deacons would come to him or her in the role of angels to announce, “Your prayer has been heard.” They would instruct the candidate to face west, stretch out one hand, and renounce Satan to break the former covenant with him. Then the candidate would face east, kneel, stretch out both hands in prayer, and profess faith in Christ and a commitment to follow him.

For the second stage, the whole company would form a procession and go down to the river, holding torches to light the way. By the riverside, the candidate’s eyes would be anointed with clay. He or she would then be baptized by immersion, and the bishop would declare the baptized person to be a son or child of God, using words similar to Ps. 2:7, “You are my son, this day I have begotten you.”

The procession would then return to the sacred place for the third stage of the rites. The candidate’s newly dirtied feet would be washed. In the Syrian tradition, the gift of the Holy Spirit was given in the water, but other traditions would do that at this stage. The candidate would then be anointed on the head and on different parts of the body, then clothed in a pure white baptismal garment. One ancient source mentions the giving of a new name at this stage of the rites.

In the final stage, a procession would accompany the candidate into an assembly hall for the Eucharist. The priests would form a circle around the altar of the Eucharist and would pray for members of the community, including the living and the dead. The members would exchange the “kiss of peace.” After the singing of hymns, a prayer would be offered for the Holy Spirit to descend and sanctify the Eucharist bread and wine. Then the candidate and other members would come forward to the altar to receive the communion.

Table 3. Baptismal rites according to early Christian sources

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<tr>
<th>D</th>
<th>JM</th>
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<th>DA</th>
<th>AJT</th>
<th>AXP</th>
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<th>CJ</th>
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<th>TM</th>
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<tr>
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Reading and instruction
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<td><strong>Renunciation of Satan</strong></td>
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<td><strong>Profession of faith</strong></td>
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<td><strong>Procession</strong></td>
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<td><strong>Anointing eyes with clay</strong></td>
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<td><strong>Declaration of sonship</strong></td>
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<td><strong>Washing of feet</strong></td>
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<td><strong>Laying on of hand(s) for gift of Holy Spirit</strong></td>
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<td><strong>Clothing in baptismal garment</strong></td>
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<td><strong>New name</strong></td>
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<td><strong>Eucharist</strong></td>
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<td><strong>Prayer circle</strong></td>
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<td><strong>Kiss of peace</strong></td>
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<td><strong>Hymns</strong></td>
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<td><strong>Epiclesis</strong></td>
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Abbreviations: D = Didache; JM = Justin Martyr; T = Tertullian; DA = Didascalia Apostolorum; AJT = Acts of Judas Thomas; AXP = Acts of Xanthippe and Polyxena; C = Cyprian; AT = *Apostolic Tradition* ascribed to Hippolytus of Rome; CJ = Cyril of Jerusalem; A = Ambrose; JC = John Chrysostom; TM = Theodore of Mopsuestia
Parts of the Book of Moses show similarities to these rites. In some cases, the people in the Book of Moses perform actions that are analogous to the rites. The clearest example of this is Adam’s baptism in Moses 6, the details of which are very close to those described in early Christian sources. In other cases, the dialogue of the book seems to echo aspects of the rites or teachings associated with baptism in the early sources, such as when Adam is taught to pray in the name of the Son for redemption. One could understand these latter cases as allusions to the rites, such as would help a baptismal candidate to place the rites in a doctrinal context. Remarkably, the similarities in the Book of Moses and in the four stages of the baptismal rites follow the same order. Therefore, these similarities may suggest that each section of the Book of Moses was read before a corresponding stage of the baptismal ritual, thus providing an ancient precedent and doctrinal context for the rite that would follow. T I will explain these similarities in more detail in the sections below.

One issue with this proposal is how to explain the many passages in the Book of Moses that do not relate directly to the baptismal rites. Such passages include the narrative of Moses’s experiences on the mountaintop in Moses 1:3–39, the account of the journeys of Enoch in Moses 6:26–47, and Enoch’s vision of the conflicts of nations in Moses 7:4–10. It is important to remember that even if a passage does not relate directly to a ritual, it might still serve a function that is tied to the ritual in indirect ways. Liturgies in Judaism, Christianity, and many other religions contain narratives to be recited (as well as poetry and other types of texts) that are only indirectly related to the ritual, such as readings from the Pentateuch in the synagogue liturgy and readings from the Gospels during the Eucharist. In many cases, the non-ritual passages in the Book of Moses could serve functions such as the following:

(1) They reinforce the authority of the manner of performing the ritual. For instance, the ritual of baptism described in the latter part of Moses 6 is placed within a divine revelation to Adam, which is in turn placed within a sermon of Enoch, which is in turn placed within the revelation of God to Moses on the mountain. These nested accounts lend triple authority to the description of the ritual.

(2) By providing descriptive context, they help ritual participants imagine the ancient events that constitute the precedent for the ritual. Ritual dramas in the world’s religions can be quite elaborate, using built environments, costumes, and choreography that help audiences identify with ancient events that are portrayed. In modern times, technology can also be used for this purpose. But early Christian communities were
relatively humble, sometimes even persecuted, and may not have had the resources to create elaborate stage productions. Verbal description in the performance, however, would have been one way of compensating in this regard. Just as the technique of ekphrasis can draw an audience’s mind to something that is present in the context of a performance, references to physical environments and to historical events can draw an audience’s imagination and help fill in the picture of the more essential events described. This could explain why Mount Simeon and other locations are mentioned by name and why events like the enemies of God standing afar off (Moses 7:14–15) are mentioned.

(3) They illustrate the blessings associated with receiving the rites, as well as the consequences of breaking the covenants that are entered into during the rites. The account of the apostasy of Cain and his descendants, for example, may have served as a warning to those who might choose the way of evil after confessing Christ through baptism. The account of Enoch’s face-to-face encounter with God and of the miracles he performed in Moses 7:1–18 could have illustrated the Priesthood power associated with the anointing rites, which rites may have been received after the reading of this section.

With the foregoing points in mind, I will focus in the sections below on those elements in the Book of Moses that seem to relate most directly to a baptismal ritual context. I will explain how these elements compare with the details of baptism as described in the ancient sources. In addition, I will discuss physical spaces both within the narrative and in the proposed ritual context that are important to the main arguments.

4.1. “An Exceedingly High Mountain”

The narrative of Moses 1 takes place on an unnamed mountain:

The words of God, which he spake unto Moses at a time when Moses was caught up into an exceedingly high mountain. (Moses 1:1)

These words were spoken unto Moses in the mount, the name of which shall not be known among the children of men. (Moses 1:42)

The text assumes that this mountain is located someplace on earth and not in heaven. God tells Moses, “for thou art in the world” (Moses 1:7); he also mentions “this earth upon which thou standest” (Moses 1:40). Thus, people hearing the text would naturally wonder about the location of the
mountain; the fact that it is unnamed heightens the sense of mystery in the narrative.

A first-century audience would be familiar with the motif of an unnamed sacred mountain as found in the Book of Moses. In the book of Jubilees, the unnamed “mountain of the East” is one of the four sacred places of the Lord, along with Eden, Sinai, and Zion (Jubilees 4:26). According to Matt. 4:8, the devil took Jesus into an “exceeding high mountain” to show him a vision of the kingdoms of the world. Various passages in the Gospels mention “the mountain” (to oros) as the location of various sacred events; it is possible that all these passages refer to a single unnamed mountain in Galilee known to Jesus and the disciples. The events that occur on “the mountain” include the following:

- Sermon on the Mount (Matt. 5:1)
- Ordination of the Twelve (Mark 3:13; Luke 6:12–13)
- Jesus resorting there to be alone and pray (Matt. 14:23; Luke 6:12; John 6:15)
- Teaching multitudes and performing miracles (Matt. 15:29; John 6:3)
- Transfiguration (Matt. 17:1, 9; Mark 9:2, 9; Luke 9:28)
- Post-resurrection appearance and commission to the Twelve (Matt. 28:16)

In Rev. 21:10, an angel transports John to “a great and high mountain,” where John then sees a vision of the New Jerusalem descending from heaven. Moses 1 provides the narrative frame for the vision that constitutes the rest of the Book of Moses. The mountain on which Moses receives his vision may therefore correspond symbolically to the location of the ritual in which the book would have been read. In biblical tradition both before and after the Babylonian exile, the temple is described in symbolic terms as “the mountain of the Lord” (Gen. 22:14; Isa. 2:3; 30:29; Micah 4:2; Zech. 8:3). Isaiah 2:2 characterizes the future “mountain of the Lord’s house” as an especially high location, “exalted above the hills,” in Ezek. 40:2, God sets the prophet upon “a very high mountain,” where he is given a tour of the future temple and its environs (Ezek. 40–48). Thus, it would make sense for the ritual setting of the Book of Moses to have been located at a temple.

In a recent study, I have argued that some early Christian communities had places of worship that were categorized as temples.
An example of such a temple may have been located at Edessa, where one ancient source mentioned “the temple of the church of the Christians.”\textsuperscript{79} The Christian building at Dura Europos, which featured an elaborate baptistry, an upper room, and an assembly hall for the Eucharist, may have been another example of an early Christian temple. The Didache and the Didascalia Apostolorum provide important evidence in this regard. According to the Didache, baptism for the living is to be performed in “living water”—that is, in the flowing water of a river—whenever possible.\textsuperscript{80} Both Edessa and Dura Europos were located next to rivers (the Daisan and the Euphrates respectively), so the Christian communities in those cities presumably used the rivers to perform baptisms (although, as I will explain below, the other baptismal rites were likely performed indoors). This means that the baptismal font in the baptistry at Dura Europos may have been used for a different purpose. Based on Doctrine and Covenants 124:29–33, in which the Lord states that the temple is the proper place for the ordinance of baptism for the dead, it is possible that the Christian building at Dura was a temple and that the font in that building was used for this ordinance.\textsuperscript{81} The Didascalia Apostolorum refers to the place where the Eucharist was celebrated as “the house of the Lord,” or simply “the house,” terms used in the Old Testament Peshitta for the Temple of Solomon. Since the building at Dura includes an assembly hall that corresponds in other ways to the descriptions in the Didascalia Apostolorum, it is likely that this building was understood as a “house of the Lord,” a temple like the Temple of Solomon.

Therefore, early Christian believers may have gathered at sacred houses of worship, known to them as temples or houses of the Lord, to perform baptisms for the living and the dead. In the case of baptisms for the living, part of the ritual (the second stage, including the actual baptism) may have taken place at a river if there was one nearby. As the ritual began, the baptismal candidate would hear the account of Moses’s vision in Moses 1 being read to him or her. The candidate would be able to imagine himself or herself in the position of Moses on the mountain, about to receive knowledge of primordial events (Moses 1:30–35, 40). Just as Moses received his vision on a mountain, the candidate would be receiving the rites in a temple, “the mountain of the Lord.”

4.2. “A Garden Eastward”

In Moses 2–4, the Lord narrates to Moses the events of the creation and the Garden of Eden. At the beginning and end of the garden narrative, there are indicators of direction:
And I, the Lord God, planted a garden eastward in Eden, and there I put the man whom I had formed. (Moses 3:8; compare Gen. 2:8)

So I drove out the man, and I placed at the east of the Garden of Eden, cherubim and a flaming sword, which turned every way to keep the way of the tree of life. (Moses 4:31; compare Gen. 3:24)

The reference to “a garden eastward in Eden” in Moses 3:8 implies that the speaker, God, is located in a specific place.82 Since the narrator and the voice of God overlap in the Book of Moses, this reference to “a garden eastward” must also make sense in relation to the ritual setting in which the text would be read. In other words, the reading of the text must have taken place in a setting in which there was something eastward that could represent the Garden of Eden. Otherwise, the reference to the garden in Moses 3:8 would beg the question, “Eastward of what?”

Donald Parry has noted the correspondence between the cherubim placed to the east of the Garden of Eden to guard the way toward the tree of life (Gen. 3:24) and the cherubim that decorated the eastward-facing doors of the ancient Israelite temple.83 As a priest entered the temple doors to minister in the holy place, he symbolically reversed the displacement of the fall of Adam, passing by the cherubic guardians into God’s presence.84 Early Christian sacred architecture was also typologically linked to the Garden of Eden, but the directions were reversed. In the Christian building at Dura Europos, the focal point of the assembly hall, the dais on which the bishop’s throne stood, was at the east end. Likewise, in the later basilica church, the sanctuary and the altar for the Eucharist were at the east end of the building, while the entrance was on the west. Worshippers would thus pray toward the east and approach eastward to partake of the Eucharist. Christian retellings of the Garden of Eden narrative correspondingly describe Adam being expelled from the garden westward.85 The Septuagint (a Greek translation of the Hebrew Bible), which was the form of the Old Testament used by Greek-speaking Christians in the early centuries AD, rendered Genesis 3:24 without reference to a cardinal direction, thus permitting this reversal of direction:

And he cast out Adam and settled him opposite the garden of delight, and he commanded the cherubim and the flaming sword that turns about to guard the way of the tree of life. (Septuagint, Gen. 3:24)
Moses 4:31 is closer to the Hebrew Bible, preserving the reference to the eastern location of the cherubim. The wording of the underlying Hebrew phrase in Genesis 3:24, *miq qedem legan ‘eden*, literally “eastward of the garden of Eden,” does imply that the cherubim were placed in a location adjoining the garden to the east. Yet even in this case, there is room for interpretation. Targum Neofiti, a Palestinian Aramaic translation of the Pentateuch dating to the early centuries AD,\(^{86}\) interprets the verse in a way that would support the early Christian reversal of direction:

> And he banished Adam and caused the glory of his Shekhinah to dwell from the beginning eastward of the Garden of Eden, between the two cherubim. (Targum Neofiti, Genesis 3:24)

According to this translation, the cherubim referred to are the ones placed over the mercy seat in the Holy of Holies, and the divine presence over the mercy seat is said to be “eastward of the Garden of Eden.” This seems to employ the typological connection between the Garden of Eden and the temple; however, it also seems to imply that the holiest part of both was to the east.

Therefore, the spatial indications in this part of the text could make sense in the context of a performance at an early Christian building oriented with the holiest part to the east. Cyril of Jerusalem, in describing the baptismal rites, assumes this kind of spatial layout. In the renouncing of Satan, when the baptismal candidate turns from west to east, he or she faces toward the gates of paradise, “that garden which God planted in the east, and from which our first parent was expelled for his transgression.”\(^{87}\) The later liturgical drama *The Cherub and the Thief*, which was performed in Chaldean churches at Easter, ended with the deacons who played the role of the cherubim carrying the person representing the penitent thief crucified with Jesus into the sanctuary at the east end of the church, thus signifying the thief’s entrance into paradise.\(^{88}\)

Early Christian sources do not explicitly describe a performance of the creation and Garden of Eden narratives as part of the baptismal ritual. However, they do refer to the administration of sacred teachings at the beginning of the ritual. According to the *Apostolic Tradition* ascribed to Hippolytus of Rome, the baptismal rites began with an all-night vigil during which the catechumens would be “read to and instructed.”\(^{89}\) It is certainly reasonable to suppose that the reading included a review of the events of the creation and the fall as found in Moses 2–4, underscoring the need for Christ’s sacrifice and the saving ordinance of baptism. These teachings were sacred and not to be shared indiscriminately, as we know
from Moses 4:32: “See thou show them unto no man, until I command you, except to them that believe.” This could explain why none of the sources mention a reading of these chapters specifically.

It is, however, noteworthy that three of the four post-Nicene fathers who prepared homilies on the mystery of baptism for initiates teach that the initiate has taken on the role of Adam in the garden. Cyril of Jerusalem and Theodore of Mopsuestia both relate the removal of the candidate’s clothing before baptism to Adam’s naked state in the garden; in Cyril’s words, “You truly mirrored our first-created parent Adam, who stood naked in Paradise and was not ashamed.”90 Cyril further teaches that the anointing on the forehead after baptism is “so that you might lose the shame which Adam, the first transgressor, everywhere bore with him.”91 Ambrose makes an equation between the experience of Adam and that of the initiate:

> Adam was tripped and thrown by the devil, so that the devil’s poison infected his feet; so you have your feet washed, in order to receive the special help of sanctification in the place where the serpent lay in ambush so that he cannot trip you up again.92

Ambrose similarly teaches that the initiate, by being immersed in water in the similitude of the grave, fulfills the sentence passed upon Adam that he would return to dust.93 These teachings could, perhaps, be explained in terms of humanity bearing the effects of Adam’s fall. However, the fact that each of these fathers refers to the events of the Garden of Eden narrative in the context of baptismal rites, and specifically in a way that emphasizes a typological connection between the candidate and Adam, would fit with the assumption that a performance of the Garden of Eden narrative took place during the baptismal rites.

4.3. “The Way toward the Garden”

Moses 5 describes the gospel of Jesus Christ being preached to Adam and his family through the ministry of angels, beginning with an angel teaching Adam that his animal sacrifice was “a similitude of the sacrifice of the Only Begotten of the Father” (Moses 5:7). The angel commands Adam to “call upon God in the name of the Son” (Moses 5:8), which Adam and Eve do (Moses 5:16). The Holy Ghost confirms to Adam, “as thou hast fallen thou mayest be redeemed, and all mankind, even as many as will” (Moses 5:8). In contrast to this redemptive path, the chapter also describes the unbelief and apostasy of some of Adam’s
descendants, who enter into a covenant with Satan (Moses 5:29–30, 49, 52). The phrase “loved Satan more than God” occurs three times in this chapter, and only in this chapter (Moses 5:13, 18, 28). Moses 5:14–15 encapsulates the contrast between these two paths:

And the Lord God called upon men by the Holy Ghost everywhere and commanded them that they should repent; and as many as believed in the Son, and repented of their sins, should be saved; and as many as believed not and repented not, should be damned; and the words went forth out of the mouth of God in a firm decree; wherefore they must be fulfilled.

The opening events in this chapter take place outside the Garden of Eden. Adam and Eve receive God’s commandment “from the way toward the Garden of Eden,” although they cannot see him, since they are “shut out from his presence” (Moses 5:4). Cain, after murdering Abel, travels in a different direction, dwelling in the land of Nod (Moses 5:41). The phrase “on the east of Eden” in this verse is a rendering of the Hebrew phrase qidmat-ʻeden (Gen. 4:16). Even though most major translations render this phrase as “east of Eden,” the phrase may actually mean “in front of Eden” or “over against Eden,” as it is rendered in the Septuagint; in fact, according to Brown, Driver, and Briggs, the word qidmah is “really, on geographical grounds, west of” the garden.94 I am not certain that this analysis is correct for the original meaning in Gen. 4:16, whose interpretation should be considered in relation to the Israelite temple; however, it is quite appropriate for the meaning of Moses 5:41, which I would interpret in an early Christian context. In terms of the physical space of the performance of the Book of Moses, chapter 5 could have been read aloud in a space adjoining that in which the garden narrative took place.

Moses 5 corresponds to the first stage of the early Christian baptism ritual. This stage consisted of two main events. The first included sacred instruction. As mentioned above, part of this instruction may have been a reading of the creation and Garden of Eden narratives (Moses 2–4). The narrative of Moses 5 may also have been part of this. According to the Didache, before being baptized, the candidate was to be taught the doctrine of the two ways: the way of life and the way of death. The first commandment of the way of life was to love God, while the way of death was “evil and completely cursed,” consisting of murders and all sorts of wickedness.95 Moses 5 deals extensively with these two contrasting ways. Cyril of Jerusalem and Theodore of Mopsuestia both teach that there
was a covenant made with Satan that affects the Gentile nations and puts individuals in a state of bondage; one seeking baptism must break this covenant as he or she enters into a saving covenant with God.  

The second event included a renunciation of Satan and a profession of faith. The combined witness of the post-Nicene fathers Cyril of Jerusalem, Ambrose, John Chrysostom, and Theodore of Mopsuestia allows us to reconstruct these rites in detail, although there are some minor discrepancies between the descriptions. First, the candidate is instructed what to do. According to Theodore of Mopsuestia, while the candidate is engaged in prayer, “appointed ministers” come to the candidate, playing the part of the angel who came to Cornelius to announce, “Your prayer has been heard” (Acts 10:30–31). They then instruct the candidate to perform the renunciation of Satan. Next, the candidate faces west, stretches out his or her hand, and renounces Satan. Finally, the candidate turns to face east, kneels, stretches out both hands, and confesses faith in Christ and a commitment to obey him. Broadly speaking, these actions fit with the description of Adam’s angelic visitation in Moses 5:6–9. Thus, if a performance of Moses 5 was followed by the candidate’s renunciation of Satan and profession of faith, the candidate would be able to identify with Adam.

4.4. “Down into the Water”

Moses 6 introduces the account of Enoch and his preaching, starting in verse 26. The latter part of the chapter, from verse 40 through verse 68, consists of a sermon given by Enoch in answer to a question by one Mahijah (the sermon actually continues through the first verse of chapter 7). In this sermon, Enoch briefly recounts his own call as a prophet (the fuller account is given earlier in the chapter, verses 26–36). He then describes in detail a revelation to Adam concerning baptism and gives an account of Adam’s baptism.

There are two important settings in this chapter, both of which are near water. The first is the location where Enoch receives his call as a prophet. In his brief account of this experience in verse 42, Enoch says that it occurred on the way “from the land of Cainan, by the sea east.” This may be a reference to the Dead Sea, which was known in antiquity as the “sea east,” since it marked part of the eastern boundary of the traditional land of Israel (Jos. 12:3; 15:5; Ezek. 47:18; Joel 2:20). The longer account of Enoch’s call in verses 26–36 does not mention the location, but the fact that Enoch is told to “anoint [his] eyes with clay, and wash them” agrees with the notion that it took place close to the sea, where wet
clay and water would be found. The second setting is the place of Adam’s baptism. This is obviously near the water, for the Spirit carries Adam “down into the water” to baptize him by immersion.

These locations in the narrative correspond to the location of the second stage of baptism. In the case of baptism for the living, this stage began with a torchlit procession from the place of gathering down to a river. In the case of baptism for the dead, the location is a matter of speculation; if it is true that buildings like the one at Dura Europos functioned as temples, as I have suggested, then the baptismal font within the sacred building would be used for this purpose. The procession would thus be much shorter in this case, from the instruction room to the baptistry.99

Four aspects of Moses 6 show striking similarities to the baptismal rites as described in early sources. First, God commands Enoch to anoint his eyes with clay and wash them; after this, Enoch is able to see spirits and other “things which were not visible to the natural eye” (Moses 6:35–36). This, of course, recalls the miracle of Jesus recounted in John 9:1–7, in which Jesus spits on clay to moisten it, then anoints the eyes of the blind man with the clay and commands him to wash in the pool of Siloam. Ambrose is our main source for the anointing of the eyes with clay during the baptismal rites. According to him, this “mystery,” which is prefigured in Jesus’s miracle in John 9, is performed sometime previous to the entrance into the assembly hall for the Eucharist. The purpose of this rite, according to Ambrose, is to allow the candidate to see spiritual things and thereby recognize what the sacramental emblems on the altar represent.100 This purpose coincides perfectly with the result of Enoch’s action in Moses 6:35–36. Ambrose’s brief and somewhat cryptic description is sufficient to suggest both the antiquity of the rite and its placement during the second stage, since the natural place for anointing the eyes with clay and washing it off would be by a river. Having performed this rite before being baptized, the candidate would be able to witness with spiritual eyes the descent of the Spirit after emerging from the water. The rite would also prepare the candidate to understand with greater clarity the later stages of the ritual.

Second, before Adam’s baptism as recounted by Enoch, God teaches Adam the doctrine associated with baptism. The earliest text of Moses 6:59, as preserved in the original manuscript, reads as follows:

in as much as they were born in to the world by the fall which bringeth death by water and blood and the spirit which I have made and so became of dust a living soul even so ye must
be born again of water and the spirit and cleansed by blood
even the blood of mine only begotten into the mysteries of the
kingdom of Heaven that ye may be Sanctified from all sin and
enjoy the words of eternal life in this world and eternal life in
the world to come even immortal glory

The language here, especially the use of the word *mysteries*, is very
similar to descriptions of the baptismal rites in the early sources. Cyril
of Jerusalem, for example, refers to the baptismal rites as “these spiritual
and celestial mysteries” and “initiation into the mysteries.”

Third, Adam’s baptism itself is described in unusual detail, as would
be appropriate for a ritual text meant to prepare initiates for the rite:

And it came to pass, when the Lord had spoken with Adam,
our father, that Adam cried unto the Lord, and he was caught
away by the Spirit of the Lord, and was carried down into the
water, and was laid under the water, and was brought forth
out of the water. And thus he was baptized, and the Spirit of
God descended upon him, and thus he was born of the Spirit,
and became quickened in the inner man. (Moses 6:64)

Note that Adam receives the Holy Spirit immediately after coming
out of the water; there is no separate ordinance of confirmation. Early
Christian sources from Syria describe the reception of the Holy Spirit in
an almost identical way. On the basis of these sources, Yarnold speculates
that the giving of the Holy Spirit with the officiator’s hand placed on the
baptized person’s head during the immersion itself “seems to have been
the original pattern for initiation in the Syrian churches.” This could
help further contextualize the ritual elements of the Book of Moses in a
Syrian environment, which would fit with the evidence for the existence
of Christian temples in Syria as described above.

