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If God Does Not Exist, Is Everything Permitted?

Daniel C. Peterson

Abstract: Can people be good without believing in God? Obviously, yes. They can. Is atheistic naturalism capable of supplying a foundation for morality? That is a separate question, to which more than a few theists have answered No. However, a relatively new book by a very prominent student of religion and society suggests otherwise. A rational morality can, it argues, be founded upon atheistic naturalism — but it will necessarily be a modest and quite limited one, lacking universal scope and without a belief in human rights as objective “moral facts.”

The striking statement that, “if God doesn’t exist, everything is permitted,” is often attributed to the great Russian novelist Fyodor Dostoevsky (1821–1881) and, more specifically, to perhaps his greatest novel, The Brothers Karamazov, which was first published in 1880. Theists have used the statement to argue that the alternative to belief in God is moral nihilism. Absent a grounding in the divine, so the argument goes, human moral systems are without foundation — and, thus, are likely to crumble in the face of human self-interest, error, and corruption. At best, we will be left with the world described by the prophet Isaiah, a world of “slaughtering oxen, and killing sheep, eating flesh, and drinking wine,” in which the shallow refrain is “let us eat and drink; for to morrow we shall die” (Isaiah 22:13). At worst, as I discuss shortly, human life will more closely resemble that of the “state of nature” portrayed by Thomas Hobbes in the thirteenth chapter of his 1651 classic, Leviathan: “solitary, poor, nasty, brutish and short.”

Shakespeare’s *Macbeth* famously captures the cynical and disenchanted mood of such a devalued world:

Tomorrow, and tomorrow, and tomorrow
Creeps in this petty pace from day to day
To the last syllable of recorded time.
And all our yesterdays have lighted fools
The way to dusty death. Out, out, brief candle.
Life’s but a walking shadow, a poor player
That struts and frets his hour upon the stage,
And then is heard no more. It is a tale
Told by an idiot, full of sound and fury,
Signifying nothing.  

In recent years, however, atheists seeking to rebut the theistic argument — and others, as well — have commonly denied that such a statement even occurs in *The Brothers Karamazov*. Perhaps, some will allow, it’s a decent though fairly loose paraphrase; others refuse to grant even that.

It appears, though, that Dostoevsky really did say “If God doesn’t exist, everything is permitted.” Or, at least, that his fictional character Ivan Karamazov did. Whether the statement accurately represents Karamazov’s actual viewpoint, of course, let alone Dostoevsky’s, is a separate question. (Presumably, not everything said by Iago or Macbeth or Richard III represents the views of Shakespeare.)

But the more important question, plainly, is whether it’s really true that “if God doesn’t exist, everything is permitted.” Does atheism actually entail moral nihilism? Please note that the question isn’t whether or not atheists can behave ethically or be morally good. Obviously, they can. Many have been and many continue to be. The question is whether, given an atheistic or naturalistic worldview, the moral principles that guide many highly ethical unbelievers are well-founded.

With that issue in mind, I’m taking this opportunity to call your attention to a relatively small book that I recently enjoyed very much: *Atheist Overreach: What Atheism Can’t Deliver*. It was written by

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2. *Macbeth*, 5.5.18–27.

It should be mentioned that contrary to common rumor, *Solitary, Poor, Nasty, Brutish, and Short* isn’t actually the name of a Boston law firm.
Christian Smith, who — after completing a Ph.D. at Harvard University (and a year at Harvard Divinity School) — taught at Gordon College and, thereafter, at the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill for many years (ultimately serving as the Stuart Chapin Professor of Sociology there), and who is currently the William R. Kenan Jr. Professor of Sociology at the University of Notre Dame. Professor Smith has won numerous professional prizes and honors, among them a “Distinguished Career Award” from the American Sociological Association. Although raised an Evangelical Protestant, by the way, he was received into the Roman Catholic Church in 2011.

I won’t be offering a book review of *Atheist Overreach* here, nor will I be drawing on the entirety of the book. I’m hoping that at least some of you will take a look at it yourselves, because I think that it has much to offer. But I do want to examine what it has to say about whether, “if God doesn’t exist, everything is permitted.”

Basically, the book consists of four chapters. The third of those, entitled “Why Scientists Playing Amateur Atheology Fail,” deals with “the question of what the findings of modern science can and cannot tell us about the existence of God.”5 The fourth chapter (“Are Humans Naturally Religious?”) examines “the question of whether or not human beings are in any significant way ‘naturally religious,’ as some religious apologists say.”6 I will not pursue either question here.