Fourth, immediately after being baptized, Adam hears “a voice out
of heaven” telling him that he is “baptized with fire, and with the Holy
Ghost” (Moses 6:66). The voice then says, “Behold, thou art one in me,
a son of God” (Moses 6:68). Two very early sources describe a similar
occurrence in which initiates were declared to be sons of God, just like
Christ at his baptism. Justin Martyr writes as follows:

When [Jesus] had stepped into the water, a fire was kindled in
the Jordan; and when he came out of the water, the Holy Spirit
lighted on him like a dove . . . and there came at the same
instant from the heavens a voice . . . You are my Son; this day
I have begotten you; [the Father] saying that his generation
would take place for all people, at the time when they would become acquainted with him: You are my son; this day I have begotten you. (Justin Martyr, *Dialogue with Trypho*, 88)  

Justin quotes the declaration of sonship from Ps. 2:7. The statement that Christ’s “generation” (that is, as the Son of God) “would take place for all people,” indicating that the declaration was received by all who were baptized, resembles Moses 6:68: “Behold, thou art one in me, a son of God; and thus may all become my sons.” According to the Didascalia Apostolorum, which likely reflects Syrian practice, it was the bishop who represented the Lord in making this declaration:

> If then one who should say any of these things to a layman is found to fall under so great a condemnation, how much more if he should dare to say aught against the deacon, or against the bishop . . . through whom in baptism, through the imposition of the bishop’s hand, the Lord bore witness to each of you and uttered his holy voice, saying, Thou art my son, this day I have begotten you. (Didascalia Apostolorum, 9.2.32)  

The narrative in Moses 6, therefore, corresponds to what early Christian baptismal candidates would experience in the second stage of baptism. If this chapter were read in the sacred house immediately before the procession to the river, the candidate would be able to imagine himself or herself reenacting Enoch’s opening of his spiritual eyes and Adam’s baptism. On emerging from the water and being declared a son of God, the baptized person would be able to feel a connection to Adam, who first followed “the example of the Son of the living God” (2 Nephi 31:16).

### 4.5. “Upon the Mount Simeon”

The first part of Moses 7 recounts a mountaintop vision of Enoch (Moses 7:2–11) and continues the account of Enoch’s ministry. In Moses 7:2, the Lord tells Enoch to go up to “the mount Simeon.” There is a mount Simeon in Palestine that would have been known to a first-century Christian audience. The mountain known in rabbinic sources as Ṭūr Šim’on is the modern Khirbet Sammuniyeh, located in the Nahal Sorek west of Jerusalem. The mountain is named after Simon the Hasmonean, a Jewish leader of the second century BC. An archaeological survey of the site revealed evidence of occupation from the early Second Temple period to the Byzantine period. This mountain overlooks the
traditional land of Canaan and the plain of Sharon to the northwest, which would correspond to the “people of Canaan” and the “land of Sharon” that Enoch saw from the mountain (Moses 7:6, 9). The “people of Shum” mentioned in Moses 7:5 could be a reference to the “men of renown” mentioned in Gen. 6:4 as understood in the first century AD. The underlying Hebrew phrase in this verse is ‘anše haššem, literally “people of the name”; in the Aramaic translation of Targum Onkelos, the phrase is rendered as ‘enāšīn dišmā, where the last word is the definite form of the Aramaic word for “name,” šum. If this last word were read as a proper name, the Aramaic phrase could be understood as “the people of Shum.” The narrative in the first part of Moses 7 could therefore help to set the scene in the Levant in the distant past.109

For the third stage of the baptismal rites, the newly baptized person and the saints gathered for the event would return from the river to the sacred building where the first stage of the rites had taken place. The precise location of this third stage within the building is uncertain. The Christian building at Dura Europos had an upper room above the baptistry, which may have been an appropriate place, given the similarity between some of the rites and those performed in the upper room of the Last Supper as described in the Gospels (particularly the washing of the feet). The ascent from the river back to the building, and possibly a
further ascent within the building, would reflect Enoch’s ascent to the mount Simeon.

The narrative in the first part of Moses 7 includes several aspects that may relate to the third stage of the baptismal rites. First, note that this chapter mentions various actions of Enoch in a particular order. There is mention of Enoch “standing upon” two different places (Moses 7:2–3), the only uses of the phrase “stand upon” in the Book of Moses. Then Enoch’s visual experience is mentioned:

And it came to pass that I turned and went up on the mount; and as I stood upon the mount, I beheld the heavens open, and I was clothed upon with glory; and I saw the Lord; and he stood before my face, and he talked with me, even as a man talketh one with another, face to face; and he said unto me: Look, and I will show unto thee the world for the space of many generations. (Moses 7:3–4)

At the end of this passage and in the following verses, Enoch hears the Lord speaking to him. Finally, the text emphasizes Enoch’s speech, first as he calls upon the people to repent (Moses 7:12) and then as he leads the people of God to battle against their enemies (Moses 7:13).

The third stage of the rites began with the washing of the feet, as appropriate immediately after entering the sacred house, and as would be appropriate for “standing upon” sacred locations (Moses 7:2–3). The anointing with scented oil (myron) followed. Cyril of Jerusalem gives the most detailed description of this rite:

First you were anointed on the forehead so that you might lose the shame which Adam, the first transgressor, everywhere bore with him, and so that you might “with unveiled face behold the glory of the Lord” (2 Cor. 3:18). Next you were anointed on the ears, that you might acquire ears which will hear those divine mysteries of which Isaiah said, “The Lord has given me an ear to hear with” (Isa. 50:4). . . . Then you were anointed on the nostrils, so that after receiving the divine chrism you might say, “We are the aroma of Christ to God among those who are being saved” (2 Cor. 2:15). After that, you were anointed on the chest, so that “having put on the breastplate of righteousness” (Eph. 6:14), “you might stand against the wiles of the devil” (Eph. 6:11).

Here the anointing is explicitly related to the actions of seeing the Lord and hearing his word, in the same order as in Moses 7. Further, Cyril
goes on to connect the anointing to having power over the adversary, just as Moses 7 describes Enoch having power over enemies after his mountaintop experience:

> Just as Christ after his baptism and visitation by the Holy Spirit went out and successfully wrestled with the enemy, so you also, after your holy baptism and sacramental anointing, put on the armor of the Holy Spirit, confront the power of the enemy, and reduce it saying, “I can do all things through Christ who strengthens me.” (Phil. 4:13)

Enoch’s reference to his having been “clothed upon with glory” (Moses 7:3) could allude to the rite of clothing in the baptismal garment, which accompanied the anointing. All the early sources that mention this rite make a point of the fact that this garment was pure white. Cyril of Jerusalem quotes Isa. 61:10 to assert that the whiteness of the garment symbolized salvation and gladness. Both in the context of the Book of Moses narrative and in the baptismal rites, the clothing reverses the nakedness of Adam and Eve associated with the fall (Moses 4:13).

Finally, Moses 7:18 states that the Lord “called his people Zion.” One source, the apocryphal Acts of Xanthippe and Polyxena, suggests that a new name was given to a person during the baptismal rites in conjunction with the washing of the feet and the anointing with oil. The Lord’s action of giving a name to his people would fit with the naming at baptism.

4.6. “The City of Holiness, Even Zion”

The latter part of Moses 7 gives an account of Enoch’s heavenly ascent and apocalyptic vision. The location from which Enoch begins his prayer and ascends is not explicit; however, the beginning of this part of Moses 7 could imply that the location was in Enoch’s city of Zion:

> And Enoch continued his preaching in righteousness unto the people of God. And it came to pass in his days, that he built a city that was called the City of Holiness, even Zion. And it came to pass that Enoch talked with the Lord; and he said unto the Lord: Surely Zion shall dwell in safety forever. But the Lord said unto Enoch: Zion have I blessed, but the residue of the people have I cursed. (Moses 7:19–20)

Zion plays a large role in the ensuing narrative, being mentioned several times in the prayer and vision (Moses 7:20–21, 23, 27, 31, 47, 53, 62, 64). In all, there are eighteen occurrences of the name Zion in the
latter part of Moses 7, and this is the only part of the Book of Moses that mentions the name. This part both begins and ends with references to Enoch’s city of Zion; the last verse of the chapter mentions the city in an expansion of Gen. 5:24:

And Enoch and all his people walked with God, and he dwelt in the midst of Zion; and it came to pass that Zion was not, for God received it up into his own bosom; and from thence went forth the saying, Zion is Fled. (Moses 7:69)

Around the first century, Zion was understood to be a physical location in Jerusalem. Although this name traditionally referred to the temple mount, some sources imply that first-century Jews and possibly Christians understood Mount Zion to be the western hill of Jerusalem, where the Church of the Holy Sepulcher came to be situated. One could understand Enoch’s city to have been located in the same place as Jerusalem but to have been taken up into heaven before Jerusalem was built.

Conceptions of Zion in the first century accord well with the motif of Zion in the Book of Moses. Mount Zion features prominently in Jewish and Christian apocryphal literature. Jubilees 1:27–29 describes the eschatological Zion, where the Lord’s sanctuary will be, and from which he shall reign. In Jubilees 4:26, Mount Zion is mentioned as one of the four sacred places of the Lord. Here Mount Zion is best interpreted as identical with the “mountain of incense” (Mount Qater), where Enoch offers incense to the Lord. The text says about Mount Zion that it “will be sanctified in the new creation for the sanctification of the earth. On account of this the earth will be sanctified from all sin and from pollution throughout eternal generations.” This sanctification seems to be associated here with the offering of incense instituted by Enoch. The portrayal of Mount Zion in Jubilees 4, then, would be parallel to the portrayal of Zion in Moses 7, as the place where Enoch prays and receives promises concerning the latter days.

Early Christianity inherited from Second Temple Judaism a juxtaposition of Mount Sinai as the place of the Lord’s appearance to Moses, and Mount Zion as the place of the Lord’s appearance enthroned between the cherubim in his temple. Early Christian interpreters added to this juxtaposition the identity of the Lord of these theophanies as Jesus Christ, who also manifested himself in his divine glory to the Apostles on the mount of transfiguration. In this light, it is significant that a mountaintop theophany to Moses (Moses 1) and a parallel theophany on
Mount Zion (Moses 7) function together as an inclusio of what can be considered a literary unit, Moses 1–7.

The early Christian understanding of Zion was linked to the crucifixion of Jesus on mount Golgotha through a messianic interpretation of Psalm 2, which Psalm describes the enthronement of the Lord’s anointed on Mount Zion.\(^{120}\) This accords with the fact that Moses 7:53–56 combines an account of Enoch beholding the crucifixion and a self-proclamation by the Lord as “Messiah, the King of Zion.” This passage also proclaims blessedness for those who enter at the “gate” and climb up by Christ, just as Psalm 2 ends with a proclamation of blessedness for those who trust in the Son.

Another prominent aspect of the early Christian understanding of Zion was the idea of the Lamb, representing the crucified Christ, standing on mount Zion in the company of his redeemed people, based on Rev. 5:6 and 14:1.\(^ {121}\) Similarly, Moses 7:47 brings together the images of “the Lamb . . . slain from the foundation of the world” (cf. Rev. 13:8) and the redeemed people of Zion.

Moses 7 portrays Zion not only as a city but also as a community living together in perfect unity, righteousness, and holiness (see Moses 7:18–19). This portrayal fits with the gathering of the community of saints for the Eucharist in the final stage of baptism. The Lord’s words to Enoch in Moses 7:53 refer to those who have been baptized:

> Whoso cometh in at the gate and climbeth up by me shall never fall; wherefore, blessed are they of whom I have spoken, for they shall come forth with songs of everlasting joy.

This would make perfect sense in the context of the Eucharist after baptism, in which the newly baptized person would literally sing hymns and “come forth” to the altar of the Eucharist to partake of the bread and wine.

The earliest source on the Christian Eucharist, the Didache, which may date as early as the first century, surprisingly contains none of the prayers or gestures associated with the Eucharist liturgy in later times. Instead, the focus of all three of the short sacrament hymns contained in the Didache is on eschatology: the events of the end times. This coincides with Enoch’s apocalypse in the latter part of Moses 7. An especially striking example is the divine promise of gathering the elect from the four quarters of the earth in Moses 7:62, which closely resembles the hymns in Didache 9 and 10:
to gather out mine elect from the four quarters of the earth, unto a place which I shall prepare, an Holy City (Moses 7:62)

Just as this broken bread was scattered upon the mountains and was gathered and became one, so may your church be gathered from the ends of the earth into your kingdom (Didache 9:4)

Remember, Lord, your church . . . and gather the sanctified from the four winds, into your kingdom, which you have prepared for it. (Didache 10:5)

Finally, the “kiss of peace” exchanged between saints during the Eucharist may have taken on eschatological meaning in light of Moses 7:63, which describes the greeting exchanged between the Lord’s redeemed people at the beginning of the thousand-year period of rest: “and we will fall upon their necks, and they shall fall upon our necks, and we will kiss each other.”

4.7. Summary

The foregoing comparison of elements in the Book of Moses and in early Christian sources on baptism demonstrates what seems to be an extensive correlation covering Moses chapters 1 through 7. Remarkably, the similarities in the Book of Moses and in the sources on baptism follow the same order, each section of the Book of Moses corresponding to one of the four stages of baptism. The geographical locations in which events take place in the Book of Moses may also relate symbolically to the locations where events of the baptism ritual were performed. The main parallels are laid out in table 4.

Table 4. Parallels between the Book of Moses and early Christian baptism

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Book of Moses</th>
<th>Early Christian baptism</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Prebaptismal rites</td>
<td>Location of the rites: a temple</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Location of frame narrative: “an exceedingly high mountain” (Moses 1:1)</td>
<td>Candidate assumed to have experienced what Adam and Eve experienced in the garden (Moses 3–4)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Book of Moses</strong></td>
<td><strong>Early Christian baptism</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>---------------------------------------------------------------------------------</td>
<td>---------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Righteous posterity of Adam and Eve contrasted with wicked posterity of Cain</td>
<td>Doctrine of the two ways taught to the candidate</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Covenant with Satan, ministry of angels, repentance</td>
<td>Renunciation of Satan</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Calling upon God</td>
<td>Profession of faith</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td><strong>Baptismal rites</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Most of the action takes place near water</td>
<td>Rites take place by a river</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Enoch commanded to anoint eyes with clay in order to see spiritual things (Moses 6:35–36)</td>
<td>Anointing eyes with clay in order to see things of the Spirit (Ambrose)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Baptism described as being “born again” and “cleansed . . . into the mysteries of the kingdom of heaven” (Moses 6:59)</td>
<td>Baptism described as “initiation into” the “spiritual and celestial mysteries” (Cyril of Jerusalem)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Adam baptized with fire and the Holy Ghost immediately after coming out of the water (Moses 6:65–66)</td>
<td>Syrian rite involves bestowal of the Holy Spirit in the water immediately after immersion</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>God’s voice from heaven declares Adam to be a son of God (Moses 6:66–68)</td>
<td>Bishop, representing God, declares candidate to be a son of God</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td><strong>Anointing rites</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Enoch goes up to mount Simeon (Moses 7:2–3)</td>
<td>Baptized person and congregation return to the temple</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Enoch is “clothed upon with glory” (Moses 7:3)</td>
<td>Clothing in pure white baptismal garment</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Enoch sees the Lord and talks with him “face to face” (Moses 7:4)</td>
<td>Anointing of the forehead so one can “with unveiled face behold the glory of the Lord” (Cyril of Jerusalem)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
5. Excursus: A More Ancient Version?

It is possible that the Book of Moses existed in some form in preexilic Israel. The book itself asserts that it is a restoration of a revelation given to Moses (see Moses 1:40–42). Just as Joseph Smith restored the book in the form in which we have it today, the book may have anciently (around the first century AD, as I have argued) restored an even earlier text.

The language of this earlier book may have been different—less like the New Testament and early Christian literature and more like the Hebrew Bible and ancient Near Eastern literature—although the doctrines taught in the book would have been similar. Like the Book of Moses revealed through Joseph Smith, this hypothetical preexilic book may have been used in a ritual context, possibly an initiation ritual analogous to early Christian baptism. Likely candidates for such a ritual context would be the consecration of priests and the coronation of kings, both of which were performed at the temple and involved rites of anointing and investiture.122 Indeed, it is possible that this hypothetical earlier form of the book included both a liturgy for the installation of priests in the first part of the book (compare the Aaronic Priesthood rites of sacrifice and baptism in Moses 5–6) and a liturgy for the coronation of kings in the latter part (compare the declaration of sonship at the end of Moses 6, corresponding to the coronation text of Psalm 2, and the ascent of Enoch and his face-to-face encounter with God in Moses 7).
The ritual of the consecration of priests provides especially instructive elements for comparison with the Book of Moses. This ritual is described in Ex. 29:1–37; 40:12–15; and Leviticus 8. The ritual lasted seven days, recalling the seven days of the creation (Ex. 29:35; Lev. 8:33–35; compare Ezek. 43:26). The primary location of the rite was “at the door of the tabernacle of the congregation” (Ex. 29:4, 10–11, 32), presumably corresponding to the temple porch in the temple of Solomon. First, the one performing the rites would need to prepare for the ritual by bringing the animals and other materials to offer (Ex. 29:1–3). Those who were to be consecrated would be brought to the door of the temple (Ex. 29:4; 40:12). They would be washed with water, clothed in the various articles of priestly clothing, and then anointed with a special compound of anointing oil (Ex. 29:4–9; 40:12–15). Then came the last part of the ritual, which consisted of the offering of animal sacrifices followed by a sacred meal of meat and bread eaten before the Lord (Ex. 29:10–28, 31–34).

Some parts of the Book of Moses would fit better or equally well in an ancient Israelite ritual context. Perhaps most obviously, the portions of Moses 2–4 that read precisely like the Masoretic text of Gen. 1–3 point to an ancient Israelite historical environment. The creation account in Genesis 1 is widely considered to be priestly in style and ideology. Donald Parry has pointed out aspects of the Garden of Eden narrative that invoke priestly matters, including sacred vestments. As has been mentioned above, the spatial layout of the garden and the placement of the cherubim correspond to the Israelite temple.

In addition, the overall positioning of Moses 5 and 6, dealing with the rites of sacrifice and baptism respectively, could correlate with the two main features of the temple court: the altar of sacrifice and the giant laver. The fact that Adam and Eve offer sacrifice only after being shut out from the Garden of Eden (Moses 5:4–5) may relate to the outdoor location of the altar of sacrifice.

The prominence of animal sacrifice in the Book of Moses also fits much better in an Old Testament context than an early Christian one. There are three animal sacrifices in the Book of Moses: Adam’s sacrifice of an unspecified animal (Moses 5:4–8); Abel’s sacrifice of sheep (Moses 5:17, 20); and Seth’s sacrifice, which is said to be “like unto his brother Abel” (Moses 6:3). Although it is not certain what kind of animal Adam sacrificed, rabbinic sources mention Adam sacrificing a bull soon after his expulsion from the Garden of Eden. These three sacrifices could correspond to the three sacrifices of the consecration rite for priests: a bull, then a ram, and then a second ram (Ex. 29:10–28).
Aside from explicit references to animal sacrifice, references to blood in the Book of Moses would seem at home in ancient Israelite ritual, in which blood played a more important role than it later would in Christian ritual. For instance, the reference to Abel’s blood crying from the ground, which had “opened her mouth to receive” the blood (Moses 5:35–36; Genesis 4:10–11), recalls the pouring of the blood of the sacrificial bullock on the ground by the altar during the consecration rites (Ex. 29:12). The Lord’s statement in Moses 6:60, “For by the water ye keep the commandment; by the Spirit ye are justified, and by the blood ye are sanctified,” is also interesting. As discussed above, both the justification by the Spirit and the general collocation of water, spirit, and blood are found in the New Testament. The idea of being sanctified by blood, interpreted in a Christian context, could refer to the wine of the Eucharist. However, the only collocation of the concepts of sanctification and blood in the scriptures is in the priestly laws of the Old Testament: one is washed with water and then “sanctified” (a word derived from the Hebrew root q’dš) by blood (Ex. 29:1, 20–21; 40:12–13).

These elements of the Book of Moses could have been part of a preexilic Israelite version of the book and could have been retained when the book was revealed in early Christian times. These elements would serve as a subtle indicator of the book’s earlier history. They would also help Christians appreciate the continuity between their own rites and those of earlier Israel. In fact, some first-century Jewish Christians would likely have seen the rites of the temple in Jerusalem before it was destroyed in AD 70.

Beyond the internal evidence of the Book of Moses, it may be possible to reconstruct some aspects of an earlier form of the Book of Moses based on outside sources. It is a reasonable assumption that this earlier form of the book corresponds to the original form of Genesis described by Joseph Smith in his Nauvoo sermons, and that this form of Genesis was found on the plates of brass mentioned and quoted in the Book of Mormon. These sources all point to a text that was doctrinally similar to the Book of Moses but different from it in language and in matters of detail. The following three brief soundings into these sources illustrate some of the differences that may be indicative of the more ancient version of the book.

(1) Joseph Smith’s Nauvoo sermons presuppose an ancient Hebrew text beginning with what corresponds to Gen. 1:1. Note that God’s commandment in the first part of Moses 2:1, “write the words which I speak,” indicates that the latter part of the verse (the part corresponding
to Gen. 1:1) was originally the start of the written text. The first chapter of Moses and the first part of Moses 2:1, which refer to Moses in the third person, would not have been part of the original written text but may have been transmitted orally when the text was ritually performed.

The beginning of the text would have read without the Hebrew preposition ב; the text would thus have started with the words reshīṭ ’elōhim “the head one of the gods,” referring to a divine council, as explained by Joseph Smith in his Nauvoo sermons. As mentioned above, the reference to a divine council echoes ancient Near Eastern concepts of the creation.

(2) Among the parts of the Book of Mormon that make reference to the plates of brass is Lehi’s discourse to his son Jacob in 2 Nephi 2, in which discourse Lehi recounts some of the events in the Garden of Eden. Lehi gives various indications that he is quoting from the plates of brass, including “according to the things which I have read” (2 Nephi 2:17) and “I have chosen the good part [of the account], according to the words of the prophet” (2 Nephi 2:30). Lehi’s account includes some details that expand on the Masoretic text in ways similar to the Book of Moses but that differ from the Book of Moses in significant details. Lehi says that the adversary was “an angel of God” who “had fallen from heaven; wherefore, he became a devil” (2 Nephi 2:17). In my discussion of New Testament language, I noted that the use of the term “the devil” to refer to Satan (Moses 4:4) is characteristic of New Testament language. While the Old Testament contains no references to “the devil,” the King James Version of the Old Testament does use the generic noun “devils,” always in the plural, to translate the Hebrew words šēdīm “demons” and šeʾirīm “goat-demons” (Lev. 17:7; Deut. 32:17; 2 Chron. 11:15; Ps. 106:37). Thus Lehi’s statement, perhaps following the text on the plates of brass, uses the generic noun as would be appropriate in an ancient Israelite context. Further, in Lehi’s account, the adversary is identical with the serpent: “Wherefore, he said unto Eve, yea, even that old serpent, who is the devil” (here the definite article before the word devil may be used to refer back to the devil mentioned in the previous verse). This differs from the Book of Moses, in which the serpent is the devil’s ally but is not identical to him (Moses 4:6). The account transmitted by Lehi resonates with ancient Near Eastern notions of a consubstantial serpentine/human adversary, while the account in Moses 4 resonates with first-century apocryphal literature.

(3) Alma, in his discourse to the people of Ammonihah, also describes events that overlap with the Book of Moses (Alma 12–13). It is
impossible to know how much of Alma’s description of events is quoted from a written account and how much is Alma’s own explanation. However, while Alma’s account closely resembles the Book of Moses in some ways, it also includes some differences. Alma clearly demarcates the order of events after the expulsion of Adam and Eve from the garden:

5. God sends angels to converse with men (Alma 12:28–29).
6. Men begin to call on the name of God (Alma 12:30; compare Gen. 4:26).
7. God converses with men and makes known to them the plan of redemption (Alma 12:30).
8. God gives men commandments to refrain from evil, to repent, and not to harden their hearts; those who keep these commandments are promised that they will enter into God’s rest, but God swears in his wrath that those who harden their hearts and do iniquity will not enter into his rest (Alma 12:31–35; compare Ps. 95:7–11).
9. God ordains priests to teach these things to the people (Alma 13:1).

This account includes the same doctrinal elements found in the Book of Moses, but it differs significantly in matters of detail. Alma’s account refers to “men” in general, leaving off the account of Adam after he is barred from the tree of life (Alma 12:22–23), while the Book of Moses focuses on Adam’s redemption (Moses 5:1–12; 59; 6:51–68). In the Book of Moses, calling upon God is the catalyst that starts the redemptive process (Moses 5:4); after Adam and Eve call upon God, they receive commandments directly from him (Moses 5:5), and only after Adam’s obedience to these commandments does an angel appear to him and teach him of the plan of redemption (Moses 5:6–10). Adam and Eve teach these things to their children, after which “the Lord God call[s] upon men by the Holy Ghost everywhere and command[s] them that they should repent” (Moses 5:14). The commandments mentioned by Alma include “that they should not do evil” (Alma 12:32) and to “repent and harden not your hearts” (Alma 12:33), which commandments could fit in an Old Testament context (Ex. 23:2; 1 Kings 8:47; Ps. 95:8). In contrast, the commandments to “believe in the Son and repent of their sins” (Moses 5:15) seem more appropriate in a first-century context (Mark 1:4; 2:17; John 3:16, 36).