It’s the first two chapters of *Atheist Overreach* with which I’ll be concerned in this short essay, and even in their cases I intend to provide only a taste of them. Again, I encourage you to read them for yourself, because I’m not by any means doing justice to their arguments. Chapter 1, entitled “Just How ‘Good without God’ Are Atheists Justified in Being?” contends that a modest and humble system of what we might call “local morality” — if, I would add, the term *morality* is really appropriate in such a case — can, in fact, be derived from a naturalistic worldview. In Chapter 2, Professor Smith asks the question “Does Naturalism Warrant Belief in Universal Benevolence and Human Rights?” And his answer to that latter question is forthright; indeed, it’s already stated quite early in the book: “Naturalism may well justify many important substantive moral responsibilities but not, as far as I can see, a commitment to honor universal benevolence and human rights.”7

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5. Ibid., 6.
6. Ibid.
7. Ibid.
As a first step, it’s important to understand what Christian Smith understands by “naturalism.” Happily, he provides a very clear description of the world so understood:

A naturalistic universe is one that consists of energy and matter and other natural entities, such as vacuums, operating in a closed system in time and space, in which no transcendent, supernatural, divine being or superhuman power exists as a creator, sustainer, guide, or judge. Such a universe has come to exist by chance — not by design or providence but by purposeless natural forces and processes. There is no inherent, ultimate meaning or purpose. Any meaning or purpose that exists for humans in a naturalistic universe is constructed by and for humans themselves. When the natural forces of entropy eventually extinguish the human race — if some natural or humanmade disaster does not do so sooner — there will be no memory or meaning, just as none existed before human consciousness evolved. 8

And, just to be clear, Smith explains that “Metaphysical naturalism … describes the kind of universe that most atheists insist we inhabit.” 9

In Atheist Overreach, Smith reports that he has read extensively in the writings of various people who hold to a naturalistic worldview but who advocate moral principles, even moral systems, that they seek to ground in that worldview. And he further reports that he finds them completely unconvincing. There are, of course, good reasons for individual members of a species to cooperate with each other, reasons that enhance the quality of an individual’s life or the prospects for an individual’s or a family’s survival — or, at least, increase the likelihood that certain genes will be transmitted into the future. Many kinds of animals, for example, pair off as mates, and some of them then share the responsibility, at least for a while, of feeding and caring for and protecting their offspring. Gorillas and dolphins and bonobos and whales live in more or less organized and mutually beneficial communities, and the cooperative nature of beehives and ant colonies scarcely requires mention. Recently, it has been seriously argued that even the trees in a forest cooperate with each

8. Ibid., 45–46.
9. Ibid., 46.
other in remarkable ways. And we’re just beginning to understand that crows and ravens communicate, too, and help each other.

But those associations appear to be limited in scope. And, I would ask, do they really result from what we would consider “moral” considerations? Do mother bears protect their cubs because they think it the right thing to do? Does a mother bear feel any moral responsibility for protecting bear cubs in general? Does her heart go out to abandoned bunnies and fawns? Christian Smith focuses on the issue of the scope of moral-seeming mutual obligation among humans:

The first problem for … atheistic moralists is that none of them provides a convincing reason — sometimes any reason — for the universal scope of humans’ asserted obligations to promote the good of all other human beings. It is one thing for people to be good to those who are proximate and similar to them. It is quite another to demand that every person is morally obliged to advance the well-being of every other human on earth. A careful reading of [such] moralists reveals good reasons why atheists should be motivated to be good to a limited set of people who matter to them. But they do not provide good reasons to be good to everyone.

If we in fact live in the naturalistic cosmos that atheists and much of science tell us we occupy, do we have good reasons for believing in universal benevolence and human rights as moral facts and imperatives?

In Christian Smith’s considered opinion, the answer to that question is a decisive No. The arguments advanced by atheistic moralists for such things, Smith contends, aren’t even “remotely persuasive”:

They may “convince” people who, for other (good or bad) reasons, already want to believe in inclusive moral universalism without thinking too hard about it. But convincing people who are already or mostly convinced is not the challenge. The

12. Ibid., 48.
challenge is to convince reasonable skeptics. So let us consider the position of a reasonable skeptic whose starting point is something like this: “I can see why, even without God, and understanding moral norms to be mere human inventions, I should be motivated to behave ethically and be good to the people around me who could affect my well-being. Beyond them, however, I see no compelling obligation to promote the well-being of other people who are irrelevant for all practical purposes to my own life, happiness, and welfare.”