The ordination of priests, which Alma says took place at “the time when the Lord God gave these commandments unto his children” (Alma 13:1), is particularly significant. Alma discusses this ordination at length
(Alma 13:2–9); his description focuses on the manner of ordination as a type of Christ (Alma 13:2) and ends with the word *amen* (Alma 13:9). Although it is unclear how much of this description is quoted from the written account, it seems analogous to the descriptions of ordinances in the Book of Moses (see Moses 5:6–7, 59; 6:52, 59–60, 68), which may suggest that the account Alma is paraphrasing was designed to establish an ancient precedent and doctrinal basis for the rite of priestly ordination, just as the Book of Moses establishes an ancient precedent and doctrinal basis for the baptism ritual.

Therefore, we may picture an ancient Israelite version of Genesis that read differently from the current Masoretic text. This ancient version corresponded in some ways to the Book of Moses, particularly in terms of doctrine, but it included language and motifs appropriate to an ancient Near Eastern historical context. Instead of being designed for use in a baptism ritual, this ancient version may have been designed for an analogous ritual such as the consecration of priests or the coronation of kings.

Throughout this essay, I have assumed that the language of the book as revealed by Joseph Smith accurately reflects the ancient language of the book. The idea that the modern revelation accurately reflects ancient language, while the ancient revelation includes significant modifications from a preceding version, is not as incongruent as it may initially seem. In modern times, including Joseph Smith’s nineteenth-century environment, the assumption that an edition or translation of an ancient text should accurately reflect the original has prevailed in Western culture. However, ancient notions of the transmission of sacred texts allowed for a wider range of innovation, as a comparison between the various ancient versions of the Bible demonstrates. The ancient and modern restorations of the Book of Moses could, therefore, have conformed to prevalent notions of textual transmission current in their respective eras. Of course, some have argued that Joseph Smith’s translation process allowed for a wide range of innovation, such as the addition of his own inspired commentary. However, I find no evidence of exclusively modern vocabulary, institutions, or cultural concepts in the Book of Moses, and I find a great deal that I think fits more comfortably in an ancient historical context than in a modern one. Thus, if any of the text of the Book of Moses is modern, then it was made to seem ancient—and further, with a remarkably convincing orientation to first-century language and culture.
6. Conclusion

In conclusion, the evidence of the language, genre, internal references, and textual status of the Book of Moses is enough to believe that an early Christian context close to the first century AD is likely. Further, some features of the book may fit with a baptismal ritual context. This could suggest that what Joseph Smith revealed through his inspired translation of the Bible was a distinctively Christian text belonging to the Church of the Lamb in the meridian of time, rather than a retrojection of each book to its point of origin.

The Book of Moses includes some elements that seem to be directly connected to the book’s ritual context. These elements include the asides to the audience at the ends of chapters, the angel’s instructions to Adam in Moses 5, the revelation to Adam on the doctrine of baptism in Moses 6, and the detailed description of Adam’s baptism. Adam’s reception of the Holy Ghost immediately after his immersion, without a separate rite of confirmation, may point to a Syrian origin of these ritual elements. This would accord with the evidence of temples in early Christian Syria, including the Christian buildings at Edessa and Dura Europos. There are also portions of the text, such as the conflicts of nations in the first half of Moses 7, that build up the narrative and relate only indirectly to the ritual context. Geographical names mentioned in these portions (the sea east, Mount Simeon, Sharon, and Canaan) may point to an origin in the environs of Jerusalem. The character Mahijah’s connection to the Book of Giants would also fit with a Judean origin. Thus, it is possible to understand the Book of Moses as an early Syrian Christian ritual text that incorporates a reworked version of Genesis with fragments of Judean apocryphal narratives.

As with any unprovenanced ancient text, conclusions will always be tentative to some degree. Indeed, as we are dealing with a text revealed in modern times, the fact that the text is ancient will always be a matter of faith, unless an ancient manuscript bearing the same text happens to be found. In the meantime, we are limited to reconstructions of what we believe to be likely scenarios. But this study underscores the importance of accounting for the language and other features of the text from a historical standpoint. The question is not just whether a particular scenario is possible but whether it is likely compared to other possible scenarios. Thus, while individual New Testament-like phrases in the book might be traceable to Old Testament antecedents, it is the high concentration of such phrases in the Book of Moses, and nowhere else in the Old Testament, that suggests the probability of a first-century
origin of the book. This evidence seems to agree with the book’s own references to its historical context and with the evidence of the Dead Sea Scrolls. Every element of the Book of Moses, as far as I have been able to determine, would fit comfortably within an early Christian context, and particularly within the ritual context of baptism as reconstructed from the available sources.

Whitney Shiner’s suggestion that the Gospel of Mark was performed at the water’s edge as part of the baptismal rites provides an interesting complement to the arguments I have made here. If his suggestion is correct, it could be that the Gospel of Mark was used in baptisms for the living in parts of Christendom that did not have access to temples. In places that had temples, the Book of Moses would be used instead.

Just as Joseph Smith restored the text in modern times, the early Christian text may also have been a restoration of a much earlier text, although reformulated in language appropriate to the times (compare 2 Nephi 31:3; Doctrine and Covenants 1:24). This earlier text, which may be identical with the original form of Genesis, may also have been used in a ritual context, possibly in the consecration of priests or the coronation of kings.

This study has some implications for Latter-day Saint approaches to biblical scholarship. Some recent discussion has noted the apparent conflict between the Book of Moses and the four-source hypothesis for the composition of the Pentateuch. If the Book of Moses in its current form is a first-century text, then it does not necessarily present a challenge to the four-source hypothesis, since that hypothesis deals with the much earlier origins of the text. However, with regard to the first two chapters of Genesis in particular, this study does offer a counterpoint to the notion that there are two creation accounts of separate origin. I have argued that the original form of Genesis, as composed in the preexilic period, may have been an analogue to the Book of Moses, used in a similar ritual context and containing similar doctrines. This supports an interpretation of the first two chapters that has already been put forward by myself and others. Briefly stated, this interpretation is that what appear to be two conflicting accounts of the creation represent two stages of a ritual: a dramatization of the heavenly council and of the creation as viewed from heaven (Genesis 1:1–2:3), then a representation of events on earth (Genesis 2:4–25). Thus, the different divine names in the two sections, which the source-critical approach has interpreted as evidence for different sources, could simply refer to different divine beings: the Elohim or gods of the divine council in the first stage, and Yahweh
Elohim, the god commissioned to carry out the council’s decisions by forming the world, in the second stage. The events of creation are mentioned in a different order in the second stage according to the role they play in the ritual. Of course, this interpretation does not exclude the possibility that the texts for these two stages are brought together from originally disparate sources. But at least for these chapters, it removes the necessity of positing different sources to explain seeming conflicts between the accounts. Both Genesis 1 and Genesis 2–3 contain priestly terminology and reflect priestly concerns, so both pericopes are easily attributable to a single priestly source.¹³³

Further, this study may help to understand the incremental restoration of Priesthood ordinances through Joseph Smith in terms of a cross-historical pattern of Gospel dispensations. Joseph Smith restored the Book of Moses in its first-century form (albeit in English translation). The text was abstracted from its original performative context, but the markers of that context were left intact, allowing modern believers (including Joseph Smith himself) to imagine God’s influence on his children through ordinances in a previous dispensation. Later, Joseph Smith revealed the ordinances of the temple for the latter-day dispensation. These ordinances are closely analogous to the Book of Moses in terms of the revealed transmission, overall structure, relationship between narrative and performance, and doctrinal content. However, they are quite different from the Book of Moses in terms of specific content, language, and ritual context. I have also suggested, on the basis of a comparison of the Book of Moses with other sources, that there may have been a preexilic Israelite text similar to the Book of Moses in some ways but different in terms of language and ritual use. If this suggestion is correct, then the relationship between the Book of Moses and the revealed latter-day ordinances is precisely like the relationship between the preexilic text and the first-century Book of Moses. In each dispensation, we see the revelation of a new ritual text that parallels those of previous dispensations but that is adapted to the unique cultural context of the new dispensation. Just as evidence of a preexilic form of the text is discernible in the Book of Moses, our modern ordinances bear traces of the texts of previous dispensations, allowing perceptive participants to glimpse the awesome antiquity of the rites. All of this suggests that we have only begun to understand the intricacies of Restoration scripture.
Discussion

Jo Ann H. Seely:
David, you have presented an interesting way of looking at the text and context of the Book of Moses. I thought your analysis of the text as a performative text, pointing out the elements that lend themselves to this interpretation, was very interesting. You have discussed what this might look like in the earlier piece of your work. Could you briefly describe what you think a performance might look like for the Book of Moses text and who this would involve—priests or people—and where it might have taken place?

David Calabro:
That’s a great question. The way I imagine this—and I think there are a number of ways to approach this, and there’s nothing ironclad about this way of looking at it—but the way I imagine it is that before each stage of the ritual, a portion of what we have as the Book of Moses would be read aloud and heard by the baptismal candidate and by the congregation. And with that reading would perhaps be a minimal dramatization of parts of it. And then the portion of the ritual pertaining to that reading would be performed. And then they would go to a new stage of the ritual with a new reading, and then that portion of the ritual would be acted out. That’s kind of how I imagine it as I’m thinking about it. This is evolving, so there could be other insights to be gained there.

Ritual dramas in the religions of the world can be quite elaborate. In Richard Bushman’s keynote address earlier, he mentioned Auerbach’s book Mimesis, where Auerbach compares Homer’s Odyssey and the Hebrew Bible. Later in that same book, Auerbach studies a medieval mystery play about Adam and Eve. These religious dramas were spectacular, with symbolic props and costumes in addition to the scripting and choreography. But I tend to assume that early Christian ritual drama would have been plainer, given their humble circumstances.

As for who would be involved, we have a few indications in the sources I mentioned in the paper: deacons playing the role of angels in the prebaptismal rites, and the bishop playing the role of God the Father in declaring the baptized person to be a son of God. Other than that, I think it would be reasonable to assume that the priest would be the one reading the text, thus playing the double role of the narrator and Jehovah. And the baptismal candidate would also play the role of Adam, or perhaps Eve if the candidate was a woman.
Jo Ann:
Do you think that as the Book of Moses appears to be a later book, could the Book of Abraham be the same thing, namely from a much later date?

David:
Yes. I think this approach to the Book of Moses actually encourages us to take a view of the Book of Abraham that fits with the Egyptian religious environment in the Ptolemaic period, which is the period of the Joseph Smith Papyri. Abraham was a known figure during this period in Egypt, and I think the Book of Abraham would fit with the environment of religious diversity and syncretism that we see there during that time. It’s possible that the Book of Abraham reflects a ritual drama that could have been practiced by some people living in Egypt in Ptolemaic times. It would be great to do more research from this standpoint, looking for evidence of an appropriate setting in life, similar to what I’ve been doing with the Book of Moses.

One interesting thing about the Book of Abraham is that the language is very different from the Book of Moses. For example, none of that New Testament language that I find in the Book of Moses is in the Book of Abraham. In fact, nowhere in the Book of Abraham does it include the words believe or faith, which are both common in the Book of Moses. This is interesting because it underscores the fact that Joseph Smith was dealing very intentionally with language, at least in his revelations of ancient texts. To me, this indicates that Joseph Smith was revealing ancient records that came from different historical environments.

Jo Ann:
Your research highlights the importance of experiencing the text aurally. Perhaps you could comment a bit on how this experience is different from reading the text and what this suggests to us in terms of our experience with the scriptures?

David:
Sure. In the printed version of my talk, I refer to the work of Whitney Shiner. He is famous for his work on “experiencing” the Gospel of Mark, what it is like to hear the book being read instead of reading it from the written page. Hearing is a different experience from reading: when you don’t have the text before you, you can’t do detailed analysis and comparison of the words. If you get distracted by analyzing the words, you’ve already missed part of the speech. But you do tend to focus more
on repeated themes. And you definitely tend to concentrate more on visualizing the narrative than on the individual words.

In our modern world, where there is really high literacy and we’re constantly exposed to the written word, we tend to underestimate the importance of nonverbal communication—the gestures we use, facial expression, voice inflection, even the amount of physical distance between you and the one you’re talking to. There are many scriptures that could take on different meanings depending on how we imagine the text sounding or being presented. So the lesson for us when we read the scriptures is to use our imaginations, to think of different ways the text could be performed. And also, go to the temple! The temple ordinances are important for us like they were for people in ancient times, because they allow us to experience the word at a deeper, more personal level than just reading from a book.

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Notes


3 Charlotte Roueché, “A World Full of Stories,” in Transformations of Late Antiquity: Essays for Peter Brown, ed. Philip Rousseau and Manolis Papoutsakis (Farnham: Ashgate, 2009), 177–85; Fabrizio Pennachietti, Il ladrone e il cherubino: dramma liturgico cristiano orientale in siriaco e neoaramaico (Zamorani, 1993); Sebastian Brock, “The Dispute between the Cherub and the Thief,” Hugoye 5,


1 contemporary with the Hebrew Bible, although he does not articulate this position in detail.

8 John W. Welch and Jackson Abhau, “The Priestly Interests of Moses the Levite,” in this proceedings

9 Jeffrey M. Bradshaw, *In God’s Likeness and Image: Ancient and Modern Perspectives on the Book of Moses* (Salt Lake City: Eborn, 2014), 37: “The details of Moses’ experience in chapter 1 place it squarely in the tradition of ancient ‘heavenly ascent’ literature and its relationship to temple theology, rites, and ordinances.” Bradshaw and Dahle, “Could Joseph Smith Have Drawn on Ancient Manuscripts,” focus on the need for an extensive analysis of the “ancient literary affinities” found in the Book of Moses. “It would be no surprise,” they write, “if long, revealed passages such as Moses 1, 6, and 7 were to provide plausible evidence of having been drawn, at least in part, from a common well of ancient textual and oral traditions” (330).

10 Calabro, “Architecture of Genesis.”

11 All biblical references are cited from the King James Version (KJV) unless otherwise noted.


13 Both phrases, however, are absent from the Book of Abraham.

14 The closest analogue to this phrase in the Old Testament is in Isa. 41:4; 44:6; 48:12, where God is called “the First and the Last”—names that also appear in Revelation alongside “the Beginning and the End” (Rev. 1:11, 17; 2:8; 22:13). Analogous phrases have also been noted in the writings of Plato and in rabbinic literature. For a full treatment of the background of this phrase, see W. C. van Unnik, “The Divine Predicate ‘The Beginning and the End’ in Flavius Josephus and the Apocalypse of John,” in *Sparsa Collecta: The Collected Essays of W. C. van Unnik*, Part Four, ed. Cilliers

15 In the Old Testament, “my chosen” refers to David as God’s servant (Ps. 89:3) or to Israel (Isa. 43:20; 65:15). This, too, compares well with usage in the Book of Moses (see Moses 1:25, 26).

16 Some early manuscript witnesses of Matthew 6 lack this clause, and some text-critical analyses therefore exclude it. However, the clause is found in the Lord’s prayer in 3 Nephi 13:13, which suggests that it is original to the text. An Old Testament parallel is found in 1 Chron. 29:11 (“Thine, O LORD, is the greatness, and the power, and the glory, and the victory, and the majesty”), but it lacks the adverb “forever” found in Moses 4:2.

17 The idea of the blood of a sacrificial animal being able to cleanse is found in the Old Testament in priestly laws pertaining to the purification of temple personnel and of sacred space (Lev. 14:14, 25, 52; 16:19; Ezek. 43:20); however, the language referring to the blood of the Son has its closest parallel in 1 John 1. Elsewhere the Old Testament refers to being cleansed from blood, since blood is usually viewed as defiling (Lev. 12:7; Num. 35:33; Joel 3:21).


19 The word comforter occurs in the KJV Old Testament, translating the Hebrew word menaḥem (Ecc. 4:1; Lam. 1:9, 16), but nowhere in the Old Testament does the term refer to the Holy Spirit.

20 The New Testament verses differ somewhat in the KJV, but the underlying Greek uses the same phrase, ho esō anthrōpos.

21 The same concept is conveyed using different language in Lev. 19:18: “thou shalt love thy neighbor as thyself.” This Old Testament commandment is frequently quoted in the New Testament (Matthew 19:19; 22:39; Mark 12:31; Rom. 13:9; Gal. 5:14; James 2:8).

22 The concept of the Messiah as a “lamb” is expressed as a simile in Isa. 53:7. The symbolism of the sacrificial lamb in the law of Moses is also relevant as background to the New Testament usage.
23 The phrase as found in the Book of Moses is also attested in the Book of Mormon, in Mosiah 16:3 and Alma 42:10. Noel Reynolds cites this as one of the phrases pointing to the influence of the Book of Moses on the language of the Book of Mormon. See Reynolds, “Brass Plates,” 154–55. He notes the presence of the similar phrase in James 3:15 without further comment, but following his approach as seen in other instances (Reynolds, “Brass Plates,” 148–50), the resemblance would presumably be due to the New Testament inheriting the phrase through a distant connection to the Book of Moses.


The Hebrew idiom here is *panim el-panim*. In the New Testament, the KJV “face to face” in the context of speaking translates Greek *stoma pros stoma*, literally “mouth to mouth” (the equivalent Hebrew idiom, *peh el-peh*, occurs in reference to Moses speaking with God in Num. 12:8). The Greek idiom *prosōpon pros prosōpon*, literally “face to face,” is used in the context of seeing in 1 Cor. 13:12. But neither of these Greek idioms is used in the New Testament in the context of a theophany or in reference to Moses. In Ex. 33:11 LXX, a different Greek idiom is used, *enōpios enōpiō*, an idiom not found in the Greek New Testament.


Reynolds, “Brass Plates”; Jeff Lindsay and Noel B. Reynolds, “‘Strong Like unto Moses’: The Case for Ancient Roots in the Book of Moses Based on Book of Mormon Usage of Related Content Apparently from the Brass Plates,” in this proceedings.


1 Nephi 1:2 and Mosiah 1:4 refer to “the language of the Egyptians,” while Moroni states that he and his father wrote in “the reformed Egyptian” (Mormon 9:32).

In Acts 7:21, the word *nourished* in the King James Version translates the Greek *anethrepsato*, from the verb *anatrephō*. The verb means “bring up, cherish, educate,” but it comes from a root having to do with feeding and nursing, hence the translation in the King James Version. See Liddell, Scott, and Jones, *Lexicon*, 124, 1814, 1827–28.

See the notes accompanying the list at the beginning of this section for discussion of the Old Testament background of these phrases.

Other than a reference to “the fall” in Ether 3:2, the book of Ether contains none of the phrases identified above. This excludes Moroni’s inserted commentary, which does contain


36 See Brown, Driver, and Briggs, *Hebrew and English Lexicon*, 244, left column.


41 See Brown, Driver, and Briggs, *Hebrew and English Lexicon*, 889.


43 Bowen, “Getting Cain and Gain,” 125–39, points out that the Nephites seem to have had knowledge of a wordplay between Cain and “gain” in the Genesis account. Their knowledge was presumably based on the plates of brass. This could suggest that we have here a remarkable example of a wordplay being preserved through multiple languages: the Hebrew or Egyptian language of the plates of brass, Aramaic, Greek, and English.

44 The idea of angels declaring a gospel is also found in Gal. 1:8 and Rev. 14:6.

45 Matthew Bowen (personal communication) points out that similar references to angels are found in Alma 13:22-23; 39:19; Helaman 13:7; 16:14. In every case, these passages use the word *tidings* (a word found in the Old Testament) instead of *Gospel*.

46 The Greek writing system has no way of representing the *sh* sound nor the medial or final *h*, all of which are common in Hebrew and Aramaic.

47 The word *mēḥā* is attested in Jewish Palestinian Aramaic and in Syriac. See Sokoloff, *Dictionary of Jewish Palestinian Aramaic*, 299; Payne Smith, *Compendious Syriac Dictionary*, 263. The definite plural form of the noun is also attested in the Aramaic of the Dead Sea Scrolls; see Cook, *Dictionary of Qumran Aramaic*, 136.

48 For a recent review of the discussion with many new contributions on this issue, see Jeffrey M. Bradshaw, Matthew L. Bowen, and Ryan Dahle, “Where Did the Names Mahaway and Mahujah Come From? A Response to Colby Townsend’s ‘Returning to the Sources,” Part 2 of 2, *Interpreter: A Journal of Latter-day Saint Faith and*

49 Like the term *myth*, the terms *apocrypha* and *apocryphal* now have a negative connotation, implying that the narrative is unreliable or outside of scriptural truth. Originally, the term *apocrypha* simply meant hidden texts that have been brought to light, and it is in this sense that I use the term here.
50 Jeffrey M. Bradshaw, David J. Larsen, and Stephen T. Whitlock, “Moses 1 and the Apocalypse of Abraham: Twin Sons of Different Mothers?,” in this proceedings

51 See Jeffrey Bradshaw, “Moses 6–7 and the Book of Giants: Remarkable Witnesses of Enoch’s Ministry,” in this proceedings


53 David Calabro, “This Thing Is a Similitude: A Typological Approach to Moses 5:4–15 and Ancient Apocryphal Literature,” in this proceedings

54 The medieval apocrypha tend to employ a more fabular narrative style and to include more discursive content, including belabored expressions of humility and long theological asides. By contrast, the late antique apocrypha, like the Book of Moses, employ a dry, scriptural narrative style.

55 In modern editions, the aside in verse 42 is enclosed in parentheses, giving the impression that the aside is extraneous to the ancient text; in the original manuscript, however, no parentheses were used here.


58 The prophecy in 3 Nephi 20:23–24 may be ambiguous like Moses 1:41. When Jesus says, “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” (3 Nephi 20:23), he may be saying that he is that prophet who will be raised up or that he is “the Lord your God” who will raise up that prophet. The prophecy of Joseph in 2 Nephi 3:9–11 and Genesis 50:29–30 JST refers to the latter-day seer Joseph Smith, whom God will “raise up,” as one “great like unto Moses.”

60 For an introduction to the fascinating Book of Rolls, see Barbara Roggema, “Biblical Exegesis and Interreligious Polemics in the Arabic Apocalypse of Peter—The Book of the Rolls,” in The Bible in Arab Christianity, ed. David Thomas (Leiden: Brill, 2007), 131–50. There are many versions that differ greatly in length; some manuscripts containing the longer (ca. 800-page) version are located at the National Library of France in Paris (BnF ar 76), the Vatican Library (Vat ar 165), the Church of the Forty Martyrs in Mardin, Turkey (CFMM 1052), and the Church of Saint George in Aleppo, Syria (SOAA 51 K).

61 The references in the Book of Moses to a time of wickedness, like the reference to a future prophet who will be like Moses, may have a double meaning. Moses 7 refers to both the meridian of time and the last days as “the days of wickedness and vengeance” (Moses 7:45–46, 60).

62 Unfortunately, the portions of Genesis preserved in the Dead Sea Scrolls do not include witnesses to Genesis 14 or 50, in which the Joseph Smith Translation contains large expansions. However, 4Q Gen-Exod\(^a\) and 4Q Gen\(^f\) attest to Genesis 48, and they do not contain the large expansion of this chapter found in Genesis JST.

63 King Follett Sermon, History of the Church, 6:307 (Teachings of the Prophet Joseph Smith, 348–49); sermon in the East Grove, History of the Church, 6:475 (Teachings of the Prophet Joseph Smith, 371).


65 Other phrases could have been used that do not have the same implication. For instance, Alma refers to Adam and Eve being “sent forth from the garden of Eden” and “cut off from the tree of life” (Alma 42:2, 6–7), and both the Book of Moses and the received text of Genesis refer to Adam and Eve being “sent forth” and “driven out” (Genesis 3:23–24; Moses 4:29, 31).


68 These ante-Nicene sources on baptism are conveniently gathered by E. C. Whitaker, *Documents of the Baptismal Liturgy*, revised and expanded by Maxwell E. Johnson (Collegeville: Liturgical Press, 2003), 1–22.


70 Yarnold, *Awe-Inspiring Rites*, 17–54.

71 Hugh Nibley, in *The Message of the Joseph Smith Papyri: An Egyptian Endowment*, 2nd ed., *Collected Works of Hugh Nibley* 16 (Provo, UT: Foundation for Ancient Research and Mormon Studies, 2005), 515–22, includes a breakdown of Cyril of Jerusalem's baptismal description, relating it to the Genesis drama as found in the Book of Abraham and the Book of Moses. His understanding of the rites is very similar to mine. However, my analysis of the individual rites and of the parts of the narrative to which they correspond differs from his.

72 Wintermute, in *Old Testament Pseudepigrapha*, 2:63, note n, suggests that this “mountain of the East” is identical with Mount Qater, where Enoch offers incense. However, a better interpretation is that Mount Qater is identical with Mount Zion, the last-named sacred place in the list, the only one of the four that the text elaborates on. The portrayal of the “mountain of the East,” then, is even more mysterious than Wintermute suggests.

73 The Joseph Smith Translation changes this so that it is the Spirit who takes Jesus into the mountain and shows him the vision. The parallels to this verse in Mark and Luke lack the adverb *exceeding*.

74 Most translations render the definite article in these references as indefinite: “a mountain.”

75 Both Matthew and Mark refer to this mountain first as “a high mountain,” with no definite article (Matt. 17:1; Mark 9:2), but Luke 9:28 refers to it as “the mountain,” with the definite article and no adjective.

76 Most major translations render the relative clause at the end of this verse as restrictive: “into the mountain where Jesus had arranged to meet them” or similar. But the clause could also be rendered non-restrictively: “into the mountain, where Jesus had arranged to
meet them.” Translating it thus would imply that “the mountain” was a location already known to the disciples.

77 Nephi is also transported “into an exceedingly high mountain” (1 Nephi 11:1), where he sees a vision that is explicitly linked to that of John (1 Nephi 14:18–27). One wonders if this could have been the same mountain. Unlike the mountain in Moses 1, the mountain(s) referred to by Nephi and by John the Revelator may have been in a heavenly location. Compare also 2 Nephi 4:25, in which Nephi mentions being transported to “exceedingly high mountains” and seeing visions; the plural implies that the experience described in 1 Nephi 11:1 was one of several.


79 Chronicle of Edessa 1.

80 Didache 7.1.

81 Paul mentions the practice of baptism for the dead in 1 Cor. 15:29, and other sources attest to the existence of the practice as late as the fourth century.

82 Of course, this is true not only of the Book of Moses but of the parallel passage in the Hebrew Bible.


84 See the illustration by Michael Lyon in Parry, “Garden of Eden,” 134–35.

85 Examples include the Conflict of Adam and Eve with Satan and the Hexaemeron of Pseudo-Epiphanius.


87 Yarnold, Awe-Inspiring Rites, 74.

88 W. A. Wigram, quoted in Brock, “Dispute between the Cherub and the Thief,” 173.

89 Whitaker, Documents, 6.

90 See Yarnold, Awe-Inspiring Rites, 76–77, 184–85.
91 Yarnold, *Awe-Inspiring Rites*, 83.

92 Quoted in Yarnold, *Awe-Inspiring Rites*, 123.


95 The doctrine is explained in Didache 1–6. In Didache 7.1, baptism was to be performed “after reviewing all these things,” referring to the doctrine explained in the previous sections.


97 Yarnold, *Awe-Inspiring Rites*, 169–70. Theodore says that it is the deacons who play this role, but John Chrysostom says it is “the priests who introduce” the candidate who play this role (Yarnold, *Awe-Inspiring Rites*, 158). On officiators playing the part of angels, compare Ambrose (Yarnold, *Awe-Inspiring Rites*, 102–3).


99 Interestingly, this would mean that baptism for the dead provided the model for the manner in which baptism for the living was performed during the post-Nicene period. Cyril of Jerusalem, for example, describes the entrance of the candidate from the forecourt to the “holy of holies” (the baptistry), where he or she was “conducted by the hand to the holy pool of sacred baptism” (the font) and immersed. See Yarnold, *Awe-Inspiring Rites*, 75, 77–78.

100 See Yarnold, *Awe-Inspiring Rites*, 125; also compare Yarnold’s discussion on page 18.

101 See Yarnold, *Awe-Inspiring Rites*, 70, 75.

102 See Yarnold, *Awe-Inspiring Rites*, 37, 161, 161 n. 37.

103 The sources do not indicate whether women would be declared daughters of God or whether they, like the men, would be given the
title Son. Moses 6:68, “and thus may all become my sons,” seems to support the latter possibility. However, the Hebrew, Aramaic, and Greek words corresponding to the English plural sons can also refer to a mixed group of male and female children; thus, the meaning in the original language would have been ambiguous.

104 Quoted from Whitaker, Documents, 3–4.

105 Quoted from R. Hugh Connolly, Didascalia Apostolorum (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1929), 93. The doctrine that the person being baptized becomes a son of God was also taught by Theodore of Mopsuestia, although the rite itself had evidently changed by his time; see Yarnold, Awe-Inspiring Rites, 195–97.

106 See Talmud Yerushalmi, Taanit 4:5; Midrash Rabba, Eicha Rabba 2:5. These sources describe Ṭūr Šim‘on as a place of great agricultural productivity but one known for the wickedness of its inhabitants. The narrative in Moses 7 makes no mention of inhabitants on the mountain; the narrative takes place in the distant past, presumably before the mountain was occupied.

107 Simeon, Simon, and Šim‘on are variant spellings of the same Hebrew name. The name comes from the root šm’, “to hear,” which may relate to the mountain’s function in the Book of Moses as a place of revelation.


109 Some may object that the references to Mount Simeon, Sharon, and Canaan would be anachronistic for the antediluvian period. Some may also object that this proposal locating these sites in the Old World conflicts with early Latter-day Saint sources placing the antediluvian events in the Americas. For instance, Wilford Woodruff recorded a statement by Joseph Smith that the city of Enoch was located in what is now the Gulf of Mexico (Journal of Wilford Woodruff, March 30, 1873). However, just as the names of locations associated with the Garden of Eden were familiar to ancient Israelite readers of Genesis in terms of their own environment (see Gen. 2:10–14), the locations in Moses 6–7 could easily have been given names that were familiar to the ancient
audience, which would help the audience feel a connection to the narrative.

110 Ambrose specifically points out that the washing of the feet was not done in Rome, but it was done elsewhere. See Yarnold, Awe-Inspiring Rites, 121–23.

111 Quoted from Yarnold, Awe-Inspiring Rites, 83–84.

112 Quoted from Yarnold, Awe-Inspiring Rites, 84.

113 For references to the clothing by Cyril of Jerusalem, Ambrose, and John Chrysostom, see Yarnold, Awe-Inspiring Rites, 88–89, 129–30, 159, and 161. The clearest description of the rite is that of Theodore of Mopsuestia; see Yarnold, Awe-Inspiring Rites, 197–98.

114 See Yarnold, Awe-Inspiring Rites, 89.

115 See Whitaker, Documents, 21–22. The “laver of water” mentioned here likely refers to the laver used in the washing of the feet; it is probably not a laver used for baptism by sprinkling, since baptism in this text is by immersion.

116 According to Josephus, Jewish War, 5.137, the western hill of Jerusalem was called by David the “Citadel” or “Fortress,” distinct from the eastern hill that was the site of the temple. However, it is not until the fourth century that the sources (including the Bordeaux Pilgrim and Cyril of Jerusalem) reveal a clear concept of the western hill as the location of Mount Zion and as the site of the upper room in which the Holy Spirit descended on the day of Pentecost (Acts 1:13; 2:1–2).


118 This differs from Wintermute’s interpretation in OTP, 2:63, note n.


122 According to Cyril of Jerusalem, baptism and anointing were prefigured by the washing and anointing of priests and the washing and anointing of kings in ancient Israel. See Yarnold, Awe-Inspiring Rites, 84.


126 The word flocks in Moses 5:5 could correspond to at least two Hebrew words: so’n and adarim. The word so’n means specifically flocks of sheep, but adarim can refer to flocks of sheep or herds of cattle. Rabbinic sources referring to Adam’s sacrifice of a bull include Avot of Rabbi Nathan 1:8 and Talmud Bavli Avodah Zarah 8a. For discussion, see Calabro, “This Thing Is a Similitude.”

127 In addition to the differences noted here, see David Calabro, “Lehi’s Dream and the Garden of Eden,” Interpreter: A Journal of Latter-day Saint Faith and Scholarship 26 (2017): 269–296, esp. pa


129 See, for example, Greek Life of Adam and Eve, 16.1–5; 17.4; English translation in Charlesworth, Old Testament Pseudepigrapha, 2:277, 279. The motif also persists in medieval Christian apocryphal literature such as the Conflict of Adam and Eve with Satan, Jewish aggadic midrash, and Islamic stories of the prophets.

130 In the original text of the Book of Mormon, there was a chapter division after Alma 13:9, so the word amen occurs at the end of the original chapter (compare Moses 5:59; 6:68). Moses 8:19 mentions that “the Lord ordained Noah after his own order, and commanded him that he should go forth and declare his Gospel unto the children of men, even as it was given unto Enoch.” This compares well with some aspects of Alma’s discourse. However, Moses 1–7 does not mention priests or ordination; there is only
one reference to “priesthood,” which occurs in the context of writing scripture by inspiration (Moses 6:7).


Framing the Book of Abraham: Presumptions and Paradigms

Stephen O. Smoot


Abstract: The Book of Abraham continues to undergo scrutiny in both academic and polemical publications. The latest offering of substance in the latter category, Dan Vogel’s Book of Abraham Apologetics: A Review and Critique, criticizes the work of those who argue for the antiquity and inspiration of the Book of Abraham and makes a sustained argument that the book is, instead, modern pseudepigrapha written by a pious fraud (Joseph Smith) in the nineteenth century. Book of Abraham Apologetics lays out a particular naturalistic approach to this text that works best only when certain metaphysical and methodological assumptions are taken for granted. This approach, however, as well as most of his arguments against the Book of Abraham’s historicity, are severely undermined both by Vogel’s inability to properly assess the evidence and his metaphysical or ideological commitments. This review critiques Vogel’s critique of Book of Abraham apologetics and offers an alternative to his questionable framing of the text and its interpretation.

At first glance, the Book of Abraham would hardly appear to warrant much, if any, apprehension; after all, the book occupies a meager fourteen pages (five chapters) in the current edition of the Pearl of Great Price as canonized by The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints. But looks, as the saying goes, can be deceiving, and popular prejudice notwithstanding, the Book of Abraham has proven both resilient and, in some ways, elusive.¹ Hugh Nibley wisely warned us a generation ago that the road ahead for anybody wishing to assess the origin and nature of the Book of Abraham by academic means is daunting. “Consider for
a moment the scope and complexity of the materials with which the student must cope if he would undertake a serious study of the Book of Abraham’s authenticity,” wrote Nibley in 1968.

At the very least he must be thoroughly familiar with (1) the texts of the “Joseph Smith Papyri” identified as belonging to the Book of the Dead, (2) the content and nature of the mysterious “Sen-sen” fragment, (3) the so-called “Egyptian Alphabet and Grammar” attributed to Joseph Smith, (4) statements by and about Joseph Smith concerning the nature of the Book of Abraham and its origin, (5) the original document of Facsimile 1 with its accompanying hieroglyphic inscriptions, (6) the text of the Book of Abraham itself in its various editions, (7) the three Facsimiles as reproduced in various editions of the Pearl of Great Price, (8) Joseph Smith’s explanation of the Facsimiles, (9) the large and growing literature of ancient traditions and legends about Abraham in Hebrew, Aramaic, Arabic, Greek, Slavonic, etc., (10) the studies and opinions of modern scholars on all aspects of the Book of Abraham.²

Nibley was not being alarmist with this assessment. After all, the canonical text of the Book of Abraham purports to be Joseph Smith’s inspired translation of a historical narrative attributed to the eponymous biblical patriarch and preserved on an ancient Egyptian papyrus. This means, at a minimum, that anyone wishing to pass judgment on the authenticity of the text is going to need some kind of training in, or at least exposure to, the following disciplines: (1) Syro-Levantine, Anatolian, and/or Mesopotamian archaeology of the Middle Bronze Age (ca. 2200–1600 BC), in order to suitably consider the historical plausibility of the events depicted in the text;³ (2) the Hebrew Bible, in order to conduct a proper comparative analysis of the biblical material (specifically Genesis 1:1–2:20; 11:27–12:13) that overlaps with the text;⁴ (3) Egyptology, including its subdiscipline papyrology and specialization in the funerary literature of the Ptolemaic Period, in order to assess the nature and content of the Joseph Smith Papyri and the three facsimiles that accompany the text, as well as to evaluate the historical and cultural setting of the papyri;⁵ (4) Greco-Roman Judaism, particularly Egyptian Judaism, in order to evaluate the significance of the many extrabiblical texts relating to Abraham composed during this period;⁶ (5) nineteenth-century Latter-day Saint history and theology, especially the theology of “translation” and the production of scripture in the religious
worldview of Joseph Smith, in order to accurately understand how the Prophet produced the Book of Abraham and what he and contemporaries thought about the text; (6) textual criticism, to accurately understand the authorship and transmission of the manuscripts related to Joseph Smith’s Abrahamic project.

As a consequence of this truly staggering state of affairs, an extensive bibliography on practically all facets of the Book of Abraham and the Joseph Smith Papyri has emerged, especially after the 1960s. One would, of course, be excused from wanting to wade too deep into what can too easily turn into mystifying exercises in the worst kind of scholastic hair-splitting. Be that as it may, this is the intimidating reality awaiting anyone who wishes to summit the mountain of Book of Abraham scholarship (and, for that matter, polemics). Those who wish to compartmentalize and limit their approach to the text by focusing on just one specific aspect, or who otherwise wish to approach the text from just one discipline or background, are welcome to do so, but they should be aware that their analysis, if unable to adequately account for each of these interlocking subcategories, is going to have limited explanatory power. In other words, “If you decide you want to enter the debate, you ought to do some real homework. There is a large bibliography, and there are dozens of theories to master, not to mention a large body of evidence.” To make matters worse, the Book of Abraham and “the [Joseph Smith Papyri] are part of a sectarian debate” that shows no signs of abating. Passions then, as now, continue to run high, and “for nearly one hundred years it has been standard operating procedure to dig for dirt on the background of anyone who enters the debate, and if one sides with the Mormons, the opponents have no qualms about bearing false witness.” In brief, “one simply cannot win playing this game,” so “if you do address the issue in print, you need to know that the two sides in the dispute will never leave you alone. It is a life sentence with no possibility of parole.”

The Book of Abraham and its Critics

After Hugh Nibley, whose voluminous writing has laid much of the bedrock for those who accept the historicity of the Book of Abraham and approach it as an ancient text, undoubtedly the most prominent Latter-day Saint scholar who has contributed to Book of Abraham scholarship is the Yale-trained Egyptologist John Gee, currently the William Gay Research Professor in the department of Asian and Near Eastern Languages at Brigham Young University. Gee has been writing on the
Book of Abraham since the early 1990s, and his most recent book-length treatment appeared in 2017. Besides Gee is the UCLA-trained Egyptologist Kerry Muhlestein, a professor of Ancient Scripture at BYU who, besides providing meaningful academic contributions to the conversation, has also been instrumental in popularizing Book of Abraham scholarship and apologetics for a general Latter-day Saint audience. These three scholars have, unquestionably, been the most influential in shaping the overall contours of the mainstream Latter-day Saint apologetic reaction to challenges made to the inspired authenticity (including the historicity) of the Book of Abraham.

As of right now, the most determined and outspoken critics of the Book of Abraham and its orthodox apologists worthy of any serious consideration are Brian M. Hauglid, a retired BYU colleague of Gee and Muhlestein who now finds their work “abhorrent,” and Dan Vogel, an independent author and Joseph Smith biographer who has returned to the polemical contest surrounding the Book of Abraham after a several-decades hiatus. It is Vogel’s most recent offering, *Book of Abraham Apologetics: A Review and Critique*, that is the focus of this review.

I should note that until very recently I would have placed Robert K. Ritner, Rowe Professor of Egyptology at the University of Chicago, among those in “the other corner.” However, sadly, Ritner “died July 25 [2021] after a years-long battle with kidney disease and leukemia.” Even if he is no longer standing in the critics’ corner, Ritner’s critical works continue to be cited among those who, like Hauglid and Vogel, reject the historicity of the Book of Abraham.

Even before jumping into the actual text of *Book of Abraham Apologetics*, something immediately stood out to me when I first picked up the volume. Three endorsements accompany Vogel’s critique of apologetic efforts on behalf of the authenticity of the Book of Abraham. That itself is not remarkable. What is remarkable are the identities of two of the endorsers. The first endorsement comes from Susan Staker, an independent scholar of Latter-day Saint history who believes “this book should be welcomed more broadly for engaging a range of scholarly discussions about Joseph Smith’s Egyptian project.” Hers is followed by two additional endorsements by one former and one current research associate with BYU’s Neal A. Maxwell Institute for Religious Scholarship: John Christopher Thomas and Brian Hauglid, who both also speak highly of the book. Thomas praises Vogel for his “painstaking research” that in his opinion produces “a compelling narrative of the emergence,
history, and development of the Book of Abraham that is sure to become standard reading and part of the academic discourse.” Hauglid applauds Vogel for his “erudite, methodical, and thorough treatment of the subject.” The book (a “must-read”), he continues, “bring[s] into high relief the difficulties of walking the razor’s edge of faith and transparency.” One might be forgiven for getting the impression that this is a polite way of saying the book is (or at least should be) effective at getting believers to question their faith in the authenticity of the text, especially since Vogel welcomes Hauglid as a compatriot and a useful foil against Gee and Muhlestein.23 In any case, the significance of two Maxwell Institute scholars endorsing what effectively amounts to an attack on Joseph Smith’s prophetic credibility is perhaps best left alone for another time. If nothing else, Thomas’ and Hauglid’s endorsements signal that the culture wars (academic and otherwise) surrounding the Book of Abraham are evolving in some unexpected ways and leaves one suspicious of what this may portend for the ideological trajectory of a Church-funded enterprise such as the Maxwell Institute.24

Whatever Vogel may lack in formal academic training25 he makes up for with a fairly impressive publication record (if only in terms of quantity) and a sort of rugged, autodidactic historiographical moxie. Thanks to his YouTube channel and recent appearance on a popular anti-Mormon podcast, he also enjoys celebrity status among disaffected and ex-members of the Church.26 Vogel is an ex-Latter-day Saint atheist who in Book of Abraham Apologetics (249–50), like on previous occasions, voices his view that Joseph Smith was a sincere but deluded religious charlatan (a so-called “pious fraud,” to use the fashionable euphemism), and that his scriptural texts are the products of his imaginative (and semiconsciously fraudulent) engagement with his nineteenth-century environment instead of divine revelation (which in Vogel’s worldview doesn’t exist). Indeed, Vogel has made his Weltanschauung as it relates to Joseph Smith’s truth claims abundantly clear:

To my mind, the most obvious solution … is to suggest that Smith was a well-intentioned “pious deceiver” or, perhaps otherwise worded, a “sincere fraud,” someone who prevaricated for “good” reasons. Admittedly, the terms are not entirely satisfying. Nevertheless, ‘pious’ connotes genuine religious conviction, while I apply “fraud” or “deceiver” only to describe some of Smith’s activities. I believe that Smith believed he was called of God, yet occasionally engaged
in fraudulent activities in order to preach God’s word as effectively as possible. …

No biographer is completely free of bias. As is no doubt apparent, my inclination is to interpret any claim of the paranormal — precognition, clairvoyance, telekinesis, telepathy — as delusion or fraud. I do not claim that the supernatural does not exist, for it is impossible to prove a negative. I maintain only that the evidence upon which such claims rest is unconvincing to me. …

I believe that during his early career as a treasure seer, he was a charlatan but came to believe that he was, in fact, called of God and thereafter occasionally used deceit to bolster his religious message.  

In brief, Vogel rejects Joseph Smith’s supernatural claims because “there is simply no reliable proof for the existence of the supernatural.” This actually makes his new book a fine example of exactly what we would expect from a metaphysically atheistic and naturalistic approach to a book of scripture that purports to be the inspired translation of the writings of an equally inspired ancient prophet; that is to say, *Book of Abraham Apologetics* approaches its subject with a paradigm that from the outset does not even allow for the possibility that the Book of Abraham is actually anything like what it claims to be. Vogel is certainly not alone in this. As Nibley observed long ago to great effect, it has been almost routine for the Book of Abraham’s most ardent skeptics to begin with the assumption that Joseph Smith was incapable of translating an ancient text through revelation because either revelation isn’t real or has ceased. Such a paradigm, unsurprisingly, has the tendency to prejudice the conclusions of the reader, who is asked to at least consider that the text just might be what it claims it to be. I thus applaud Vogel for his forthrightness and candor when he frankly admits at the outset that he “see[s] the Book of Abraham as a product of the nineteenth century,” even if he then quite unbelievably tries to assure readers that his “conclusions are based entirely on a dispassionate, balanced analysis of the relevant historical documents” (xvii). I likewise commend Vogel for at least making token gestures of attempting to refute the evidence for the historicity of the Book of Abraham that challenge his beliefs about the nature of the text, even if it is painfully obvious throughout *Book of Abraham Apologetics* that he has little to none of the specialization
mentioned above that is essential to critically engage the issues and thereby offer a substantive verdict.

**On “Objectivity”**

Since he presents himself to his readers as a scholar who, unlike his apologist foes, offers a cool, even-tempered, no-nonsense analysis of the documentary record (xvi–xvii), it behooves us to ask whether Vogel’s assumed naturalistic paradigm might in any way compromise his feigned objectivity; whether, indeed, our would-be dragoman leading us through this mess is up to the task of navigating the intricacies of the subject. Before we answer this, let us first turn to the sage observations of Kerry Muhlestein, who with admirable frankness has voiced an important point self-evidently obvious to all but the most mulishly ideological. At the 2014 annual FairMormon conference and again at the same’s 2020 conference, Muhlestein raised the (clearly true) point that all those who approach the Book of Abraham bring with them both general assumptions about how they think the world works and assumptions specific to Joseph Smith’s claims to inspired seership. Muhlestein reminds us “how important the beginning premise or the beginning assumption is that people make” when they approach books that purport to be inspired scripture, and how “often we don’t realize this.” He continues,

I think this is a little bit akin to our assumptions about the validity of revelation as a source of knowledge. There are many people in the world [including Vogel] who are certain that [revelation] is not a valid source of knowledge. And beginning with that assumption then anything having to do with the restoration and Joseph Smith as a prophet has to be discarded. They have to ignore any evidence that would support [the notion that Joseph Smith was a prophet,] and I’ve seen this happen. I’ve seen people who are critical of Joseph Smith when something comes up that kind of supports something he had translated through inspiration.

Because these persons do not allow for the possibility that Joseph Smith could have translated an ancient document by revelation, they must “explain things away because it doesn’t fit in with their beginning assumption.” Muhlestein, on the other hand, not only allows for the possibility but positively believes that Joseph Smith received revelation to translate ancient texts, and so he “start[s] out with an
assumption that the Book of Abraham and the Book of Mormon and anything else that we get from the restored gospel is true,” and therefore attempts to harmonize evidence “into that paradigm.” He doesn’t, however, feel the need “to defend that paradigm; [he] feel[s] that [he] want[s] to understand the evidence that [he] find[s] within that paradigm because to [him it is] a given that it’s true.” Muhlestein freely acknowledges that “there are others [like Vogel] who will assume that it’s not true, and on these points, we’ll just have to agree to disagree, but we will understand one another better when we understand how our beginning assumptions color the way we filter all of the evidence that we find.”

Whether he likes it or not, Vogel is doing in *Book of Abraham Apologetics* precisely what Muhlestein described in this 2014 address — he is approaching the Book of Abraham with certain metaphysical assumptions that influence not only how he interprets the data, but that prejudices the conclusions he draws therefrom. To be sure, this does not mean that Vogel is automatically wrong when he concludes that the Book of Abraham and its claimed translator are nineteenth century frauds (“pious” or otherwise). It does mean, however, that Vogel cannot realistically expect us to believe that he is coming at this issue as a dispassionate, “objective” scholar who has no predetermined interest in whether Joseph Smith’s claims are true or false. Metaphysically speaking, Vogel has just as much riding on the authenticity or inauthenticity of the Book of Abraham as orthodox Latter-day Saints do. By the evidence of his own admission, as seen above, it is dishonest in the extreme for Vogel to pretend otherwise.

**Vogel’s Argument**

Vogel’s main argument offered in *Book of Abraham Apologetics* is effectively articulated in his opening chapter (1–32). Here he makes the following case for the composition of the English text of the Book of Abraham:

After dictating three verses of the Book of Abraham to [William W.] Phelps, probably in early July 1835, Smith began immediately to work on his Alphabets and bound Grammar of the Egyptian language. Then, the following November, he dictated forty-eight verses of Abraham to [Frederick G.] Williams and [Warren] Parrish. … Recognizing that the Parrish and Williams documents are the original records of Smith’s dictation of Abraham and that they date to
November 1835 means the theory that the Alphabets and bound Grammar were created after the translation must be abandoned. Instead, these documents — the Joseph Smith Egyptian Papers — relating to the Egyptian language should be seen as Smith’s preliminary efforts to understand his newly acquired papyri and to convince followers that his translation was derived from the papyri. (31–32)

The problem this presents for those who believe the Book of Abraham is a translation of an ancient text is simple: first, the papyri fragments allegedly believed by Joseph Smith to be the source of the translation of the Book of Abraham were recovered in the 1960s, and the Egyptian text thereon, when translated, bears no resemblance to the English text of the Book of Abraham; and second, the Egyptian-language documents (discussed below) fail to convey an accurate understanding of the Egyptian language. We can determine the first point, according to Vogel, thanks to the hieratic characters in the margins of the Kirtland-era Book of Abraham manuscripts, and the second because Joseph Smith was, Vogel alleges, the primary author of the Egyptian-language documents. In short, in Vogel’s formulation Joseph Smith fails on both counts as a translator of Egyptian: he misidentified what was on the papyri he acquired, and he misunderstood how the Egyptian language actually works.

This is why Vogel does not feel it is necessary to turn to any other discipline to assess the authenticity of the Book of Abraham than his preferred area (category six in my articulation above). “I believe that what is required in any treatment of the Book of Abraham is not fluency in hieroglyphics [sic] or a belief in Joseph Smith’s prophetic calling, but a firm, clear-headed understanding of the methods of history and of the relevant nineteenth-century historical sources. Anything else is counterproductive” (xvii). It seems, however, that Vogel doesn’t actually believe this, because a sizable portion of Book of Abraham Apologetics is dedicated to neutralizing arguments for the historicity of the Book of Abraham from those who affirm it is a translation of an ancient text (215–42). If Vogel’s theory for the composition of the Book of Abraham and the text’s relationship to both the surviving papyri fragments and the Egyptian-language documents is as decisive as he claims, we cannot help but wonder why he must go to such lengths to disarm the evidence for historicity. In any case, since Vogel insists that knowledge of ancient languages is not needed to render confident judgment on the Book of Abraham, throughout this review I will oblige him by not bothering to
provide transliterations or translations of the ancient languages I utilize unless otherwise necessary.