Now, we might be inclined to call such a skeptic “bad,” “selfish,” “egocentric,” or “self-centered,” but name-calling isn’t a convincing argument. And, again, such names seem to presuppose a moral foundation that is precisely the point at issue. Moreover, our skeptic would merely be conforming to what nature seems to dictate: Mama bears don’t care much, if at all, about unrelated cubs. Troops of silverback gorillas don’t feel much, if any, sense of obligation to help each other. Indeed, they fight and kill silverbacks of other troops, and nothing in nature suggests that, in doing so, they’re being “immoral.” (Adolf Hitler’s quest for Lebensraum, for greater space into which the Aryans or the Germanic peoples could expand via continual warfare, and his belief that other “races” should be either subjugated or altogether exterminated, seen from this vantage point, fits right in. Hitler’s attitude would not be so very different from that of a silverback gorilla, if a silverback could articulate its worldview. A literate silverback could have written a book called Mein Kampf, “My Struggle.” And this shouldn’t be surprising; Hitler was a social Darwinist. His “god,” to the extent that he actually had one, was Nature.)

You may, however, have noted Smith’s acknowledgment above, a very quiet one but (as we’ll soon see) one that is made more explicit elsewhere, that naturalism is actually capable of grounding some moral standards — or, perhaps better, moral standards of a certain kind or range. That concession might seem to some to be a significant one, undercutting the claim of certain critics of naturalism that it is incapable of grounding any moral standards at all. “If God doesn’t exist, everything is permitted.” (I, myself, am inclined to that point of view.) As Smith puts it,

13. Ibid., 22, emphasis in original.
I think that atheists are rationally justified in being morally good, if that means a modest goodness focused primarily on people who might affect them and with a view to practical consequences in terms of “enlightened self-interest.” “Good,” however, has no good reason to involve universal moral obligations. Atheists who wish to promote being “good without God,” if they are intellectually honest, need to scale back their ambitions and propose something more defensible, forthright, and realistic than most of these moralists seem to want. A more modest goodness may or may not suffice for functional human societies and a happy life, but — unless these atheist moralists have so far missed a big reason yet to be unveiled — that is all it seems atheism can rationally support.15

In allowing for that modest kind of naturalistically justifiable “moral obligation,” though, is Christian Smith really describing anything human that isn’t functionally equivalent to monkeys picking lice off of each other, or to wolves working together to take down prey, or, for that matter, to a fungus “cooperating” with green algae or cyanobacteria in order to make up a functioning lichen that benefits both? Individual specimens of Ipomoea hederacea, a tropical American flowering plant in the bindweed family that is more commonly known as “ivy-leaved morning glory,” compete fiercely with unrelated rivals but seem to relax considerably in the presence of kin.16 Is what Christian Smith describes really very different, mutatis mutandis, from that? And, I would ask, is there really anything specifically “moral” about it?

Many years ago, while my wife and I were living in Egypt, we had an American neighbor family who had lived and worked for several immediately prior years in a large city in Nigeria. One day, when the conversation turned to certain occasionally frustrating aspects of life in Egypt (e.g., traffic, and traffic signals that were taken as unsolicited and mostly unheeded advice rather than as commands), the husband, who was an engineer, hastened to assure me that, compared to the west African city in which he had previously resided, Cairo was a virtual utopia. One illustration that he gave me to support his claim has remained with me ever since.

In his former city, he said, absolutely nobody paid even the slightest attention to traffic lights. And that meant that every intersection was a continual snarl of cars entering from at least four directions, trying to work their way through to the next chaotic mess a block beyond. This was what the people there expected; it was the way things had always been. In his frustration, he told me, he often wanted to get out of his car, jump on its hood, and explain loudly to them that, if the traffic going east-west would simply pause for a couple of minutes to allow north-south traffic to pass through the intersection, and if the north-south cars would just permit the east-west cars to have their own two minutes of uninterrupted transit, everybody would save both time and emotional health.