The second component of Vogel’s argument against the Book of Abraham is to defuse the evidence for the text’s historicity by providing modern sources from which Joseph Smith could have derived the contents, themes, and ideas in the text. In addition to the usual suspects, such as Adam Clarke and Thomas Dick, Vogel points to other nineteenth century sources, no matter how obscure, to contend that “the so-called unique elements in the Book of Abraham ... were all known to Joseph Smith’s contemporaries.” Vogel wisely cautions that he is “not arguing that Smith knowingly plagiarized these sources,” but simply that “Smith arrived at a similar narrative but through a different process.” The net result is that “Smith’s contemporaries had access to the same Jewish, Christian, and Muslim traditions about Abraham and that these traditions were widely known in Smith’s day,” and that this refutes “claims of antiquity” (217).

With the basic thrust of Vogel’s main contention in mind, let us proceed to examine some of the key arguments put forth in Book of Abraham Apologetics. This review does not pretend to be an exhaustive response to all of Vogel’s arguments, but hopefully I will be able to show how in some important ways Vogel’s arguments are either questionable, insufficient, or simply erroneous. I, myself, do not profess to have mastery over all aspects of the Book of Abraham. Those readers interested in diving deeper into the issues discussed in this review are encouraged to consult the bibliography collected on the Pearl of Great Price Central website. Most of the material from Nibley, Gee, and Muhlestein that Vogel argues against in Book of Abraham Apologetics are also online (and catalogued in the Pearl of Great Price Central bibliography), and readers are likewise encouraged to engage these works on their own as they assess their own position on the Book of Abraham.

The “Kirtland Egyptian Papers” and the Book of Abraham

The centerpiece of Vogel’s contention that the Book of Abraham is a modern pseudepigraphon is the motley collection of manuscripts commonly classified as the “Kirtland Egyptian Papers,” the “Joseph Smith Egyptian Papers,” or more recently the “Egyptian-language documents.” This corpus can broadly be grouped into the following categories:

(1) several manuscripts on which associates of Joseph Smith copied Egyptian characters; (2) three manuscripts containing
Smoot, Framing the Book of Abraham (Vogel) • 273

attempts to decipher the Egyptian writing system, called the Egyptian Alphabet documents; (3) a document associated with the Egyptian Alphabet documents, called the Egyptian Counting document, that contains a system of counting; and (4) a manufactured book of ruled paper into which early Latter-day Saint scribes William W. Phelps and Warren Parrish inscribed a “Grammar and Alphabet” of the Egyptian language. The Egyptian-language documents are textually interdependent. The Egyptian Alphabet documents contain non-Roman characters — many of which were copied from the papyri — with accompanying transliterations and definitions. Characters, transliterations, and definitions from the Egyptian Alphabet documents were later copied into the Grammar and Alphabet volume.\(^{37}\)

Controversy has swirled around these documents for over five decades, since “the extent of Joseph Smith’s involvement in the creation of these manuscripts is unknown.”\(^ {38}\) More than just that, actually,

Almost every aspect of these documents is disputed: their authorship, their date, their purpose, their relationship with the Book of Abraham, their relationship with the Joseph Smith Papyri, their relationship with each other, what the documents are or were intended to be, and even whether the documents form a discrete or coherent group.\(^ {39}\)

From the looks of it, the Egyptian-language documents are little more than a confounding historical oddity that only a small cadre of archivists and historians would find meaningful; hardly the sort of thing to get worked up over. Why is it, then, that anti-Mormons have long salivated over these manuscripts? Because despite how well-intended they may have been, “these attempts are considered by modern Egyptologists — both Latter-day Saints and others — to be of no actual value in understanding Egyptian.”\(^ {40}\) The “Grammar and Alphabet of the Egyptian Language” (GAEL) document, called the “bound grammar” throughout Book of Abraham Apologetics, has particularly proven to be a lightning rod, since it is commonly believed that the linguistic hocus-pocus of the GAEL is all that is needed to safely demonstrate Joseph Smith’s inability to understand Egyptian.

To properly indict Joseph Smith, Vogel attributes the entirety of the Kirtland-era Egyptian-language corpus to the Prophet (xi). He specifically goes to great pains to attribute authorship of the “Grammar
and Alphabet of the Egyptian Language” (GAEL) to Joseph Smith (96–115), since the “imaginative” (96) way the Egyptian language is understood in this text is indeed damning for the Book of Abraham if the latter was derived from the former. Of course, Vogel has no other prosecutorial option if he wants his charges to stick. If enough reasonable doubt can be cast on the claim that Joseph Smith was the primary author of the GAEL, then one of Vogel’s most important arguments in Book of Abraham Apologetics unravels. For Vogel’s naturalistic claims about the Book of Abraham to work, he needs Joseph to be the principal instigator behind the Egyptian-language documents.

So what evidence, exactly, does Vogel have to attribute authorship of the GAEL to Joseph Smith? The first is this entry from Joseph Smith’s history: “The remainder of this month [July 1835], I was continually engaged in translating an alphabet to the Book of Abraham, and arranging a grammar of the Egyptian language as practiced by the ancients.” Although dated July 1835 and written in the first person, this entry, in fact, is a retrospective account that was composed by scribe Willard Richards no earlier than mid-September 1843. Vogel is aware of this, and so postulates that “he probably composed the July 1835 account with the help of Smith and/or Phelps, the latter of who also worked on Smith’s history” (34). He indeed may have consulted Joseph for this entry, or he may have only consulted Phelps, who is the other (stronger, in my judgment) candidate for the authorship of the GAEL and who by late 1843 had assumed the mantel of ghostwriter for the Prophet. So while this entry from Joseph Smith’s history is evidence of contemporary attribution of the GAEL to Joseph, it is only secondary evidence for such, as it could just as well be Phelps’ own projection of his summer 1835 efforts onto Joseph. “It is important to remember that although various people acted as scribe to Joseph Smith, they were independent people and had their own independent thoughts. Not everything written by one of Joseph Smith’s scribes came from the mind of Joseph Smith, even during the time period when they served as Joseph Smith’s scribes.”

Vogel next offers Joseph Smith’s October 1, 1835, journal entry as evidence that “phase two” of work on the GAEL resumed under the Prophet after a brief lapse (121–25). The entry reads: “October 1, 1835. This after noon labored on the Egyptian alphabet, in company with brsr O[live]r Cowdery and W[illiam] W. Phelps: The system of astronomy was unfolded.” Vogel immediately jumps to the conclusion that this must be referring to the astronomical content of the GAEL, “which in the last seven chapters … [describes] a hierarchy of stars and planets” (121).
A much more parsimonious explanation for the October 1, 1835 journal entry, however, is that on this day Joseph was working (“laboring”) on the “Egyptian alphabet” documents, not the GAEL. Unlike the GAEL, this group of Egyptian-language documents (labeled A, B, and C in JSPRT4) actually does contain not only the handwriting of Phelps, but also that of Cowdery and the Prophet. “The three versions are clearly related. They may all be derived from an earlier version, or, more likely, they may have been created simultaneously, with [Joseph], Cowdery, and Phelps consulting with one another or referring to each other’s manuscripts.”

Joseph, Cowdery, and Phelps working together on the “Egyptian alphabet” texts one breezy October afternoon is a far more likely scenario than the convoluted one Vogel offers.

None of this is to deny that Joseph Smith had any involvement whatsoever with the composition of the Kirtland-era Egyptian-language documents. His handwriting appears in at least one of the “Egyptian alphabet” manuscripts, and his history could be used to show his involvement in the production of the GAEL in some undeterminable capacity. It is, rather, to stress two things. First, the evidence for Joseph Smith’s involvement in the composition of the GAEL, specifically, is tenuous; and second, Vogel has ramrodded the facts into a specific predetermined conclusion about the composition of the Book of Abraham and its relationship with the Kirtland-era Egyptian-language documents. In fact, the situation is far more uncertain than Vogel lets on.

It is unclear when in 1835 Joseph Smith began creating the existing Book of Abraham manuscripts or what relationship the Book of Abraham manuscripts have to the Egyptian-language documents. While some of the documents are clearly textually dependent upon others, there is also evidence of overlapping creation, false starts, and building upon previous work. The sequence of the creation of the Kirtland-era Book of Abraham manuscript and the various manuscripts of the Egyptian-language project is unknown. Considerable overlap of themes exists between the Book of Abraham and the Egyptian-language documents. Both have information concerning Abraham, Egypt, the Creation, Adam and Eve, Eden, astronomy, and Kolob and other stars, among other topics. Some evidence indicates that material from the Grammar and Alphabet volume was incorporated into at least one portion of the Book of Abraham text in Kirtland. But
most of the Book of Abraham is not textually dependent on any of the extant Egyptian-language documents. The inverse is also true: most of the content in the Egyptian-language documents is independent of the Book of Abraham.48

Because of this, Vogel’s overall discussion of the significance of the Egyptian-language documents in Book of Abraham Apologetics, including his exposition on how the content of the GAEL and other related documents must have informed the worldview of Joseph Smith, is of limited value.49

The “Lost Papyrus” Theory and the “Catalyst” Theory

The 2014 Gospel Topics essay “Translation and Historicity of the Book of Abraham” forthrightly notes how the surviving fragments of the Joseph Smith Papyri do not render the English text of the Book of Abraham when translated. “None of the characters on the papyrus fragments mentioned Abraham’s name or any of the events recorded in the book of Abraham,” the essay acknowledges.

Mormon and non-Mormon Egyptologists agree that the characters on the fragments do not match the translation given in the book of Abraham, though there is not unanimity, even among non-Mormon scholars, about the proper interpretation of the vignettes on these fragments. Scholars have identified the papyrus fragments as parts of standard funerary texts that were deposited with mummified bodies. These fragments date to between the third century B.C.E. and the first century C.E., long after Abraham lived.50

Understandably, this incongruence is simply too good for critics of Joseph Smith to pass up. As Nibley so memorably expressed it back in 1975, “Some people were endlessly dinning into the ears of the public that what was written on that small and battered strip [of papyrus] proved beyond a doubt that Joseph Smith was a fraud, because he thought that it contained the Book of Abraham, whereas it contains nothing of the sort.”51 How, then, does the Church account for this discrepancy? The essay offers two options:

It is likely futile to assess Joseph’s ability to translate papyri when we now have only a fraction of the papyrus he had in his possession. Eyewitnesses spoke of “a long roll” or multiple “rolls” of papyrus. Since only fragments survive, it is likely that much of the papyri accessible to Joseph when he translated
the book of Abraham is not among these fragments. The loss of a significant portion of the papyri means the relationship of the papyri to the published text cannot be settled conclusively by reference to the papyri. Alternatively, Joseph’s study of the papyri may have led to a revelation about key events and teachings in the life of Abraham, much as he had earlier received a revelation about the life of Moses while studying the Bible. This view assumes a broader definition of the words *translator* and *translation*. According to this view, Joseph’s translation was not a literal rendering of the papyri as a conventional translation would be. Rather, the physical artifacts provided an occasion for meditation, reflection, and revelation. They catalyzed a process whereby God gave to Joseph Smith a revelation about the life of Abraham, even if that revelation did not directly correlate to the characters on the papyri.52

These two explanations have come to be commonly called the “missing papyrus” theory and the “catalyst” theory, respectively. The first theory finds perhaps its most outspoken advocate in John Gee, whereas the second enjoys support among influential Latter-day Saint thinkers such as Terryl Givens.54 Both theories have their strengths and weaknesses, and both are, in my judgment, viable, but “for none of the theories is the evidence as neat or as compelling as one might wish,” and so it is wise at this point not to become too particularly dogmatic.

In order to erase any vestiges of hope for those who wish to affirm the historicity and inspiration of the Book of Abraham, Vogel critiques both the missing papyrus theory and the catalyst theory in the penultimate chapter of *Book of Abraham Apologetics* (179–214). “There is no reasonable or compelling evidence to support the theory that the Book of Abraham’s English text came from a long roll of papyrus” that is now missing, Vogel announces. “Furthermore, appeals to a catalyst theory of the Book of Abraham, including attempts to redefine the term translate, fail to account satisfactorily for the text’s own references to Facsimile 1 and to Smith’s own use of the term ‘translate’ in its conventional meaning” (213–14). The Mormons are without a prayer. The only honest option, our authority urges, is to admit that the Book of Abraham is a nineteenth-century pseudepigraphon. But is the situation really as dire for the faithful as Vogel makes it out to be?
Red Ink

Vogel begins his refutation of the missing papyrus theory by attacking its weakest argument that informed advocates for the theory no longer use (179–80). In the first edition of *The Message of the Joseph Smith Papyri* Nibley referenced the following entry in the *History of the Church* as evidence that the Book of Breathings fragments recovered in 1967 were not the source of the Book of Abraham: “The record of Abraham and Joseph, found with the mummies, is beautifully written on papyrus, with black, and a small part red, ink or paint, in perfect preservation.”56 This description, supposedly from Joseph Smith as it appears in *History of the Church*, was to Nibley evidence that the Prophet did not consider P. Joseph Smith X–XI the source of the Book of Abraham.57 As Vogel correctly points out (180), however, this source actually comes from Oliver Cowdery, not Joseph Smith, and was describing the papyri generally, not strictly the supposed source of the Book of Abraham.58 Vogel did not need to cite the critical author H. Michael Marquardt to inform us of this, since in the second edition of *The Message of the Joseph Smith Papyri*, Gee himself made this clear. “It is now known that the person who identified the papyri as having red ink was Oliver Cowdery rather than Joseph Smith, and he may have been referring to a different papyrus than the one Nibley thought he was.”59 Still, if Vogel’s intention here was to score an easy point against Nibley, then he succeeded admirably.

Eyewitness Testimony

Of great importance for the missing papyrus theory are the testimonies left by eyewitnesses who viewed the papyri in the nineteenth century. Vogel recognizes this as much as Gee and Muhlestein do, and so he devotes a considerable portion of this chapter attempting to negate or downplay the eyewitness testimony, which appears to indicate rather strongly both that a sizeable portion of papyrus is missing and that the source believed to be the Book of Abraham was contained on that missing portion (181–82, 192–204). Since this matter essentially boils down to a matter of interpretation, it strikes me as rather unnecessary, even pedantic, in this review to assess each of Vogel’s claims individually. Readers are welcome to gauge the competing interpretations of the historical sources offered by Muhlestein and Vogel for themselves.60 But I do feel it necessary to make one observation on Vogel’s overall methodological habits when it comes to interpreting the relevant sources.

Vogel displays an unmistakable kind of presentistic hubris in his efforts to downplay the significance of the eyewitness testimony
A major problem Vogel has with Muhlestein’s reading of the historical accounts is that “none of the eyewitnesses possessed the knowledge necessary to verify a long-scroll theory. Most witnesses simply expressed an assumption based on Smith’s identification” of the papyri (182). What Vogel seems to forget here that he is not the eyewitness in all of this, and it doesn’t require any sort of esoteric knowledge or specialized academic training for nineteenth-century frontier rustics to tell the difference between a “long roll of manuscript” (see below) and fragments of papyrus mounted under glass. Neither does it require an “assumption” for an eyewitness to report what Joseph Smith or others related about the contents of this or that portion of the papyri. To be fair, Vogel does make the valid point that some of the eyewitnesses do identify the mounted fragments and not the long roll as being the source of the Book of Abraham, or at least they report Joseph Smith as indicating such (e.g. 193). But this merely complicates the missing papyrus theory; it does not outright refute it as Vogel insists.

The way Vogel handles the testimony of Charlotte Haven is instructive on this point. Her account of viewing the papyri has been scrutinized by both advocates and opponents of the missing papyrus theory because of its potential ramifications for identifying the source of the Book of Abraham. Below is the relevant portion of Haven’s testimony in full:

From there we called on Joseph’s mother, passing the site of the Nauvoo House, a spacious hotel, the first floor only laid. It is like the Temple in being erected on the tithe system, and when finished will surpass in splendor any hotel in the State. Here Joseph and his heirs for generations are to have apartments free of expense, and they think the crowned heads of Europe will rusticate beneath its roof. Madame Smith’s residence is a log house very near her son’s. She opened the door and received us cordially. She is a motherly kind of woman of about sixty years. She receives a little pittance by exhibiting The Mummies to strangers. When we asked to see them, she lit a candle and conducted us up a short, narrow stairway to a low, dark room under the roof. On one side were standing half a dozen mummies, to whom she introduced us, King Onitus and his royal household, — one she did not know. Then she took up what seemed to be a club wrapped in a dark cloth, and said “This is the leg of Pharaoh’s daughter, the one that saved Moses.” Repressing a smile,
I looked from the mummies to the old lady, but could detect nothing but earnestness and sincerity on her countenance. Then she turned to a long table, set her candle-stick down, and opened a long roll of manuscript, saying it was “the writing of Abraham and Isaac, written in Hebrew and Sanscrit,” and she read several minutes from it as if it were English. It sounded very much like passages from the Old Testament — and it might have been for anything we knew — but she said she read it through the inspiration of her son Joseph, in whom she seemed to have perfect confidence. Then in the same way she interpreted to us hieroglyphics from another roll. One was Mother Eve being tempted by the serpent, who — the serpent, I mean — was standing on the tip of his tail, with which his two legs formed a tripod, and had his head in Eve’s ear. I said, “But serpents don’t have legs.” “They did before the fall,” she asserted with perfect confidence. The Judge slipped a coin in her hand which she received smilingly, with a pleasant, “Come again,” as we bade her goodby.

Vogel’s objections to Muhlestein’s and Gee’s interpretation of this account are equal parts special pleading and ideologically motivated. Haven reports that Lucy Smith explicitly identified the “long roll of manuscript” as “the writings of Abraham and Isaac,” to which Vogel merely shrugs off by saying she “only” identified it as such and not explicitly as “the source of the published Book of Abraham” (199). But what else could the Prophet’s mother have possibly meant other than the source of the Book of Abraham with her comment that the “long roll” contained the “writings of Abraham”? Vogel’s objection here is simply a desperate attempt to make Haven’s testimony mean something other than what it plainly means.

Like Christopher Smith before him, Vogel also objects that Haven could merely have been describing the “two-foot scroll containing the end section of Hôr’s Book of Breathings” (199). The matter basically boils down to whether it is plausible that a casual observer would consider two feet of papyrus a “long roll.” It is of course possible, but it’s not a foregone conclusion, that this is an example of “a witness describing the fragments as if they were complete scrolls” (200–201) as Vogel pretends. Even Smith, who is skeptical of the missing papyrus theory and argues against it, concedes that “since [two feet] for the interior portion of the Hor scroll is hardly long by Egyptological standards, Haven’s report seems to imply the presence of another text on the scroll.
following the Document of Breathing.”67 Just so. That Vogel obstinately refuses to acknowledge as even possible what is obvious from the Haven account obliges me to conclude that he is motivated not by careful historical consideration but rather by a desire to neuter the arguments of his apologist interlocutors.68

**The Length of the Hor Scroll**

Besides the testimony of eyewitnesses who viewed the papyri, is there any other way to determine the amount of material originally possessed by Joseph Smith? In 2007 Gee attempted to answer the question of how long the Joseph Smith Papyri originally were with a mathematical formula used by Egyptologists to calculate the length of papyri scrolls.69 Gee’s initial calculations yielded an estimated 1250.5 cm or 41 feet of missing papyrus from the scroll of Hor.70

Gee’s initial findings were met with criticism by Andrew Cook and Christopher Smith not long after his 2007 publication.71 They argued that “no more than 56 cm of papyrus can be missing from the scroll’s interior,” a number that, obviously, is both far less than Gee’s estimate and precludes the possibility of a hypothetical missing Book of Abraham text to appear on the Hor scroll.72 What resulted was a back and forth between Gee and Cook73 that resulted in Gee revising his math and coming up with a new estimate: “about 314 centimeters, which is about ten feet three and a half inches give or take a foot.”74

Vogel, predictably, sides with Cook and Smith on the question of mathematically determining the amount of missing papyrus from the Hor scroll (185–86). “This means,” he writes, “that there was an intact roll of about four inches wide and about two feet long that Gee’s and Muhlestein’s eyewitnesses saw and identified with the Book of Abraham” (186). I freely confess that I do not have the mathematical acumen to independently determine who is right or wrong on this matter. From the fact that he provides no actual compelling reason to prefer Cook and Smith’s results over Gee’s, neither, it appears, does Vogel.

What I can say, however, is that last year Eshbal Ratzon and Nachum Dershowitz published a study which found that “though theoretically reasonable, many practical problems interfere with” any attempt to determine the length of ancient scrolls mathematically, with the unfortunate result that “highly significant errors are quite frequent” and “past uses of this approach should be reevaluated.”75 When it comes to Cook and Smith’s methodology, which Vogel assures us is superior to Gee’s (186n19), these two authorities conclude that “the results [derived
from their method] are no better than eyeballing.” This does not prove Cook and Smith are wrong and Gee is therefore correct, but it does put something of a damper on our confidence in their results, especially since Ratzon and Dershowitz have no vested interest that I can detect in how much missing papyrus there might be from the Hor scroll. It would appear, then, that caution and further study seem prudent when it comes to attempting to determine the length of the Joseph Smith Papyri with heretofore standard mathematical formulae.77

Facsimile 1

Critics of the missing papyrus theory are quick to point out that the text of the Book of Abraham actually mentions Facsimile 1:

> And it came to pass that the priests laid violence upon me, that they might slay me also, as they did those virgins upon this altar; and that you may have a knowledge of this altar, I will refer you to the representation at the commencement of this record. … That you may have an understanding of these gods, I have given you the fashion of them in the figures at the beginning, which manner of figures is called by the Chaldeans Rahleenos, which signifies hieroglyphics. (Abraham 1:12, 14, emphasis added)

Vogel contends that “these statements regarding Facsimile 1 create a serious problem for the long-scroll theory. Indeed, it is difficult to explain how the Book of Abraham can refer to the opening vignettes of the Book of Breathings as ‘the commencement of this record’” (188). In fact, although this claim has been popular with anti-Mormons since the 1960s, it actually isn’t very hard to account for these verses with the missing papyrus theory. Muhlestein has offered a perfectly plausible explanation, which Vogel ignores.79

But more importantly, Vogel finds himself at odds with every other text critic who has look at the Book of Abraham manuscripts, and who agree that the damning lines from vv. 12, 14 are interlinear insertions in the Williams manuscript, and not original.80 Rather than being interlinear insertions, Vogel claims that “there is a general upward slant to all of Williams’ lines [on the first page of the manuscript], especially at the end of paragraphs,” and therefore v. 12 “was inserted into the space created by the upward angle of the previous line” (189). A careful look at the first page of the Williams manuscript, however, tends to refute Vogel’s claims. (See Figure 1.) Only the third and fourth paragraphs on that
page might to an appreciable degree be described as slanting upwards, but certainly not “all of Williams’s lines” as Vogel claims. Crucially, the lines immediately before and after v. 12 do not appear to slant. The text “I will refer you to the representation that is at the … ” does slant upwards, but even if we grant that this was because of Williams’ scribal habit, and not because the line is an insertion, it does not explain why “… (commencement of this record” is directly underneath and does not begin at the left margin of the next line.

Vogel’s claim that “cutting out the entire reference to the sacrificial altar does not work, because doing so would create too much space between paragraphs, which was not Williams’s practice” (189–90) is also refuted by a look at the preceding paragraph breaks, which do in fact tend to leave considerable space between the end of the line and end of the page. (See Figure 2.) The first and third paragraph breaks, for example, occur before halfway down the line; the second and sixth paragraph breaks end about halfway down the line; and the fourth paragraph ends at about 3/4s down the line. If we suppose a fifth paragraph ending at “knowledge of this altar” on lines 36–37, it would, in fact, align very nicely with the first, second, third, and sixth paragraph endings. What’s more, the breaks at paragraphs one and arguably two occur mid-sentence in Williams’ text, posing no problem for the fact that the likely break at the fifth paragraph, as postulated above, also occurs mid-sentence.

Figure 1. Lines 36 and 38 on the first page of Frederick G. Williams’ copy of Abraham 1:2–13. These lines show no tendency towards slanting upwards, contrary to Vogel’s claim. Detail of image from www.josephsmithpapers.org.
Figure 2. The paragraph breaks on the first page of Frederick G. Williams’ copy of Abraham 1:2–13. Image via www.josephsmithpapers.org.
Vogel has a better argument for why verse 14 may not be an interlinear insertion. He observes that “this page, like the previous one, is unruled; so there is no top margin that would have been left blank” (190–91). He also notes that “page 4 [of the Williams manuscript] also begins without observing the right margin” (191). What Vogel does not mention, however, is that page four of Williams’ manuscript also ends without observing the left margin, as shown in Figure 3, effectively making the entire page margin-less. (The first two lines and the last seven lines basically run from the left to right edges of the page.) The same is not true for page two, where the first four lines of v. 14 begin left of the margin that runs uniformly until the end of the page. Williams began and ended page four by following the same margins except for the middle of the page where he indented right to make room for marginal characters.