Now, traffic rules are not moral laws. There’s nothing intrinsic to green lamps that says “Go!” and nothing intrinsic to red lamps that means “Stop!” Requiring cars to travel on the righthand side of the road rather than on the left is purely arbitrary. Deciding whether the speed limit on a given street should be set at thirty miles per hour or at twenty-five is a matter of prudence, not of ethical theory. Traffic regulations simply make public life a little easier and better, and, on the whole, we all benefit from them. (It’s easy to imagine exceptional cases, of course, such as an ambulance or even a private vehicle speeding and running a red light in a desperate attempt to save a life or to deliver a woman in labor to medical care. But, in general, the rules make for much better cities and improved communities.)

It seems to me that the limited “morality” that Christian Smith sees as justifiable on naturalistic grounds, when it is so justified, actually resembles traffic rules more than it does what many of us feel is actual morality. There is a self-interestedness to it, an element of quid pro quo, that seems fundamentally different from the self-sacrificial sense of many genuinely moral rules and decisions. “I will do this because I will benefit by doing it” — doing well by doing good, as it were — seems quite distinct from “I will do this even though it will hurt my own interests and perhaps even cost me my life.”

Moreover, there is a second grave problem that seems to cripple the project of grounding a universally benevolent morality in naturalism. No atheistic moralist, writes Smith, drawing again on his systematic reading in a wide range of writings from such thinkers,

   successfully explains why rational persons in an atheistic universe should uphold a culture’s moral norms all of the time.

   Why not be good when it serves one’s enlightened self-interest
but strategically choose to *break* a moral norm at opportune moments, when violation has a nice payoff and there is little chance of being caught?¹⁷

For, after all, individual interests aren’t — even “enlightened self-interest” isn’t — always perfectly aligned with society’s interests. Sometimes, in fact, they’re diametrically opposed. It’s not difficult to imagine cases where public and private interests or priorities would be out of alignment.

Presumably, for instance, it would be in society’s interest that a drowning boatload of thirty young honors students be saved. But is it in the individual interest of the people on the shore to risk their lives in order to save those honors students? And would it make any moral difference if, instead of honors students, these were criminals being transported from one prison to another? The public interest in high-quality medical care would certainly not be served were all medical students to cheat their way to graduation. But it might easily be in the interest of an individual medical student, burdened with ever increasing debt and perhaps an ever-growing family, to find a short-cut, guaranteed way to his degree.

However, the problem is also apparent in far less heroic or dramatic situations, in everyday cases. It’s the challenge posed by the “sensible knave” in David Hume’s 1751 *Enquiry Concerning the Principles of Morals* and, long before that, by Glaucon’s challenge to Socrates in the second book of Plato’s early-fourth-century BC *Republic*. What rational objection can a confirmed naturalist offer to someone who chooses to live as a shrewd opportunist, cultivating a reputation for ethical integrity while shunting ethics aside when doing so suits his or her interest? “Recall our atheistic situation,” Smith writes.

There is no objective, external source of moral order, such as God or a natural law. Humans invent morality through learning and social contract to make society function better — to benefit themselves. People are motivated to follow their culture’s moral norms because breaking them will lead to punishment in the short run and unhappiness and reduced well-being in the longer run. This kind of enlightened self-interest should produce societies of people who are morally good without God.¹⁸

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¹⁸. Ibid., 26.
But, again, what if our shrewd opportunist can escape punishment and evade damage to her reputation? (Smith sagely observes, by the way, that, for some atheistic moralists, society, with its sanctions, appears to have taken the place of a judging and punishing God.) What if she has solid reasons to believe that her personal well-being will be enhanced and her happiness uninjured (if not actually increased) by violating one or more social rules? While hoping that other people follow traditional moral codes, why shouldn’t she feel free to violate them when it serves her interests to do so?

To use the economist’s language, many perceptive people in an atheist universe will be tempted on occasion to “free ride” — that is, let others pay the full fare for the collective benefits of moral order, while they themselves occasionally jump the turnstile while nobody is looking and ride for free.¹⁹

And Smith raises yet another interesting issue: It seems intuitively obvious, he says, and evident to him as a practicing sociologist, that most people will be more inclined to follow moral rules if they believe them to be objective truths and/or that moral rules have been decreed by an all-powerful, all-observing, and all-judging divine being than if they regard them merely as rules that have been ginned up by society in order to enhance collective (but not necessarily individual) well-being and social functioning. As Thomas Hobbes wrote,

the laws of nature, as justice, equity, modesty, mercy, and, in sum, doing to others as we would be done to, of themselves, without the terror of some power to cause them to be observed, are contrary to our natural passions, that carry us to partiality, pride, revenge, and the like.²⁰