One could argue that the difference in indentation on pages two and four is because of the placement of the marginal characters. A cursory glance at the manuscript would seem to bear this out. Even so, if one were to follow Vogel’s argument, one would be hard-pressed to explain the cramped spacing of the first line on page two, which does not seem to appear at the top of the other three pages of Williams’ manuscript. This along with the fact that v. 12 almost certainly is not original satisfies me that “the content and spacing of this paragraph [at the top of page two], along with similar revisions to the line at the bottom of the previous page, suggest that this paragraph was inserted.”

Gee is absolutely correct that “the Book of Abraham actually reads smoothly without these additions.” As revised to omit the lines in question, the text of Abraham 1:12–15 from Williams’ manuscript would read:

![Figure 3. Lines 1–10 of page 2 of Frederick G. Williams’ copy of Abraham 1:14–22. The clear indentation after line 4 is apparent, as is the cramped spacing of the first line at the top of the page. Detail of image via www.josephsmithpapers.org.](image-url)
... and that you might have a knowledge of this alter[,] It was made after, the form of a bedsted such as was had among the Chaldeans and it stood before the Gods of Elk-keenah Zibnah Mah-Mach-rah — and als[o] a God like unto that of pharaoh King of Egypt[,] And as they lifted up their hands upon me that they might offer me up ...

Whatever the ultimate implications this may have for the missing papyrus theory, the relationship between the text and Facsimile 1, or what was assumed by Joseph or his clerks to be the source of the Book of Abraham remains to be fully explored. For now, it is enough to say that Vogel’s appeal to Abraham 1:12, 14 in his attempt to refute the missing papyrus theory is not decisive.

**Joseph Smith — “Translator” Extraordinaire**

If the missing papyrus theory does not suit Vogel, what about the so-called catalyst theory, or the theory that Joseph Smith’s engagement with the Egyptian papyri “catalyzed” a revelatory experience by which he revealed the Book of Abraham text? As mentioned previously, the two most recent advocates for this theory are Terryl Givens and Samuel Brown. As ingenious as they might be, Vogel is not impressed with the attempt to broaden the semantic range of “translation” in Joseph Smith’s theological lexicon. He is specifically critical of Givens, whose recent articulation of the catalyst theory Vogel strenuously critiques (204–13). “Did Smith truly believe — mistakenly — that his inspired dictation of the Abraham text came from the papyrus?” he asks. “The text itself references Facsimile 1 twice, which suggests that Smith believed he was translating, *in the conventional sense*, and not receiving revelation” (211, emphasis added). Vogel doubles down on this claim by appealing to the Egyptian language documents, all of which Vogel attributes as being the mental products of the Prophet (211). For Vogel, the Kirtland-era Egyptian papers “tell us Smith’s definition of translation was conventional and straightforward” (211). One page later, Vogel insists that Joseph Smith’s translation projects must have been conventional because of the “eye-witness testimony that describe Smith reading the translation from the [seer] stone” (212). Vogel concludes by mentioning the Prophet’s translation or revision of the Bible as yet further evidence that “there is no indication that he used ‘translation’ in any sense different from the conventional sense” (213).

There is so much question begging packed into these few short pages of *Book of Abraham Apologetics* that it is truly difficult to know
where to begin unpacking all of it. In a spectacular display of clairvoyance, Vogel confidently proclaims exactly what Joseph Smith must have been thinking and intending with his use of the word “translation” to describe his textual compositions. Unfortunately for him, though, Vogel’s pronouncements on the supposed “conventional” banality of the Prophet’s use of “translation” could not come at a more awkward moment, since the inquisitive reader is now greatly benefitted by last year’s Producing Ancient Scripture, which demonstrates beyond controversy just how multifaceted and at times unreservedly idiosyncratic the Prophet’s use of “translation” truly was.

Let’s begin with the Book of Abraham, which Vogel is adamant is Joseph Smith’s bungled “conventional” rendering of the papyri fragments now housed safely in Church archives in Salt Lake City. Even if we grant Vogel’s highly dubious dogma that the Kirtland-era Egyptian language documents are exclusively the fruit of the Prophet’s wild linguistic forays, we must ask how exactly Joseph and his clerks imagined he could understand Egyptian in the first place. By consulting the work of the European savants, perhaps? Out of the question, as both the Prophet’s defenders and critics agree. “It would have been impossible for any American scholar to know enough about Egyptian inscriptions to read them before the publication of Champollion’s grammar,” insisted the skeptical James Henry Breasted in 1912. “American Universities have never until recently given such studies any attention. … It will be seen, then, that if Joseph Smith could read ancient Egyptian writing, his ability to do so had no connection with the decipherment of hieroglyphics by European scholars.” Then how? We need not resort to any Vogelian augury to answer this question, as the documentary record provides more than enough clues to bolster our confidence. “Joseph the Seer saw these Record[s] and by the revelation of Jesus Christ could translate these records,” recorded John Whitmer in his important history, “[w]hich when all translated will be a pleasing history and of great value to the saints.” Warren Parrish, an intimate in the Prophet’s labor on the Egyptian papyri, recounted after his disaffection how he “penned down the translation of the Egyptian Hieroglyphicks as [Joseph] claimed to receive it by direct inspiration from Heaven.” And what of the seer stone? The Cleveland Whig reported in the summer of 1835 on being “credibly informed” by a source close to him (apparently Frederick G. Williams) that “Joe has … examin[ed] the papyrus through his spectacles.” The Prophet’s mother rehearsed something similar to visitors shortly after her son’s death. “She said,” reports our informant, “that when Joseph was
reading the papyrus, he closed his eyes, and held a hat over his face, and that the revelation came to him; and that where the papyrus was torn, he could read the parts that were destroyed equally as well as those that were there; and that scribes sat by him writing, as he expounded."

This agrees with William West, who in 1837 described “a quantity of records, written on papyrus, in Egyptian hieroglyphics” in the possession of Joseph Smith.

These records were torn by being taken from the roll of embalming salve which contained them, and some parts entirely lost; but Smith is to translate the whole by divine inspiration, and that which is lost, like Nebuchadnezzar’s dream, can be interpreted as well as that which is preserved; and a larger volume than the Bible will be required to contain them.

Frederic G. Mathers’ late account converges well the contemporary reports with his remark that “Joe Smith translated the characters on the roll, being favored with a ‘special revelation’ whenever any of the characters were missing by reason of mutilation of the roll.” (That is supposed to be the “conventional” or “straightforward” way of dealing with lacunae in a manuscript when attempting to translate an ancient text?) But where these accounts are hearsay, we have the testimony of no less than one of the men who “assist[ed] in setting the TIPE for printing the first peace of the BOOK OF ABRAHAM” and who was “much edified” with the Prophet’s ability “to translate through the Urim & Thummim Ancient records & Hieroglyphics as old as Abraham or Adam.”

Another one of Joseph’s Nauvoo clerks, Howard Coray, reminiscenced to his daughter of having “heard him prophesy many things that have already come to pass,” and, what’s more, distinctly remembered having also “seen him translate by the Seer’s stone.” Translate what? Surely neither the Book of Mormon nor the Bible, which were completed long before Coray began clerking for the Prophet (or before he had even joined the Church, for that matter) in the spring of 1840. The Kinderhook Plates, perhaps? Also impossible, as Coray was finishing a mission in the eastern United States at the time of the incident (early May 1843), and, furthermore, we can confidently say that Joseph attempted a secular, not a revelatory, translation of those notorious fakes. This leaves only a portion of the Book of Abraham or, perhaps, some other heretofore unknown Nauvoo-era revelation that the Prophet received through his seer stone. But Coray recalled both hearing Joseph prophesy and seeing
him translate with the seer stone, strongly suggesting that he meant the Book of Abraham with this description.

From friendly and hostile sources, then, we see a picture of Joseph Smith not scrabbling through lexica and grammars to give us the English text of the Book of Abraham, which any “conventional” translation would demand, but instead of him tapping into the same prophetic reserve with which he produced the Book of Mormon. “The decipherment of the Egyptian language was newly under way when [Joseph] Smith began to study the papyri, and there is no evidence that he was acquainted with the progress that had been made,” write Jensen and Hauglid.

He was certainly unequipped to translate the scrolls as a scholar would. The translation of the Book of Abraham is perhaps best understood by examining the way in which Smith produced other scriptural works, namely the Book of Mormon, the Bible revision, and his revelations.

Speaking of which, Vogel does not dispute the “eye-witness testimony that describe Smith reading the translation [of the Book of Mormon] from the [seer] stone” (212). What, pray, is “conventional” and “straightforward” with translating an ancient text on golden plates by looking into a magic rock? So frightfully disruptive and absurd is this notion of “translation” within the strict confines of secular academe that even the most generous Gentile authorities who write on Joseph Smith today find themselves blushing when asked to account for the affair.

Then there is the troublesome fact for Vogel that Joseph Smith described his Bible revision project undertaken between 1830–1833 as both a “translation” and a “revelation,” and that this translation/revelation was done by revising and expanding the English text of the King James Bible, not through a fresh rendering of Hebrew or Greek (as is widely known). And yet we are to believe that this is a “conventional translation?” So anomalous is the Prophet’s Bible revision that its very existence has spawned a veritable academic cottage industry of specialists who since at least the mid-twentieth century have exhausted themselves trying to understand the precise nature of the Prophet’s revisions to the biblical text and the relationship the final product has with his revelatory method. But our author cannot be bothered by this. “Rather than redefining ‘translation’ to address problems, the problems should tell us that Smith was not translating as he claimed” (213). In other words, Vogel is upset that Joseph Smith did not use words the way he does, and therefore finds fault both with the Prophet and his followers.
who try to make sense of the texts he produced. Rather than be caught in the uncomfortable position of taking Joseph Smith seriously on his own terms, Vogel is content to dismiss the matter as being unworthy of any intellectual curiosity or honest effort to understand.

To be sure, we should be wary of the more outlandish post-modernist approaches to understanding Joseph Smith’s conception of translation which attempt to totally decouple the Prophet’s texts from “an underlying ancient source” (208).\textsuperscript{102} In that regard, I am actually in agreement with Vogel that one real danger of the catalyst theory (whether for the Book of Abraham or any other of Joseph Smith’s scriptural productions) is that one is liable to redefine the meaning of translation “as broadly as possible, even to the point that the word loses any significant meaning” (205). The point that Vogel fundamentally misses is that one can formulate a definition of “translation” and “translator” that is meaningful in describing Joseph Smith and his scriptural works only by first putting in the minimal amount of effort to understand Joseph on his own terms. This Vogel obstinately refuses to do, because he clearly thinks he knows better than Joseph Smith what Joseph Smith meant by calling his textual outpouring “translations.”\textsuperscript{103} We might be tempted to give Vogel some credit here, were it not for his conspicuous habit of riding roughshod over the historical record and imputing to his subject his own assumptions about how a translation must be in order to be worthy of the name. So instead we turn to Nibley, who wisely observes how the Prophet has saved us the trouble of faulting his method by announcing in no uncertain terms that it is a method unique to himself depending entirely on divine revelation. That places the whole thing beyond the reach of direct examination and criticism but leaves wide open the really effective means of testing any method, which is by the results it produces.\textsuperscript{104}

**Book of Abraham Parallels: Ancient or Modern?**

As previously mentioned, a sizable portion of *Book of Abraham Apologetics* is devoted to refuting the arguments put forth by apologists and other Latter-day Saint scholars for the Book of Abraham’s historicity (215–42). Vogel sets out to “deal with defensive attempts to support the Book of Abraham’s antiquity that draw parallels between unique/non-biblical aspects of Abraham’s narrative and genuinely ancient Egyptian, Jewish, Christian, and Muslim sources.” Vogel concludes that “these parallels are invariably weak, misrepresented, or irrelevant, and arguments for
ancient historicity overestimate the significance of the evidence and underestimate what Smith’s contemporaries knew about non-biblical legends involving Abraham” (215, emphasis added). A powerful claim, to be sure. Defenders of the Book of Abraham’s historicity have nothing to offer in defense of the text that wasn’t already known to Joseph Smith’s contemporaries, according to Vogel, and they misrepresent the evidence. We might have more confidence in Vogel’s verdict if he himself did not routinely demonstrate his inability to provide even a modicum of original argumentation or critical assessment of the evidence. Instead, what he offers in this portion of his book is largely a parade of hand-waving, appealing to authority, and a totally inadequate engagement with both the primary evidence and the secondary literature. A few examples should suffice our purposes here.

**Abrahamic Traditions**

As previously mentioned, a substantial portion of *Book of Abraham Apologetics* is dedicated to negating the impressive amount of parallels the Book of Abraham shares with extra-biblical sources. In the eighth chapter (“Nineteenth-Century Sources,” 215–26), Vogel discusses “possible nineteenth-century sources for the English text of the Book of Abraham,” specifically potential sources for the first two chapters of the text (215). Vogel is keen to refute “defensive attempts to support the Book of Abraham’s antiquity that draw parallels between unique/non-biblical aspects of Abraham’s narrative and genuinely ancient Egyptian, Jewish, Christian, and Muslim sources.” In Vogel’s opinion, the sources amassed in publications such as *Traditions About the Early Life of Abraham* are “invariably weak, misrepresented, or irrelevant” (215). Instead, Vogel “contend[s] that the so-called unique elements in the Book of Abraham — that Abraham’s father, Terah, was an idolater; that Abraham was a victim of an attempted sacrifice; that Abraham was an astronomer; that Abraham made converts in Haran — were all known to Joseph Smith’s contemporaries,” and are therefore unimpressive evidence for the text’s antiquity (216).

For all the grief he gives “apologists” for their supposed leaps in reconstructing the chronology of the translation of the Book of Abraham, Vogel has no problem filling the gaps with his own preferred speculation so long as it benefits his predetermined naturalistic conclusions. Vogel wonders, for instance, if “Smith may have consulted Bible commentaries such as Methodist Adam Clarke’s well-known volumes and other theological works” in the summer of 1835 to conjure
material ("brainstorm," to use Vogel’s word) for his “pseudepigraphic text” (217–19, emphasis added). Here we encounter a rather curious — if not also comical and totally absurd — portrait of a Joseph Smith who was clever enough to rattle off hundreds of pages of original material for the composition of the Book of Mormon in a matter of weeks, but needed months to mine material in order to compose a measly forty-five verses for the Book of Abraham (Abraham 1:4–2:18). Vogel similarly cites an 1841 discourse delivered by Joseph Smith as further evidence that “Smith had time to think about his pseudepigraphic text” (218) without ever considering the possibility that this material is evidence for precisely the opposite of what Vogel supposes, namely, that the Prophet had translated material well beyond the extant text. The reason for this failure of imagination on Vogel’s part, of course, is because he needs Joseph Smith to be both a thieving magpie lifting content from Clarke and Dick and Josephus and a quack pseudepigraphist scrambling for time as he strings along his unsuspecting followers.

But it was not only contemporary sources that inspired the Prophet’s fanciful text, according to Vogel. “To Smith, this partly intact vignette [in P. Joseph Smith I] looked like human sacrifice, and no doubt the attempted sacrifice of Isaac by Abraham came to mind” (226). How exactly Vogel has divined all of this he does not disclose; suffice it to say that for him the point is that “none of the non-canonical sources [compiled by Latter-day Saint scholars] has Abraham stabbed or slashed with a knife before being thrown into the fire. He is simply thrown into the fire alive and a miraculous power preserves him until he emerges” (227). True enough, but in his attempt to turn the Book of Abraham into derivative nineteenth-century pseudepigrapha, Vogel misses something important: if none of the sources “well known to Smith’s contemporaries” (227) portray Abraham as being slaughtered with a knife, then where on earth did the Prophet come up with the idea? Vogel may be confident in his ability to read Joseph Smith’s mind, but I am not. Vogel must supply us with better evidence than basically a hunch if we are going to follow his line of thinking. What’s more, we must insist that Vogel do something more to account for the crucial point raised by Muhlestein:

What I found in the few cases of Egyptian sacrifice (human or not) about which we have details is that typically the sacrificial victim was struck with a blade and then burned. In hindsight that makes perfect sense. It is much easier to burn someone or something that is already dead. Nearly all animal sacrifices are done this way. This is likely what was intended
for Abraham as well, to first be struck with a knife while on an altar (as pictured on the facsimile) and then to be burned. Thus the Egyptian sources helped make sense of the various elements of the Abraham story.\(^{110}\)

Vogel actually cites part of this source (227) but does nothing to refute Muhlestein’s point that what is depicted in the first chapter of the Book of Abraham actually accords better with ancient Egyptian material from Abraham’s day (see below) than with the later Judeo-Islamic traditions about the patriarch that were circulating in Joseph Smith’s day.

Consider also how Vogel handles the Book of Abraham’s portrayal of the patriarch as an astronomer. He correctly points out that Josephus, a source available to Joseph Smith, includes brief mention of Abraham’s penchant for arithmetic and astronomy, and that Latter-day Saints, unsurprisingly, cited Josephus on occasion (121).\(^{111}\) From this Vogel concludes that “it is no surprise that Smith would include a discussion of astronomy in his account of Abraham in Egypt” (121). Perhaps not, but what is surprising if we assume Josephus was a major source of Joseph Smith’s thinking is that the latter would depart from the former in some important ways.

The Book of Abraham implies that Abram reasoned with the Egyptians about astronomy, and while there is certainly a very distinct parallel here between Josephus and Joseph Smith, there are also some key differences in the way they present Abram teaching astronomy. First off, the Book of Abraham relates that the principles of astronomy were given to Abram in a nighttime revelation before he entered Egypt. However, Josephus reports that Abram had already acquired such knowledge while still in Chaldea. Josephus also states that he derived such knowledge through celestial observation, as opposed to revelation, since by nature Abram was naturally very intelligent and somewhat of a prodigy. Second, Josephus frames Abram’s presentation of astronomical insights within the context of mathematics whereas the Book of Abraham never reports that Abram taught mathematics but instead that he taught the Egyptians astronomy to teach the realities of deity. Finally, in Josephus’s account, Pharaoh is never mentioned, and the context presupposes that Abraham taught generally the Egyptians arithmetic and astronomy, whereas the Book of Abraham implies that Abraham taught Pharaoh specifically astronomy. In this respect, the Book of Abraham
account is actually closer to an account given by Artapanus, an ancient Jewish author who lived in Egypt sometime before the first century BCE, since he specifically reported that Abram taught Pharaoh astronomy. These observations are not to minimize the fact that there is significant extrabiblical parallel between Josephus and Joseph Smith, but to suggest some caution before automatically assuming that Josephus has to be the direct source for this parallel since there are also some important differences. Also, it must be remembered that in Jewish sources of the Second Temple period and Rabbinic period, Abram was widely regarded as an astronomer of sorts, so it is not inconceivable that such information could have been obtained via a source other than Josephus.\textsuperscript{112}

The most notable aspect of the Book of Abraham’s depiction that departs from Josephus and the other usual sources we might suspect if we were to follow Vogel is the explicit mention of the patriarch possessing and using the Urim and Thummim (Abraham 3:1, 4), which finds deeply intriguing parallel with rabbinic sources unavailable to Joseph Smith (and, apparently, unknown to Vogel).\textsuperscript{113} While Vogel does helpfully remind us about the pitfalls of parallelomania, his own reading of the Book of Abraham as nothing more than Joseph Smith’s imaginary literary concoction with some run-of-the-mill nineteenth-century sources thrown into the mix leaves much to be desired.

“Human Sacrifice” in the Book of Abraham

The opening chapter of the Book of Abraham narrates the patriarch’s near-sacrifice at the hands of an idolatrous priest, which Facsimile 1 of the Book of Abraham visually depicts. According to the text, Abraham’s kinsfolk at Ur practiced the “custom” of “offer[ing] up upon the altar which was built in the land of Chaldea . . . men, women, and children” to “strange gods” (Abraham 1:8). This “custom” is called in the text “the sacrifice of the heathen” (v. 7) and an “offering” (vv. 7–9), but never a “human sacrifice.” It was directed by “the priest of Elkenah,” a northwest Levantine deity attested in Abraham’s day\textsuperscript{114} who was also a “priest of Pharaoh” (v. 7), meaning evidently a god closely associated with Pharaoh or the office of kingship (v. 9).\textsuperscript{115} This practice is said to have been conducted “after the manner of the Egyptians” (vv. 9, 11) at an altar near a hill that bore an Egyptian name (v. 10). The text of the Book of Abraham, therefore, depicts what we today might call “human sacrifice” (a loaded term that requires lots of unpacking) being practiced
at Ur of the Chaldees (wherever that was) in a ritualized setting that to some unspecified degree mimicked an Egyptian custom.

Is there any evidence for what is depicted in the Book of Abraham? Specifically, is there evidence that the ancient Egyptians practiced “human sacrifice” that might have been mimicked by non-Egyptian peoples (such as Abraham’s presumed northwest Semitic or Mesopotamian kinspeople)? Vogel answers in the negative (231–32). Citing Ritner and Woods, who also dismiss the Book of Abraham, Vogel insists that “defenders of the Book of Abraham not only persist but overstate their case” for the practice of “human sacrifice” among the ancient Egyptians (232). A closer look at this issue, however, reveals serious problems with Vogel’s claim.

Let us first take a look at whether Vogel has fairly represented the argument made by those who affirm the Book of Abraham’s historicity. The only pieces of apologetic literature Vogel cites on this point are Muhlestein’s 2003 dissertation on the subject of “sanctioned killing” in ancient Egypt and his 2011 article giving a general overview of Book of Abraham issues. Either because he is ignorant of it or because he could not be bothered to include it, Vogel fails to meaningfully engage Muhlestein’s extensive Egyptological work on the subject of “sanctioned killing” in ancient Egypt. He also overlooks Muhlestein’s important 2011 study cowritten with Gee that explains the relevance of this body of work for the Book of Abraham. In fact, while Muhlestein was (only somewhat) tentative in the 2011 article cited by Vogel, he would later go on to make a much more forceful argument in subsequent publications. In 2015, for instance, writing in the journal *Near Eastern Archaeology* (published by the prestigious American Schools of Oriental Research), Muhlestein summarized his work on “sanctioned killing” in ancient Egypt by making the emphatic case that “institutionally sanctioned ritual violence [in ancient Egypt] centered around two main ideas: interference with cult, and rebellion.” Interference with the cult and rebellion against the established political (and thereby religious) order is precisely what landed Abraham on the altar according to the first chapter of the Book of Abraham, which Vogel perhaps would have appreciated had he better command of the relevant literature.