Thus, David Hume’s sensible knave will not only feel free to violate received moral standards while hoping that others obey them, but will actually prefer that the mass of humankind not discover that morality is a mere human construct, effectively an illusion, designed to minimize social frictions. After all, the authority of the Great and Terrible Oz didn’t last very long after his subjects discovered that he was really just a carnival magician and conman named Oscar, from Omaha, Nebraska. Since greater ethical education would seem liable, on an atheistic construal of the matter, to lead not to improved morality

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¹⁹. Ibid.
but, rather, to increased moral skepticism and even perhaps to knavery, the moralists of naturalism should, says Christian Smith, oppose moral enlightenment. They should hope that the masses of humanity remain naïve conformists.

Perhaps they should actually, maybe even cynically, encourage ordinary people to believe that morality reflects some sort of natural law, or the Will of God, or the laws of karma, while (of course) they themselves believe nothing of the kind. Perhaps they should tell what Plato, in the third book of his Republic, called a γενναῖον ψεῦδος, a gennaion pseudos or “noble lie.”

Early in that book, Plato’s fictionalized Socrates announces that, in the ideal, utopian, authoritarian state that he’s undertaken to describe, “it’s appropriate for the rulers, if for anyone at all, to lie for the benefit of the city in cases involving enemies or citizens, while all the rest must not put their hands to anything of the sort.”

His interlocutor agrees to this, and they proceed. Accordingly, Socrates soon introduces what is often called “the myth of the metals.”

“Could we,” he asks, “somehow contrive one of those lies that come into being in case of need … some one noble lie to persuade, in the best case, even the rulers, but if not them, the rest of the city?”

He speaks here in the first person:

I’ll attempt to persuade first the rulers and the soldiers, then the rest of the city, that the rearing and education we gave them were like dreams; they only thought they were undergoing all that was happening to them, while, in truth, at that time they were under the earth within, being fashioned and reared themselves, and their arms and other tools being crafted. When the job had been completely finished, then the earth, which is their mother, sent them up. And now, as though the land they are in were a mother and nurse, they must plan for and defend it, if anyone attacks, and they must think of the other citizens as brothers and born of the earth. …

"All of you in the city are certainly brothers," we shall say to them in telling the tale, “but the god, in fashioning those of you who are competent to rule, mixed gold in at their birth; this is why they are most honored; in auxiliaries, silver; and iron and bronze in the farmers and the other craftsmen. So,

because you’re all related, although for the most part you’ll produce offspring like yourselves, it sometimes happens that a silver child will be born from a golden parent, a golden child from a silver parent, and similarly all the others from each other. Hence the god commands the rulers first and foremost to be of nothing such good guardians and to keep over nothing so careful a watch as the children, seeing which of these metals is mixed in their souls. And, if a child of theirs should be born with an admixture of bronze or iron, by no manner of means are they to take pity on it, but shall assign the proper value to its nature and thrust it out among the craftsmen or the farmers; and, again, if from these men one should naturally grow who has an admixture of gold or silver, they will honor such ones and lead them up, some to the guardian group, others to the auxiliary, believing that there is an oracle that the city will be destroyed when an iron or bronze man is its guardian.”

“Well,” Socrates’s conversation partner replies, “that would be good for making them care more for the city and one another.” In other words, such deception would be good for the collective welfare.

The flat dishonesty that is advocated, and the seeming aroma of what we moderns might term fascism, is difficult to miss in the lines above and, for that matter, in the hypothetical picture of “atheist moralists” seeking, for the good of society, to prevent moral enlightenment among the masses. It’s scarcely surprising, in that light, that the eminent Anglo-Austrian philosopher Sir Karl Popper (1902–1994) harshly criticized Plato as a would-be totalitarian and as a major theoretical source for the autocratic tyrannies of the mid-twentieth century — including the Nazi Third Reich that had absorbed his country of birth. The first volume of his two-part 1945 work The Open Society and Its Enemies bears the significant subtitle The Spell of Plato.

But this is just the sort of thing, according to Christian Smith, toward which a consistent naturalistic moralism might well tend. And, frankly, it puts me in mind of such dystopian fictions as Aldous Huxley’s Brave New World, George Orwell’s 1984, and, perhaps most of all, C. S. Lewis’s That Hideous Strength.