Central to the question of whether the ancient Egyptians practiced “human sacrifice” is the archaeological deposit discovered at the Middle Kingdom fortress of Mirgissa. Muhlestein and Gee cite this finding as their key witness, observing,
Just outside the Middle Kingdom fortress at Mirgissa, which had been part of the Egyptian empire in Nubia, a deposit was found containing various ritual objects such as melted wax figurines, a flint knife, and the decapitated body of a foreigner slain during rites designed to ward off enemies. Almost universally, this discovery has been accepted as a case of human sacrifice.\textsuperscript{122}

Does this concur with the Egyptological consensus? Writing in 2001, Stephan J. Seidlmayer summarized,

The most important find relating to execration rituals of the Middle Kingdom comes from outside the Egyptian fortress at Mirgissa in Lower Nubia. … There, a large pit was excavated that contained the remains of more than 175 pottery vessels inscribed with long execration texts; they had been broken intentionally during the ritual. This cache also contained an extensive series of other magical objects, including models of birds, ships, and parts of the human body. The remains of four inscribed limestone figures of captives were also found there that had possibly served as models for the texts on the pots. Careful analysis of the archaeological context revealed the phases of the ritual, during which even a human sacrifice occurred.\textsuperscript{123}

Seidlmayer is not alone in this assessment. Thus John Coleman Darnell and Coleen Manassa:

The interplay of ritual activity and more mundane military activity in the Egyptian world led on at least one occasion to what might be considered human sacrifice — the so-called Mirgissa Deposit. An intact assemblage from the Middle Kingdom fortress of Mirgissa contained the body of an executed man buried in a shallow pit along with a number of broken red clay vessels and several limestone and clay figurines of prisoners and associated images. The deposit appears to reveal the conjunction of three events: (1) a ritual called “breaking the red vessels,” well attested in representations of Egyptian funerary practice; (2) an execration ritual in which certain individuals, both Egyptian and foreign, are ritually damned; (3) finally, the actual execution of a human. … At Mirgissa, ritual and reality appeared to have coincided, and a human victim — decapitated and buried upside down
— received the treatment meted out to ritual images. One cannot say whether the individual executed was simply chosen at random, the human sacrifice being the primary object of the ritual, or whether, as appears more likely, the deposit represents the religious significance of a ritualized execution that would have taken place on the basis of some military or legal precedent. Most likely the victim was a Nubian criminal or rebel leader whose execution took on greater cosmic meaning by the application of the execration ritual to his execution.\textsuperscript{124}

And Perla Fuscaldo:

In the Middle Kingdom fortress at Mirgissa, figurines and jars were found in situ inside two pits. On three stone statuettes representing prisoners buried in sandy soil, and on a large amount of broken pottery placed in a pit, “execration texts” were written. In another pit a human skull was found. At Mirgissa not only human figurines and broken pottery but also human remains were buried, which means that an actual human sacrifice could have been made during this execration ritual.\textsuperscript{125}

And Emily Teeter:

Two other large deposits of execration figurines were found at the Middle Kingdom fort at Mirgissa in Nubia. One consisted of inscribed potsherds and 350 figurines. The other was made up of about 200 fragments of broken red vases bearing inscriptions, ostraca, 346 mud figurines, and three limestone prisoner figurines of bound enemies (and the head of another). The malicious intent of the deposit was made clear by the presence of a human sacrifice and by four crucibles supplied to burn and destroy the four prisoner figurines. These vessels are known from religious texts as the “furnace of the coppersmiths” that consumed enemies. This group … show[s] the extent to which magic was legitimate and accepted, for these deposits were intended to kill enemies of the state.\textsuperscript{126}

And, most recently, Andrew T. Wilburn:

One of the best preserved and archaeologically complete deposits of execration figurines and texts is associated with
the military fortress at Mirgissa, constructed in the XII dynasty, perhaps during the reign of Sesostris II (1845–1837 BCE), which served as a bulwark against the Nubian peoples to the south of Egypt. The deposit, which consisted of three separate pits, included 197 inscribed red ceramic vessels, 437 uninscribed red vessels, 346 mud figurines, 3 figurines in limestone, the head of a fourth figurine, and the remains of a human ritual killing. The bulk of the deposit was placed within a large pit hollowed out in the sand, well away from patterns of movement on the site. The ceramic vessels were shattered prior to being placed in the pit, and approximately one-third of the vessels had been inscribed with the names of enemies of the Egyptian state. The fragments of inscribed and uninscribed pots were regularly interspersed with seven layers of mud figurines, with each layer including a specific corpus of items: a headless and bound torso, a severed head or foot, a blinded eye, six or seven models of reed boats, a domesticated animal, a reptile, twelve geese in flight and a number of unidentified objects. The human figures or body-parts clearly represent the Nubians, whom the rite intended to kill or otherwise destroy; the rite also intended the destruction of their herds (the domesticated animals) and means of transport (the boats). The reptile and the geese likely stood for the traditional divine enemies of Egypt, residents of the desert. A second deposit was placed eleven meters away from the first, and included the statuettes of three bound prisoners and the head of a fourth. A third deposit consisted of the head of a Nubian victim, killed as part of the ritual, and buried in the ground on top of a pottery vessel. Around the skull, the excavators discovered traces of red beeswax, presumably the remains of wax figurines that were melted in the performance of the rite. The decapitated body of the Nubian was found a short distance away, offering clear evidence that this individual was executed as part of the process.127

Vogel’s appeal to Ritner in his attempt to refute Muhlestein’s work on this matter is rather awkward considering that Ritner himself described the Mirgissa deposit as “indisputable evidence for the practice of human sacrifice in classical ancient Egypt.” As he explained,

Interred about four meters from the central deposit, a skull rested upside down on one half of a broken pottery cup, its
mandible missing and its upper jaw flush with the surface. About the skull were found small traces of beeswax dyed with red ochre, presumably the remains of melted figurines. Although the cup which had probably once held the skull seemed naturally broken, perhaps as a result of burial, an intentionally shattered piece of inscribed red pottery 15 cm to the southeast clearly affiliated the find with the ritual of the central deposit. Lying a further 5 cm from this broken pottery was a flint blade, the traditional ceremonial knife for ritual slaughter. That the skull derived from a ritual sacrifice cannot be denied, as it was the initial discovery of a nearby decapitated and disarticulated skeleton which had led to the find of the execration assemblage. ... At Mirgissa, the interdependence of rite and execution is expressed concretely — by the corpse of the human sacrifice.128

My point here is not to make an argument from consensus, which is fallacious, but rather to stress that Vogel’s nihilistic and uniformed quibbling over whether we call the phenomenon “human sacrifice” or “sanctioned killing” or “ritual violence” or something else obfuscates the fact that Muhlestein’s work is both firmly within the Egyptological mainstream and amply demonstrates the overall plausibility of the behavior depicted in the first chapter of the Book of Abraham. We can, in fact, answer in the affirmative that there is evidence that the ancient Egyptians of Abraham’s day sometimes ritually executed human victims in what not a few Egyptologists sometimes call “human sacrifice.” The supreme irony in all of this, of course, is that the text of the Book of Abraham does not even call the practice described in its pages “human sacrifice.” Nor does it require actual Egyptians in Abraham’s homeland committing the deed. It merely requires general knowledge of this Egyptian custom among Abraham’s kinsfolk. Vogel has come nowhere close to adequately accounting for the evidence pertaining to this matter.129

Olishem

As early as the mid-1980s,130 Latter-day Saint scholars have pointed to a plausible candidate for the toponym Olishem mentioned at Abraham 1:10. Inscriptional evidence from Mesopotamia dating to the reign of the Akkadian king Naram-Sin (circa 2254–2218 BC) speaks of a certain 𒐠, standardized as either Ulisum or Ulishum, but also Ulissum, Ullis(s)um, Ul(l)is(s)um, and Ul(l)is.131 The location of
this Ulisum/Ulishum most likely lies somewhere west of the Euphrates in southern Turkey, but it is difficult to be more specific with the available evidence. Vogel, desperate to neutralize this very promising evidence for the antiquity of the Book of Abraham, is quick to dismiss this correlation. “[M]aking this argument requires moving Ur from Chaldea in the south to an unlikely location in northern Mesopotamia near Haran,” Vogel informs us (235). What exactly makes it “unlikely” he never bothers to explain. I myself have looked carefully at the question of the location of Abraham’s Ur, and while the case for a northern location is not ironclad, it is also not out of question and finds support among non-Latter-day Saint scholars.132 Because Vogel is completely unequipped to critically engage this issue, he passes the buck by once again offhandedly citing Christopher Wood’s negative assessment of the proposed identification of Olishem with Ulisum.133 Vogel appears to be unaware of the fact that more recently at least one non-Latter-day Saint archaeologist working at one of the proposed sites of ancient Ulisum (the Kilis plain located north of Aleppo across the Turkish border) has suggested a promising though tentative identification with Olishem and its connected plain.134 While a positive identification of the Book of Abraham’s Olishem with Ulisum is still currently beyond definitive proof, it is nevertheless a viable and promising candidate, despite Vogel’s feeble objections.135

Shinehah

The third chapter of the Book of Abraham furnishes the names Shinehah and Olea as meaning “the sun” and “the moon,” respectively (Abraham 3:13). Whatever language these two words are supposed to derive from, however, is left unspecified. In 1936, J. E. Homans (writing under the pseudonym R. C. Webb) felt that “neither of them resembles a word of Egyptian origin,” and argued that Shinehah derived from “such a verb-root as šanah, meaning ‘to shine,’ ‘to brighten,’ although as spelled here, it is unfamiliar.”136 Homans’ argument to link Shinehah with a Semitic root, however, is not persuasive.137 In 2010, Hugh Nibley and Michael D. Rhodes proposed a reconstructed Egyptian etymology for Shinehah as deriving from the elements Ƛ and ꟝.138 While this appears plausible, it remains unattested and is a conjectural reconstruction. Matthew Grey has most recently suggested that Shinehah, like Olea, instead derives “from Smith’s previous work on the ‘pure language of Adam’,” and therefore should not be seen as deriving from any extant ancient tongue.139 Vogel, as would be expected, weighs in on the matter by dismissing Shinehah as an “invented” name that
belongs with the other codenames created for the 1835 first edition of the Doctrine and Covenants (161). He additionally disputes the arguments made by Gee and others that Shinehah in Abraham 3:13 indicates the translation of the Book of Abraham extended beyond the extant Kirtland-era manuscripts, which end at Abraham 2:18 (158–63).

Vogel’s protestations notwithstanding, I am not convinced that we can definitively resolve the issues pertaining to the presence of Shinehah in the 1835 Doctrine and Covenants and Abraham 3:13 and what the implications of such are for the chronology of the translation of the latter. What I do wish to emphasize here is the point previously made by Gee:

Some [like Vogel] might hypothesize that the term Shinehah was borrowed into the Book of Abraham from its use in the Doctrine and Covenants. This hypothesis assumes that the Book of Abraham is a modern fictional work written by Joseph Smith. The assumption, though unstated, is essential for the argument to be comprehensible. The problem with the assumption is that this term in the Book of Abraham is a known Egyptian term.140

Gee is referring to the attested Egyptian word from the time of Abraham for the sun’s ecliptic: 𓊰. This word141 and its cosmological significance for the ancient Egyptians is both a phonetic and a broadly conceptual match with what is found in Abraham 3142 and, accordingly, “if one accepts that the Book of Abraham is ancient, then the simplest explanation is that the Doctrine and Covenants borrows from the Book of Abraham.” If, on the other hand, one follows Vogel and “argues that the Book of Abraham borrows from the Doctrine and Covenants, then one assumes the Book of Abraham is modern, but one must still explain how it contains an authentic Egyptian term whose existence was unknown to Western scholarship until 1882.”143 Because he does not know Egyptian and by his own admission does not care to bother with the Egyptian sources in assessing the authenticity of the Book of Abraham, Vogel’s treatment neglects to account for any of this significant evidence.

Miscellaneous Issues

There are a multitude of miscellaneous issues relative to the Book of Abraham that Vogel raises in Book of Abraham Apologetics which should not be dismissed or avoided. The following sections examine just three of these issues.
Race, the Priesthood Ban, and the Book of Abraham

The issue of race in the Book of Abraham and the nature of the priesthood “curse” described at Abraham 1:23–27 is one that will likely continue to provoke strong feelings, especially among readers living in the United States who are still grappling with the deeply regrettable legacy of anti-black racism in America. The sad reality is that historically, and in some lingering cases even today, Latter-day Saints have used the Book of Abraham to justify racist policies and attitudes, chief among them the pre-1978 prohibition on men of African descent from holding priesthood offices and the restriction on both men and women of African descent from participating in temple ordinances. Although contemporary leaders of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints have officially rejected attempts to use scriptural justification for these past racist policies and teachings, this does not change the unfortunate ways in which Latter-day Saints have used scripture in what can charitably be called deeply flawed and misapplied readings.

As would be expected, Vogel sees the Book of Abraham as the product of Joseph Smith’s nineteenth century racist ideas about the origins of people of African descent (95–117). As Vogel correctly notes, a number of Joseph Smith’s contemporaries, like generations of Christians before the nineteenth century, read certain passages in the book of Genesis (such as the enigmatic story of Noah cursing of his son Ham in Genesis 9 and details about the descendants of Ham in the so-called Table of Nations in Genesis 10:6–20) to justify the enslavement of people of African descent. For Vogel, Joseph Smith’s scriptural productions are merely the outgrowth of these racist theories.

“As early as 1831,” Vogel writes, “Smith’s revelations explained that the mark God had put upon Cain for murdering his brother, Abel, was black skin” (108). To support this, Vogel cites Moses 7:8, 22, which speaks of how in vision the prophet Enoch saw that

> the Lord shall curse the land with much heat, and the barrenness thereof shall go forth forever; and there was a blackness came upon all the children of Canaan, that they were despised among all people. … [And he] beheld the residue of the people which were the sons of Adam; and they were a mixture of all the seed of Adam save it was the seed of Cain, for the seed of Cain were black, and had not place among them.
He likewise draws attention to Joseph Smith’s revision or translation of Genesis 9 (KJV 9:25–26), which reads, “And he said cursed be Canaan a Servent of servents shall he be unto his breatheren and he said blessed be the Lord God of Shem and Canaan shall be his servent and a vail of darkness shall cover him that he shall be known among all men.”

As Vogel goes on to argue, the Book of Abraham merely amplified Joseph Smith’s racist predilections enshrined in his prophetic engagement with the biblical text. “In the intervening years between working on his Bible revision and dictating the text of the Book of Abraham, Smith modified his ideas about the origin of the Black race” (109).

The most glaring problem with Vogel’s argument, of course, is that these passages say positively nothing about Cain’s descendants having black skin. If, as Vogel believes, Joseph Smith was conjuring the contents of his “new translation” of the Bible from his own mind, there was nothing to stop him from explicitly making black skin the mark of Cain’s descendants. But the text never actually does this. Instead, it uses the much more abstract “blackness” and “darkness” to describe the people. Vogel infers that Moses 7:8 “seemed to allude to Africa” (109) but provides no justification for this reading beyond his own supposition. What’s more, the opening chapter of the Book of Moses subverts Vogel’s reading, and supports the notion that the “blackness” of the children of Cain and Canaan, and later the “veil of darkness” over Canaan, was not skin pigmentation, but a withdrawal of the glory of God from among the people. Moses 1:15 describes how Moses could detect Satan’s deception because the latter’s “glory” was “darkness” unto him compared to God’s own incomparable glory. In OT1 this passage reads that Satan’s glory was “blackness” unto Moses, thus providing a clear thematic link with Enoch’s prophecy later in Moses 7. This, of course, is in strict keeping with ancient Jewish idiom, which uses “darkness” to describe evildoers, demons and their realm, and those who are in a spiritually benighted state. Ironically, Vogel is imposing on the text of both the Book of Moses and the Book of Abraham the same racist (mis)reading that Latter-day Saints after Joseph Smith’s death imposed on these texts.

The glaring problem for Vogel and others who wish to portray Joseph Smith as imbibing in commonplace nineteenth century American racism with his scriptural productions is that there is “no contemporary evidence” that the Prophet ever appealed to either the Book of Moses or the Book of Abraham in his racial thinking. Indeed, “There is no evidence that during his lifetime [Joseph] Smith or any of his followers cited the book of Abraham to deny black Mormon men the priesthood.”
Vogel admits that “how [the Book of Abraham’s teachings] applied to Smith’s church [sic], and the priesthood Smith established, was never explicitly stated during Smith’s lifetime” (110), which is a bashful way of conceding that he has no actual evidence for this reading that he merely assumes must have originated with the Prophet. “While not addressing slavery directly,” Vogel writes, “[the Book of] Abraham supports the white supremacist ideology of slave owners” (116). This bizarre claim is made all the stranger by the fact left unaddressed (but certainly known) by Vogel that Joseph Smith not only approved of the ordination of at least two black men to the priesthood (Elijah Able and Q. Walker Lewis), but also that he ran on an anti-slavery platform during his 1844 presidential bid. 155

Vogel correctly observes that in April 1836, in what was probably a move to distance the Latter-day Saints from the more radical antebellum abolitionist movement and to ameliorate the tense situation with the pro-slavery Missourians, Joseph Smith published an anti-abolitionist editorial in the *Messenger and Advocate*. 156 What Vogel seems not to appreciate, however, is that with this editorial Joseph had a perfect opportunity to use his supposedly racist scripture to bolster his case. But he didn’t. Instead, he quoted the KJV rendering of Genesis 9:25–26, not the Book of Abraham and not even his own translation of this same passage (the one Vogel thinks is clear proof of the Prophet’s racist thinking). Vogel never stops to ask why. I can only assume that this is because Vogel has already come to the conclusion that as nineteenth century texts, the Book of Moses and the Book of Abraham must necessarily reflect their racist nineteenth century environments. As with his utterly farfetched attempt to use the issue of race in the Book of Abraham to attribute the authorship of the Grammar and Alphabet to Joseph Smith (96–115), his attempt to depict the Book of Abraham as projecting a “white supremacist ideology” is entirely unconvincing (116). Suffice it to say that more responsible, informed treatments of this topic should be sought elsewhere. 157

**Joseph Smith as a Student of Hebrew**

Hebrew terminology appears in both the text of the Book of Abraham and in some of Joseph Smith’s explanations to the text’s accompanying facsimiles (Abraham 3:13, 16, 18; Facsimile 1, Fig. 12; Facsimile 2, Figs. 4–5). Additionally, the Creation account preserved in Abraham 4–5 in some ways appears to reflect a knowledge of Hebrew (for instance, the rendering of “expanse” at Abraham 4:6 as opposed to the “firmament” of
Genesis 1:6 for the word רָקיע). Since there is no evidence that Joseph Smith knew Hebrew in any meaningful sense before late-January 1836, this raises questions about both the nature and chronology of the translation of the Book of Abraham.

As would be expected, scholars are divided on the ramifications of the presence of this Hebrew terminology in the Book of Abraham.\(^\text{158}\) A significant part of the debate revolves around whether the presence of Hebrew words in the third chapter of the Book of Abraham indicates this portion of the text was translated after January 1836. On one side of the argument is Matthew Grey, who has recently affirmed that the presence of Hebrew terminology in the Book of Abraham is indicative that the text of Abraham 3–5 was composed after 1836.\(^\text{159}\) On the other side is Kerry Muhlestein, who, along with his co-author Megan Hansen, argues that the Hebrew phrases in the Book of Abraham are evidence of Joseph Smith’s editorial preparation and revision, but not the composition, of the text post-1836.\(^\text{160}\) Although he himself does not know Hebrew, Vogel weighs in on this subject (145–77) and argues that “the last three chapters of Abraham bear the marks of Smith’s Hebrew lessons with Seixas in early 1836,” which, he insists, “creates a problem for defenders who require that the entirety of the Book of Abraham translation must precede” both the composition of the GAEL and Joseph Smith’s Hebrew lessons (147).

None of Vogel’s counterarguments to Muhlestein and Hansen’s thesis appear especially fatal in my judgment, as they largely rest either on assumptions about certain behavior expected of Joseph Smith\(^\text{161}\) or on readings of historical sources that are particularly suited to Vogel’s need to downplay or otherwise refute his interlocutors’ own conclusions.\(^\text{162}\) In any case, a much more robust, comprehensive, and informed treatment on Joseph Smith’s study of Hebrew can be found in Grey, who has both the advantage of not sharing Vogel’s ideological handicaps and an actual working knowledge of the languages involved in this subject. For now, I am interested in reiterating what Vogel never bothers to explain in his treatment: how Joseph Smith was able to capture authentic ancient concepts with only an elementary understanding of Hebrew and while under the tutelage of a teacher who openly balked at the ideas advanced in the Book of Abraham and the Prophet’s sermons.\(^\text{163}\)

As Vogel correctly observes, Joseph Smith learned that the Hebrew noun אלהים is, technically, a plural form from his Hebrew studies (155, 167–69).\(^\text{164}\) What Vogel does not adequately account for is how this rudimentary understanding not only supposedly gave Joseph Smith
the wherewithal to concoct an elaborate cosmology for the Book of Abraham, but how this cosmology could anticipate the findings of secular scholarship by several decades. As I myself and others have shown, the Book of Abraham’s depiction of the divine council and a plurality of gods is firmly at home in the ancient world.¹⁶⁵ Vogel never addresses any of this, and in his regrettable habit of missing the forest for the trees, instead contents himself with arguing over minutiae with “apologists” on the chronology of the production of the English text. But regardless of when the text was produced, that it captures authentic ancient concepts cannot be denied, and is wholly remarkable. The ways Joseph Smith deploys his knowledge of Hebrew in the Book of Abraham and in other teachings cannot simply be a matter of the Prophet heedlessly repackaging a few things he picked up from Joshua Seixas.¹⁶⁶ Instead,

While [Joseph] Smith clearly deferred to his various textbooks on several points — sometimes preferring one resource over another — there were other instances in which his own examination of the papyri, developing theology, and revelations merged with his creative use of less conventional Hebrew definitions or technicalities, thus allowing him to tease out unique theological concepts and produce a distinctively expansive translation.¹⁶⁷

The Cosmology of the Book of Abraham

The cosmology described in the third chapter of the Book of Abraham has proven to be an irresistible fascination for writers since at least the nineteenth century.¹⁶⁸ Following his earlier work from the 1990s, Vogel offers his own views on the cosmology of the Book of Abraham in the fifth chapter of his book (“The Cosmos,” 119–44). The two main arguments that Vogel drives home in his treatment on the cosmology of Abraham 3 are that the cosmology is not ancient, and that it borrows from contemporary nineteenth century astronomical and theological speculation. “[The Book of Abraham’s] cosmology was not what one would expect from an ancient author,” Vogel insists. Instead, “the mix of contemporary astronomy and theological concerns” of the nineteenth century “resulted in a cosmology [in the text] that is as foreign to twenty-first-century readers of Smith’s texts as ancient Hebrew cosmology was to Smith and his contemporaries” (119).

What interests me with Vogel’s approach to the cosmology of the Book of Abraham is not his wholly speculative arguments for its
dependence on the Egyptian grammar documents (121–33), nor his rehashing of the tired claim that Joseph Smith was dependent on the writings of Thomas Dick (129, 132, 138–39, 144), nor his ignoring the fact that learned contemporaries dismissed it as absurd and contrived (which is strange indeed if the system is wholly derivative of nineteenth-century thinking). Instead, I am interested in his attempt to refute the reading of the cosmology of Abraham 3 that sees the system as geocentric. Specifically, Vogel takes issue with the arguments made in the groundbreaking 2005 study conducted by John Gee, William J. Hamblin, and Daniel C. Peterson, (133–40).

Vogel is eager to refute this model for understanding Abraham 3 because it fundamentally undercuts his belief that the Book of Abraham is a modern pseudepigraphon influenced by Dick and other nineteenth century theologian-cosmologists. In his haste to refute Gee, Hamblin, and Peterson, however, Vogel ends up committing the same infractions he lays at the feet of his opponents. He also fails to account for other models for Abraham 3, such as Muhlestein’s, that also plausibly situate the text in the ancient world. Crucially, Vogel fails to explain how his model accounts for the fact that Abraham 3 has “the earth upon which [Abraham] standest” (vv. 3, 5, 7) as the patriarch’s point of reference for “reckoning” the movement of the celestial bodies being viewed above him. The plainest reading of these two verses at the very least strongly point to the likelihood that the text is describing a geocentric cosmos from Abraham’s (the narrator’s) vantage.

Of special interest in this discussion is what to do with one Middle Kingdom text that seems especially germane to the cosmology of Abraham 3. The significance that the couplet shown in Figure 4 holds for royal ideology and the idea of cosmic dominion is fairly clear both from the excerpted passage below and from other examples, and both Gee and Muhlestein have perceptively noted the significance it holds for Abraham 3. Much less clear is what it might tell us about how the ancient Egyptians envisioned their cosmos and what bearing that may have on the argument that Abraham 3 reflects a geocentric cosmos.

While Leonard Lesko disavows the idea that the “very common phrase” and its equivalents reflects a geocentric cosmos, more recently Joanne Conman has problematized Lesko’s reading by pointing out that he neglects to consider the precise manner in which
the Egyptians tracked the movement of celestial bodies, including the sun. In any case, it is clear that what the sun encircles in the Egyptian cosmic view includes the earth — “the world ruled by the pharaoh” — and Vogel does not do justice to the issue with his dismissive footnote.

**Conclusion: Taking Stock**

“None of the leading theories of Book of Abraham historicity exhibits an accurate understanding of the Joseph Smith Egyptian papers” (243). So writes Vogel at the curtain call of *Book of Abraham Apologetics*. For a study that boasts to be nothing less than a soberminded “work of history” (xvii), it is truly telling that Vogel spends most of his conclusion recapitulating his grievances with “apologetic theories” (243), gets in one final dig at “the last stand of one school of Abraham apologetics” (248), and injects a bit of theology for good measure (249–50). In any case, Vogel again entreats us to abandon the apologetics of yesteryear and embrace Joseph Smith as a saintly liar who “believed himself authorized by God to use misdirection/deception … to promote greater faith in his ‘inspired pseudepigrapha’” (249). The Book of Abraham, in Vogel’s final ruling, is a modern forgery that Joseph Smith used “to lend ancient support to several of [his] doctrinal innovations not clearly discussed in the Bible” (250).

Although in this review I have been highly critical of *Book of Abraham Apologetics*, I want to conclude by reiterating that I actually do appreciate that Vogel has offered a fairly systematic attempt to account for the origin and contents of the Book of Abraham from a metaphysically naturalistic or atheistic perspective that, however woefully inadequate, takes the text seriously enough to undertake such a project. I commend Vogel for giving his Latter-day Saint “apologist” foes enough courtesy to at least spare us the sort of patronizing, glib dismissiveness that has marred the work of past skeptics. I mean this sincerely when I say that if one is looking for a secular accounting for the Book of Abraham that begins with the conclusion that Joseph Smith could not and therefore did not translate ancient records by the power of God, you have a fairly decent example in the form of *Book of Abraham Apologetics*.

This, however, is about all I can say positively for the book. It is apparent throughout *Book of Abraham Apologetics* that while Vogel is certainly better informed than most critics, his work nevertheless suffers from what is at times a painfully obvious lack the prerequisite ability needed to tackle most of the issues he contends with. To put it bluntly
in the reappropriated words of Richard Lloyd Anderson, Vogel is in no position
to say whether the Book of [Abraham] is more like the nineteenth century than the ancient world that it chronicles. A student of the nineteenth century [like Vogel] may indeed find parallels in this period and the Book of [Abraham], but without a knowledge of the world of antiquity, he simply is not equipped to make a judgment whether the Book of [Abraham] resembles more Joseph Smith’s environment or the ancient culture it claims to represent.¹⁸⁵

Lest I am misunderstood, let me be clear what I am and am not claiming. Vogel, as I have shown in this review, is incapable of adequately dealing with the ancient evidence for the Book of Abraham, and therefore most of his objections to the work of his apologist interlocutors is spurious. This is simply because he is deficient in the specialized training needed to do such. Consequently, he can only consider a nineteenth century origin for the book both because his ideological position requires it and because his inability to handle the ancient sources means that he is incapable of critically assessing the evidence for the ancient origin of the book. It is, furthermore, very obviously the reason why he is adamant that the only discipline needed to assess the authenticity of the Book of Abraham just so happens to be the one discipline in which he has any expertise. This does not automatically make Vogel’s arguments wrong, but it does make them deeply suspect. I am not saying that Vogel is simply wrong because he doesn’t have the necessary training, but rather that Vogel’s arguments are deficient because he doesn’t actually carefully consider all the evidence, and uncritically relies on others to make his predetermined case against the historicity of the Book of Abraham for him. If I may reapply Vogel’s own words, “[His] claims are not supported by the documentation, but, instead, result from [his] need to make the facts fit their theories” (16).