If atheistic naturalism comes to be the dominant ideology of a society, though, might not such a course be necessary? Alternatively, if we

balk at lying, will we eventually feel ourselves compelled to jettison our cherished but untenable belief in universal benevolence and in human rights as “moral facts?” The American Declaration of Independence announces that “We hold these truths to be self-evident, that all men are created equal, that they are endowed by their Creator with certain unalienable Rights, that among these are Life, Liberty and the pursuit of Happiness.” If, however, such things come to seem no longer “self-evident” but, instead, absolutely false, will we need to simply abandon them?

The eminent Canadian philosopher Charles Taylor wonders if many people in the post-Christian West aren’t already operating on borrowed moral capital to which they have no proper right, having rejected the religious tradition from which it comes:

> The question is whether we are not living beyond our moral means in continuing allegiance to our standards of justice and benevolence. Do we have ways of seeing-good which are still credible to us, which are powerful enough to sustain these standards? If not, it would be both more honest and more prudent to moderate them.²³

Christian Smith contends that, if atheistic naturalism is true — and please remember that he himself is a Roman Catholic Christian — that is the path that we are logically required to take:

> The atheist moralists are overreaching. An ethics of genuine goodness without God may be possible. But the substantive obligations of such a morality are not what most activist atheists claim they can justify. They will need to lower their standards to fit the premises and parameters that their atheistic universe actually provides. People seem justified in being “moderately good” without God, motivated by a concern about the practical consequences of morality for their own and their loved ones’ well-being, understood in terms of “enlightened self-interest” (what I have called a modest or moderate goodness). But rational and intellectually honest atheists do not have good reasons justifying their strong, inclusive, universalistic humanism, which requires all people to adhere to high moral norms and to share their resources in

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an egalitarian fashion for the sake of equal opportunity and the promotion of human rights.\textsuperscript{24}

It’s obvious that the naturalistic moralists of whom Christian Smith writes badly want to reach a conclusion that they favor — a universally benevolent morality and the existence of human rights as genuine, objective “facts” — and that their desire reflects well upon them. But is such a morality logically entailed, or even logically allowed, by their overall position? That is the question. And we shouldn’t be sentimental about it.

Recall the features of a naturalistic universe. There is no transcendent natural law or moral force, no divinity, no ultimate spiritual meaning or destiny that transcends human invention during the blip of cosmic time that we humans have occupied. Reality consists of various conglomerations of infinitesimally small particles pulled together by physical forces and processes of emergence that are in a continual state of flux. Matter and energy — atoms, molecules, cells, organisms, light, heat, gravity, radiation — exist. Everything in existence is working itself out by natural forces that are neither designed nor intended nor morally weighted. Everything simply is. Some forces and processes generate certain outcomes; others generate others. Complex substances have slowly evolved. Life has very improbably evolved. Conscious and self-conscious human beings have even more improbably evolved.\textsuperscript{25}

This brings us, again, to Smith’s question, which I cited earlier:

If we in fact live in the naturalistic cosmos that atheists and much of science tell us we occupy, do we have good reasons for believing in universal benevolence and human rights as moral facts and imperatives?\textsuperscript{26}

Clearly, as I also mentioned earlier, Smith’s answer is No. But he insists that we keep three questions distinct in considering this subject. I’ve paraphrased them as follows:

1. Can people who accept metaphysical naturalism believe in human rights and universal benevolence and act based on such belief? He forthrightly declares that, yes, they can.

\textsuperscript{24} Smith, \textit{Atheist Overreach}, 42.
\textsuperscript{25} Ibid., 55.
\textsuperscript{26} Ibid., 48.
2. Do metaphysical naturalists have good reason, based upon their naturalistic assumptions, to believe in human rights and universal benevolence? Which is to say, is their belief rationally warranted? Here, his answer is no.

3. If his negative answer to the second question is true, will societies and cultures in which that answer becomes widely accepted be able to sustain a committed belief in human rights and universal benevolence over the long term? Here again, his answer is no. He regards it as highly unlikely. “If and when people come to see … ‘morals’ as mere social conventions,” he writes, “the main thing that will then compel their conformity in action is the threat of greater harm for not conforming.”

Of course, Thomas Hobbes had already made the same point in the mid-seventeenth century. He was writing principally about political anarchy, but what he said is surely also true regarding the moral anarchy that some feel will arise in the absence of a divine lawgiver or absent a concept of natural law:

>[D]uring the time men live without a common power to keep them all in awe, they are in that condition which is called war; and such a war as is of every man against every man.\(^{28}\)

To this war of every man against every man, this also is consequent; that nothing can be unjust. The notions of right and wrong, justice and injustice, have there no place. Where there is no common power, there is no law; where no law, no injustice. Force and fraud are in war the two cardinal virtues.\(^{29}\)

No arts; no letters; no society; and which is worst of all, continual fear, and danger of violent death; and the life of man, solitary, poor, nasty, brutish, and short.\(^{30}\)

However, the issue here isn’t solely the danger that obvious human evils might break out catastrophically in a post-theistic society. Even some conceivably well-intended “reforms” could someday be suggested that many of us conventional moralists would regard as repugnant. Recall, for example, that the extermination of counterrevolutionaries

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27. Ibid., 68.
29. Ibid., 79.
30. Ibid., 78.
and “deviationists” has been a moral imperative under more than one Communist regime and that, for Hitler’s National Socialism, the elimination of Jews and Gypsies and the subjugation of Slavs were dictated by supposedly idealistic principles. Christian Smith offers a short list of measures that might potentially be proposed — they are not his proposals — to improve society. I provide an abridgment of his list here:

- “All inveterate drug addicts, incorrigible drunks, and long-term homeless people” should be either forcibly enslaved or euthanized.
- Babies who are born with incapacitating mental or physical defects, or who, though healthy, are unwanted, should be allowed to die.
- Elderly invalids and long-term patients in mental hospitals and insane asylums who show no promise of recovery should be permitted or assisted to die.
- Serious repeat criminals, if allowed to live, should be sterilized.\(^{31}\)

For most of us — including me and Christian Smith — such suggestions would be abhorrent. But why? And on what naturalistic basis could one rationally argue against them? Smith is unpersuaded that, in an atheistic, naturalistic world, there would be rational grounds for opposing these and similar policy suggestions.

\[I\]t is not clear that in a naturalistic universe there are normative sources that exist apart from people. Matter and energy are not a moral source. They just exist and do what they do. The natural processes that govern the operation of the cosmos are not moral sources. They are simply the givens of physics and mathematics, elemental facts of natural reality lacking inherent meaning or purpose or normativity. Positive and negative electrical charges do not attract one another because that is right or just, they do so simply because that is simply how they work. The evolutionary development of substances and life forms is not a moral source. These also just happen as they happen. What then in naturalism’s cosmos could serve for humans as a genuine moral guide or standard, having a source apart from human desires, decisions, and

preferences and thus capable of judging and transforming the latter? I cannot think of any.\footnote{32. \textit{Ibid.}, 69, emphasis in original.}

In closing, I want to clearly say that such concerns as those raised by Christian Smith don’t prove that there is a God, let alone that the claims of the Restoration are true. One might still conclude that, sadly, we live in a godless (and therefore objectively valueless) world. But they do strongly suggest that rejecting the existence of God comes at a substantial cost.

Happily, we here at the Interpreter Foundation don’t live in an atheistic, naturalistic universe. So, it’s both my pleasure and, yes, my duty to express my gratitude and appreciation to the authors, reviewers, designers, source checkers, copy editors, and others who have created this volume of \textit{Interpreter: A Journal of Latter-day Saint Faith and Scholarship}, as well as all of its 48 older siblings. I particularly want to thank Allen Wyatt and Jeff Lindsay, who currently serve as the two managing or production editors for the \textit{Journal}. Like every other leader of the Interpreter Foundation, they volunteer their time, their talents, and their labor; they receive no financial or other compensation. Yet \textit{Interpreter} would not appear and the Interpreter Foundation could not function without their considerable effort. I’m also deeply grateful to all of the other Foundation volunteers and to the donors who supply the funds that are essential even to a largely volunteer organization.

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A SYMPATHETIC BUT FLAWED LOOK AT BOOK OF MORMON HISTORICITY

Brant A. Gardner


**Abstract**: Terrence O’Leary enters the field of books attempting to describe a geographical and cultural background to the Book of Mormon. Placing the action of the text in Mesoamerica, O’Leary explains the Book of Mormon against his understanding of the geography and therefore culture of the Book of Mormon peoples. He begins with the Jaredites, then moves to the Nephites and Mulekites. Along the way, he uses historical data to back up his ideas. While I agree with much of what he has written in principle, his lack of expertise in the cultures of Mesoamerica leads to times when he incorrectly uses some of his sources.