One final question to consider before we conclude is to ask how we should frame the Book of Abraham, or which presumptions should we let prevail as we approach the text. The first option is to presume, like Vogel, that because there is no good reason to believe in the supernatural, the Book of Abraham must therefore be something other than what Joseph Smith said it was, and the evidence examined in that light. The second — and, in my judgment, superior — option is to “exercise a particle of faith” (Alma 32:27) that the Book of Abraham is actually what it and its translator claim it to be, and to not reflexively dismiss
the evidence for its authenticity just because it may not always be as direct as we would wish, or just because doing so might force us to ask difficult metaphysical questions about the existence of revelation and the reality of Joseph Smith’s seeric gift. This approach, which Hugh Nibley articulated well for the Book of Mormon in the 1950s, is admittedly not without its shortcomings, and asks much in the way of intellectual and metaphysical commitment of those who would entertain it, but is far better at making sense of the relevant facts pertaining to the coming forth of the Book of Abraham, to say nothing of the text itself.

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Endnotes


3 Establishing the overall “plausibility” of the historicity of the text of the Book of Abraham is pretty much the most we can hope to achieve with the tools of scholarship, for the reasons cogently laid out in John Gee and Stephen D. Ricks, “Historical Plausibility: The Historicity of the Book of Abraham as a Case Study,” in Historicity and the Latter-day Saint Scriptures, ed. Paul Y. Hoskisson (Provo, UT: Religious Studies Center, Brigham Young University, 2001), 63–98.

4 One study that has approached the Book of Abraham from this angle can be found in David E. Bokovoy, Authoring the Old


For two recent representative works on this point, see Samuel M. Brown, *Joseph Smith’s Translation: The Words and Worlds of Early Mormonism* (New York: Oxford University Press,


16 In a 2018 social media post, Hauglid stated “for the record” that he no longer held to his previous theories about the textual composition of the Book of Abraham and found the “apologetic ‘scholarship’ [of Gee and Muhlestein] on the [Book of Abraham] abhorrent.” See Wikipedia, s.v. “Brian Hauglid,” last edited on June 9, 2021, 16:38, https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Brian_M._Hauglid (with links to a third-party site that has preserved screenshots of Hauglid’s comment). Hauglid’s latest thinking on the composition of the English text of the Book of Abraham can be found in Brian M. Hauglid, “‘Translating an Alphabet to the Book...
of Abraham’: Joseph Smith’s Study of the Egyptian Language and His Translation of the Book of Abraham,” in Producing Ancient Scripture, 363–89.


18 Dan Vogel, Book of Abraham Apologetics: A Review and Critique (Salt Lake City: Signature Books, 2021). Citations of this volume will appear in parentheses throughout the body and footnotes of this review.


21 Samples of Staker’s work includes Susan Staker, ed., Waiting for World’s End: The Diaries of Wilford Woodruff (Salt Lake City: Signature Books, 1993); John Sillito and Susan Staker, eds., Mormon Mavericks: Essays on Dissenters (Salt Lake City: Signature Books, 2002); Susan Staker, “God(s) as Character(s) in Joseph’s Bible Stories: March 1830 to September 1830,” The John Whitmer


In his introduction (xvi) and again in his conclusion (248), Vogel cites Hauglid’s 2018 announcement on social media that he “wholeheartedly” agrees with Vogel on the production of the Book of Abraham and had broken rank with his former colleagues.

At the very least, it calls into question the propriety of keeping Elder Neal A. Maxwell’s name affixed to the institute, since Elder Maxwell was, famously, a fierce advocate for exactly the kind of apologetics that some at the MI now appear to agree, with Vogel, is duplicitous (or, more specifically, “abhorrent”).

The extent of Vogel’s academic training is a BA in history from California State University at Long Beach.


Vogel, Joseph Smith, viii, xii, xiv-xv.

Ibid., xvi.


32 Ibid., transcript punctuation slightly altered.


36 The term used by the Joseph Smith Papers Project, as found in Jensen and Hauglid, JSPRT4, xiii.

37 Jensen and Hauglid, JSPRT4, xiv–xv, citations removed.

38 Ibid., xv.

39 Gee, An Introduction to the Book of Abraham, 33.

40 Jensen and Hauglid, JSPRT4, xxv.


45 Jensen and Hauglid, JSPRT4, 53–93.
46 Ibid., 53.
48 Jensen and Hauglid, JSPRT4, xxv, citations removed.
52 “Translation and Historicity of the Book of Abraham,” emphasis in original.
54 Givens, The Pearl of Greatest Price, 180–202, views the Book of Abraham as the revelatory outpouring of Joseph Smith’s prophetic insight upon his encounter with the Egyptian papyri but not a translation of an ancient Abrahamic text. Another version of the catalyst theory that compares the production of the Book
of Abraham with the charismatic practice of glossolalia (that is, speaking in tongues) has recently been articulated by Brown, *Joseph Smith’s Translation*, 193–232.


58 Oliver Cowdery, “Egyptian Mummies — Ancient Records,” *Latter Day Saints’ Messenger and Advocate* 2, no. 3 (December 1835): 234.


61 A much more careful critique, and one that I recommend over Vogel’s, even though I disagree with many of its conclusions, is Christopher C. Smith, “‘That Which is Lost’: Assessing the State of Preservation of the Joseph Smith Papyri,” *The John Whitmer Historical Association Journal* 31, No. 1 (Spring/Summer 2011): 78–81.

62 Incidentally, Vogel fails to meaningfully engage any of the points raised in Muhlestein, “Joseph Smith and Egyptian Artifacts,” 35–82.

63 Gee, “Eyewitness, Hearsay, and Physical Evidence of the Joseph Smith Papyri,” 192–95, for instance, has offered justifiable reasons to be cautious with the sources Vogel uses to say that Joseph Smith identified Abraham’s handwriting as being on P. Joseph Smith XI.


65 Smith, “‘That Which is Lost’,” 78–81.

66 Vogel (199) is also dismissive of Haven’s testimony because of the “exaggerated, if not fanciful” comments by Mother Smith that she could read the papyri by her faith in the inspiration of her son. But Haven is clear that what Lucy read aloud “sounded very much like passages from the Old Testament — and it might have been for anything we knew.” It could be that Lucy was reading
from published portions of the Book of Abraham text, and not making up "fanciful" material in the moment. (After all, the Book of Abraham not only sounds like the Old Testament, but even reproduces material from the book of Genesis.) Vogel might have a point here if Haven were the only source Muhlestein and Gee rely on for the missing papyrus theory. But since she is not, the most we can afford Vogel is that he is right to say that we must not overstate the evidence (a point that is hardly controversial and provides no special insight).

Smith, ""That Which is Lost,'" 78. To be clear, Smith immediately follows with his own reasoning for why he ultimately rejects this view:

One must keep in mind, however, that Haven was completely ignorant of Egyptological standards. She had no reference against which to judge what constituted a 'long roll.' Indeed, her use of the term 'manuscript' to describe the papyrus may indicate that she evaluated the scroll’s length relative to typical nineteenth-century paper manuscripts rather than to typical Ptolemaic papyrus scrolls.

I do not find this argument especially convincing, but that is beside the point; lest I am accused of duplicity, I feel it needful to make Smith’s own position clear.

In this regard Vogel is utterly incorrigible, as he exhibits the same methodological behavior in how he handles the testimonies of the Three and Eight Witnesses of the Book of Mormon (e.g. Dan Vogel, “The Validity of the Witnesses’ Testimonies,” in American Apocrypha: Essays on the Book of Mormon, eds. Dan Vogel and Brent Lee Metcalfe [Salt Lake City: Signature Books, 2002], 79–121).


Ibid., 121.


Ibid., 36.

Gee, “Book of Abraham, I Presume.”


Ibid., 23.

Ibid., 22–23, warn from their results that

[w]hile the length reconstruction method works well in theory, its margin of error — when trying to estimate the length of a real scroll — is simply too large to be trusted. In the rare cases where four or five consecutive damage points are preserved, however, its reliability might be reasonable. It should be stressed that we examined here some of the very best preserved scrolls, for which approximate reconstructions are not required, since they are already comparatively intact, and their length can be measured. In practice, the method is applied to much more poorly preserved scrolls, ones that have decomposed into many scattered fragments. These fragments underwent additional processes of deterioration, disintegration, and warping. In these cases, the distance between points is sometimes reconstructed rather than measured. Therefore, in the actual cases where the method is used, the margin of error should be expected to be much larger.

If Vogel is going to insist that we accept Cook and Smith’s results over Gee’s, it seems reasonable to insist that he give some mathematical reason that accounts for the analysis of Ratzon and Dershowitz.


Jensen and Hauglid, *JSPRT4*, 239n64.


In fact, as Gee, “Fantasy and Reality in the Translation of the Book of Abraham,” 133, notes, the result is something of a mess for Vogel.


“Another Humbug,” *Cleveland Whig* 1, no. 49 (August 5, 1835): 1. See the discussion in Michael Hubbard MacKay and Nicholas J. Frederick, *Joseph Smith’s Seer Stones* (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 2016), 127–28, who suggest the source was William W. Phelps, a scribe in the Egyptian project.

M., *Friends’s Weekly Intelligencer* 3, no. 27 (3 October 1846): 211.


Frederic G. Mather, “The Early Days of Mormonism,” *Lippincott’s Magazine* 2, no. 6 (August 1880): 211. One wonders if Mather’s sarcastic “special revelation” is a reference to the seer stone.

94 Howard Coray to Martha Jane Lewis, 2 August 1889, p. 4, Church History Library, MS 3047. My thanks to Walker Wright for alerting me to this source.

95 Coray joined the Church in late-March 1840 and began clerking for Joseph Smith less than a month thereafter. See Howard Coray, Journal, pp. 6–7, Church History Library, MS 8142 = Harold B. Lee Library, Brigham Young University, Mss 1422, Box 1, Folder 1.

96 Coray, Journal, p. 15.

97 Seethe definitive analysis in Don Bradley and Mark Ashurst-McGee, “‘President Joseph Has Translated a Portion’: Joseph Smith and the Mistranslation of the Kinderhook Plates,” in Producing Ancient Scripture, 452–523.

98 Jensen and Hauglid, JSPRT4, xxii.


100 Scott H. Faulring, Kent P. Jackson, and Robert J. Matthews, eds., Joseph Smith’s New Translation of the Bible: Original Manuscripts (Provo, UT: Religious Studies Center, Brigham Young University, 2004), 83, 86, 92. See also the significant facts surrounding whether the parchment of John was considered a “translation” or “revelation” to Joseph and the early Saints as discussed in David W. Grua and William V. Smith, “The Tarrying of the Beloved Disciple: The Textual Formation of the Account of John,” in Producing Ancient Scripture, 231–61.

101 See Robert J. Matthews, “A Plainer Translation”: Joseph Smith’s Translation of the Bible, A History and Commentary (Provo, UT: Brigham Young University Press, 1985); Robert L. Millet and Monte S. Nyman, eds., The Joseph Smith Translation: The Restoration of Plain and Precious Things (Provo, UT: Brigham Young University,

102 I hasten to add that I do not believe Givens is guilty of any such offense, as Vogel apparent does; on the contrary, whatever my disagreements with him, I find Givens consistently thought-provoking, informed, and insightful, and recommend him as an admirable exponent of the catalyst theory for the production of the Book of Abraham. For a thoughtful engagement with Givens’ articulation of the catalyst theory, see John S. Thompson, “‘We May Not Understand Our Words’: The Book of Abraham


Vogel makes a rather astonishing admission here that might otherwise go unnoticed if the reader is not paying close attention. Vogel states,

In July 1835, Smith started to dictate the English text of the Book of Abraham from a copy of the Egyptian funerary manual Book of Breathings once owned by an
Egyptian [sic] priest named Hôr but soon interrupted his dictation to compile an Alphabet and then a Grammar and Alphabet of Egyptian, in which he gave ‘translations’ of random hieratic-looking characters. (217)

If we follow Vogel’s logic here, Joseph Smith was able to produce fanciful content for his pseudepigraphic Book of Abraham on the fly in July 1835 after his initial encounter with the papyri, but for some inexplicable reason decided to suddenly stop to first produce a convoluted alphabet and grammar system to translate the text he was already capable of simply making up in the first place. Vogel, it would seem, wants to have it both ways—he both wants Joseph Smith to be dependent on the Grammar and Alphabet but also able to materialize content out of thin air without the aid of the Grammar and Alphabet.


108 “Everlasting covenant was made between three personages before the organizations of the earth, and relates to their dispensation of things to men on the earth, these personages according to Abraham’s record, are called God the first, the Creator; God the second, the Redeemer, and God the third, the witness or Testator.” See “Discourse, circa May 1841, as Reported by William Clayton,” p. 10, The Joseph Smith Papers, https://www.josephsmithpapers.org/paper-summary/discourse-circa-may-1841-as-reported-by-william-clayton/1; Vogel cites the version of this discourse in Andrew F. Ehat and Lyndon W. Cook, comp., The Words of Joseph Smith: The contemporary accounts of the Nauvoo discourses of the Prophet Joseph (Provo, UT: Religious Studies Center, Brigham Young University, 1980), 87–88n5.

109 Compare Jensen and Hauglid, JSPRT4, 244, “Despite [Joseph Smith’s] reference to ‘Abraham’s record,’ no known Kirtland-era manuscript contained these teachings, perhaps indicating that [he] had an understanding of the later portion of the Book of Abraham before he committed it to paper.”


111 Antiquities (1.7.1–1.8.2). See Annette Yoshiko Reed, “Abraham as Chaldean Scientist and Father of the Jews: Josephus, Ant. 1.154–168,

112 Lincoln H. Blumell, “Palmyra and Jerusalem, ISR: Joseph Smith’s Scriptural Texts and the Writings of Flavius Josephus,” in *Approaching Antiquity*, 372, citations removed.

113 For instance, the ספר זהר (1.78a) says of Abraham:

ורזא דמלת לך לך דהא קודשא בריך הוא יהיב ליה לאברהם רוחא דחכמתא והוה ידע ומצרף סטרי דיישובי עלמא ואשתך בהח ותקילת בחקלא וידע חולין די ממס על סִּרְרֵי יִשׁוֹבָא

Of special interest for our purposes is the function of the תקיל in the patriarch’s possession, with which, this source says:

והוה תקיל וצריף אנון דשלטין בסִּרְרֵי דיישובא מדברי ככביא ומסיון

So far, the best theory for the identification of Abraham’s תקיל remains that of Moshe Cordovero (יאר יִרְד) [Jerusalem, ISR: Achuzat Israel, 1967], 4:127–29). See also the discussion in Howard Schwartz, *Tree of Souls: The Mythology of Judaism* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2004), 332, citing B. Bava Batra 16b; Zohar 1:11a-11b, *Idra Rabbah*. While I am hesitant to definitively say this is a parallel with Abraham 3:1, 4, it is nevertheless a very enticing one.


119 Vogel quotes Muhlestein, “Egyptian Papyri and the Book of Abraham,” 221, thus: “While the Egyptians may have had some kind of regular program of human sacrifice (slight bits of evidence suggest this but there is no conclusive evidence), at the same time they certainly did believe there were certain circumstances in which the only appropriate response was to ritually slay someone.” Vogel omits what immediately follows: “The most likely scenario for this occurred when an individual disrupted the religious or political order. The Book of Abraham indicates that Abraham had been preaching against idolatry (a concept that lay at the heart of almost every aspect of Egyptian belief and culture) and that this led to the local priest trying to sacrifice him (see Abraham 1:5–7). A large corpus of noncanonical tradition about Abraham agrees
with that picture.” Muhlestein, citing his own work, then goes on to affirm, “I discovered that thoroughly and correctly performing Egyptological research is a key to understanding the Book of Abraham. When we pull facts from carefully researched materials, they match perfectly with the information we receive from Joseph Smith. The picture the Book of Abraham paints dovetails neatly into the larger mural of Egyptian history and practice.”

120 Muhlestein, “Sacred Violence,” 244.

121 As Muhlestein and Gee, “An Egyptian Context for the Sacrifice of Abraham,” 75, explain,

Because of the temporal and categorical proximity of Middle Kingdom examples of human sacrifice, we can now come closer to an understanding of Egyptian ritual slaying and the story presented in the first chapter of the Book of Abraham. It is clear that during the Middle Kingdom, Egyptians engaged in such practices when they deemed it necessary, and that desecrations or perceived threats were some of the situations that seemed to justify the ritual slaughter of humans. This picture matches well with that depicted in the Book of Abraham. Our understanding of the picture painted by each context can now be informed by the other, allowing us to more fully understand each individual story and the larger context in which these people lived their lives and practiced their religious beliefs.


124 John Coleman Darnell and Colleen Manassa, Tutankhamun’s Armies: Battle and Conquest During Ancient Egypt’s Late Eighteenth Dynasty (Hoboken, NJ: John Wiley & Sons, 2007), 133.

American University in Cairo Press, 2003), 187. Note that Fuscaldo goes on to link the Mirgissa findings with those at Avaris:

The two execration pits at Tell al-Dab’a are similar to those found at Mirgissa. The execration pit, Locus 1055, with the three human skulls is similar to the Mirgissa pit containing a human skull. The execration pit, Locus 1016, with the two human skeletons and the broken pottery, could be similar to those with three limestone figurines embedded in sand, and to the pit with the inscribed broken pottery. The special feature of the execration pit, Locus 1016 at Tell al-Dab’a, is that the figurines with the name of the defeated enemies were substituted with the sacrifices of two defeated enemies. . . . If this happened, we do not know why the Egyptians sacrificed enemies in Avaris instead of using substitute figurines as usual. This ritual of the destruction of pottery and the actual execution of prisoners, as happened with the rebels, could have been an execration ritual performed as part of the ceremonies for the celebration of the conquest of the city and for the construction of new buildings.

126 Emily Teeter, Religion and Ritual in Ancient Egypt (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 2011), 178


129 Vogel could have spared himself a lot of unnecessary trouble had he bothered to consult Muhlestein’s discussion on the semantics of “human sacrifice” as opposed to “sanctioned violence” and the like in Violence in the Service of Order, 5–8, as well as in Herman te


133 Christopher Woods, “The Practice of Egyptian Religion at ‘Ur of the Chaldees’?” in The Joseph Smith Egyptian Papyri, 73. I have responded to Woods’s objections in Smoot, “‘In the Land of the Chaldeans,’” 32–34.


136 R. C. Webb, Joseph Smith as a Translator (Salt Lake City: The Deseret News Press, 1936), 104, bolding in original.

137 For one thing, Homans never bothers to specify which Semitic root “shanah” meaning “to shine” or “to brighten” is supposed to
derive from. It is not recognizable as a root in Hebrew, Aramaic, Ugaritic, or Akkadian as meaning “to shine.”

138 Hugh Nibley and Michael D. Rhodes, One Eternal Round (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 2010), 333–35.


141 Also attested as, variously: 𓊞𓊟𓊠𓊢 (CT 61 I, 259), 𓊞𓊠𓊠𓊢 (CT 214 III, 174), 𓊟𓊠𓊠𓊢 (CT 393 V, 67).


Today, the Church disavows the theories advanced in the past that black skin is a sign of divine disfavor or curse, or that it reflects unrighteous actions in a premortal life; that mixed-race marriages are a sin; or that blacks or people of any other race or ethnicity are inferior in any way to anyone else. Church leaders today unequivocally condemn all racism, past and present, in any form.


See for instance Targum Jonathan Isaiah 52:14, which reads:
כָּא הַסָּבְרוּ לְהַיָּה בֵית יִשְׂרָאֵל יְמֵי מָגוֹן
דְּהוּ הַשָּׁוֶּהָ בְּנֵי עָמָּדָּא הָיוֹתָן מְבִכִּי אֲנָשָׁא

or Targum Jonathan 1 Samuel 2:9, which reads:
נֵּיה גְּדוֹלָה פְּדֵי הָאָדָם וַרְשֵׁי מַעְלָה בְּגוֹיִם חֲשֻׂאכִי

or the magical texts from the Jewish Babylonian Aramaic bowls, which refer to demons as
דְּהוּ רַבָּרָבָּנָה שֶׁדֶה מָרִי וְיִשְׂרֵי דַּאַי בְּבֵית עָרָה


used it to justify a priesthood restriction.” The same can be said for the white enslavement of persons of African descent.


Muhlestein and Hansen, “‘The Work of Translating’,” 149–53.
161 E.g., “If Smith possessed more of the Book of Abraham translation beyond chapter 5, it seems inconceivable that he would not have included it when he published Facsimile 3 in the May 1842 issue of the *Times and Seasons*” (176).

162 E.g., Vogel’s discussion (163–64, 172–76) of Wilford Woodruff’s and Anson Call’s testimonies.

163 “Discourse, 16 June 1844–A, as Reported by Thomas Bullock,” p. [2], The Joseph Smith Papers, https://www.josephsmithpapers.org/paper-summary/discourse-16-june-1844-a-as-reported-by-thomas-bullock/2; Ehat and Cook, *The Words of Joseph Smith*, 379. “I once asked a learned Jew once — if the Hebrew language compels us to render all words ending in heam in the plural — why not render the first plural — he replied it would ruin the Bible — he acknowledged I was right.”

164 Vogel does nothing to reinforce his contention that there is “no indication that Smith was a polytheist [in 1835], although he held an unorthodox interpretation of the Trinity” (167). Leaving aside that Vogel never bothers to explain what he means by either “polytheist” or “unorthodox interpretation of the Trinity,” the Prophet’s 1831 translation of Genesis, now canonized as Moses 2–4, which overtly speaks of God the Father and his Only Begotten (two gods) as being involved in the Creation, and texts such as D&C 76:18–24, 58 refute this assertion.


Not only are Vogel’s arguments for the Book of Abraham’s dependency on the Egyptian language documents debatable, they are also a red herring. As far as interpreting the cosmology in the published text of the Book of Abraham goes, it is the text itself that demands our attention and consideration. It is therefore perfectly irrelevant to our evaluation of the cosmology of Abraham 3 that the GAEL describes lunar eclipses in the system of astronomy (138), for instance. Gee’s dismissal of the GAEL in his analysis of the cosmology of Abraham 3 does not render his treatment “incomplete” (137); rather, Vogel’s constant recourse to the GAEL throughout this chapter to shore up his counter-arguments is nothing but a distraction.

Edward T. Jones, “The Theology of Thomas Dick and its Possible Relationship to That of Joseph Smith” (M.A. thesis, Brigham Young University, 1969) and Erich Robert Paul, Science, Religion, and Mormon Cosmology (Urbana, IL: University of Illinois Press, 1992), 88–92, are just two authors who come to mind who have reviewed the claim that the Prophet was dependent on Dick and find it lacking, or, at least as typically presented by environmentalist critics like Vogel, lacking the needed nuance.

“Mormonism; or, New Mohammedanism in England and America,” Dublin University Magazine 21, no. 123 (March 1843): 296–97. (My thanks to Matthew Roper for alerting me to this source.) The objections raised against the Book of Abraham in this source are revealing, both because it shows how the Book of Abraham has found vindication only after Joseph Smith’s lifetime (e.g. Smoot, “In the Land of the Chaldeans,” 32–34; Gee, “Four Idolatrous Gods in the Book of Abraham,” 133–52), and also in
how it highlights Vogel’s deficiencies in his one area of competence: nineteenth-century sources.


173 For example, Vogel repeatedly brings up the point that the Book of Abraham fails to explicitly describe the earth as a flat disc, which would have been the cosmological view during Abraham’s time (119, 134n42). This, for Vogel, is apparently indication that the text reflects the astronomy of Joseph Smith’s day. But the text of the Book of Abraham is actually silent on the shape of the earth, and Vogel’s attempt to somehow use this silence to his advantage is, of course, fallacious.


175 The closest Vogel comes to addressing this crucial point is with his comment that “Abraham 3:5 . . . implies the earth moves when it places the earth in the planetary hierarchy below the slower-moving moon” (143–44, emphasis added).

176 So rightly recognized by John L. Foster, Thought Couplets in the Tale of Sinuhe, Münchener Ägyptologische Untersuchungen 3 (Frankfurt, DEU: Peter Lang, 1993), 55–56; James P. Allen, Middle Egyptian Literature: Eight Literary Works of the Middle Kingdom (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 2015), 125.


also the perceptive connection made in Ritner, *The Mechanics of Ancient Egyptian Magical Practice*, 57–67, which converges nicely with what is conceptually depicted at Abraham 3:3, 5–6, 9. My thanks to John Gee for reminding me of this source. (Gee, incidentally, also reminds me how this is just one of many examples—another being his work on human sacrifice—from Ritner’s usually overall excellent non-polemical Egyptological work that has led him and other Latter-day Saint scholars to consider Ritner one of the foremost non-Mormon Egyptologists to have done the most to establish the historical authenticity of the Book of Abraham.)


182 Joanne Conman, “It’s About Time: Ancient Egyptian Cosmology,” *Studien zur Altägyptischen Kultur* 31 (2003): 33–71, esp. 34–35. In fact, Conman’s entire treatment on time reckoning in Egyptian cosmology may prove to be fertile ground for further exploration of the issue at hand, but it is not expedient to do so now.


184 Perhaps this is the “razor’s edge of faith and transparency” Hauglid had in mind in his endorsement of Book of Abraham Apologetics.