For Latter-day Saint scholars of the Book of Mormon from the Utah-based church, it becomes too easy to forget that we are not the only children of the Restoration who are interested in the text. In particular, the Community of Christ has scholars who continue to approach the Book of Mormon as a historical record, even though the Community of Christ itself has institutionally moved away from an emphasis on historicity. It is a welcome addition to the literature on the historicity of the Book of Mormon to have Terrence J. O’Leary write his findings. He grew up in the Reorganized Church of Jesus Christ of Latter Day Saints and continues through the 2001 name change to Community of Christ. He attended Graceland College (now Graceland University) which is affiliated with the Community of Christ.

The chance to have more serious scholars working on the Book of Mormon is wonderful, and it is important to cooperate in
examining the text that is important to both traditions. Unfortunately, there appears to be an invisible wall separating the Book of Mormon scholars in the two traditions. Latter-day Saint writers seldom cite Community of Christ writers, and at least in O’Leary, there seems to be the reciprocal for Community of Christ writers not citing Latter-day Saint scholars. A simple but glaring example is that O’Leary places the Book of Mormon in Mesoamerica but has no bibliographic entry for John L. Sorenson. Anyone looking at a Mesoamerican background for the Book of Mormon who does not at least acknowledge, let alone engage, Sorenson is immediately lacking research depth and perhaps unwittingly attempting to cover ground well-covered before without necessarily adding anything new.¹

I find myself agreeing, in principle, to perhaps 80 percent of what O’Leary has written, but my hesitations come from the lack of scholarly discernment he shows in using his sources. This occurs very early when he cites Ether 5:30–31 about the brother of Jared moving the mountain Zerin. O’Leary cites a Chinese legend, then another author who suggests the miracle occurred in a pass through the Altai mountain range known as the Dzungarian Gate (pp. 6–7). I miss any solid analysis of why O’Leary elects to send the Jaredites eastward (though it is not an unusual suggestion in the literature), and then why it would be possible to associate the mountain Zerin’s absence with the Dzungarian Gate. While interesting, O’Leary has not built a strong case.

He has the Jaredites arrive in Olmec territory in Mesoamerica, a very common connection in the literature on Book of Mormon historicity. However, one of his evidences is the use of Chinese characters on Olmec celts. Since he has the Jaredites going through Asia, the Chinese connection becomes plausible, but he is totally reliant on Michal Xu’s work suggesting that identifiable early Chinese characters appear on some Olmec celts (p. 19). This sounds interesting, but O’Leary clearly didn’t follow the academic discussion of those celts, which has totally repudiated the theory. Xu read as Chinese characters pieces of a large artwork that existed on the stone before it was broken up into celts. The scholars have clearly demonstrated that they could be reassembled to show the original picture. Therefore, they were not Chinese characters at all.

¹ O’Leary has not totally ignored the Latter-day Saint writings. Several are listed in the bibliography, but the absence of Sorenson or anyone else explicitly working on a Mesoamerican cultural background is glaring.
O’Leary’s chapter 7 is entitled “A Skin of Blackness,” and is a very good addition to the literature discussing that topic. Much of his analysis is not new and has appeared in different essays over the years, but his suggestion that the “&c” found in the 1830 edition of what we know as Alma 3:14–17 suggests that “the complete text of the curse was lost and is not found anywhere in the Book of Mormon” (p. 125). It is a new and interesting argument.

My biggest criticism of O’Leary is that when he begins to use sources on the history of central Mexico, he demonstrates that he has only a layman’s understanding of those sources. Hubert Howe Bancroft was a great synthesizer but should not be used as a primary source. He interpreted his sources as he retold them. Fernando de Alva Ixtlilxochitl would appear to be a great source, since he was fluent in the native language and declared that his history in Spanish was based on pre-Contact histories. Unfortunately, Ixtlilxochitl also modified his stories as he told them to enhance possible biblical connections for the benefit of the Spanish fathers. He needs to be used with care as a source, which it seems O’Leary does not know.

O’Leary sees connections between the Aztec stories of Hueman (Huemac is probably the more likely name based on Aztec sources) and Mormon. O’Leary doesn’t explain how stories about Mormon, whose people died out, would influence Aztec stories collected some eight hundred years later. He also seems unaware that the timing of the Huemac stories is much later than Mormon.

This is a book that can give a reader a nice overview of Book of Mormon history set against a real-world scenario, but the reader should beware that much of the evidence used to create a connection between stories in the Book of Mormon and stories from the Maya or Aztecs are strained. If I take the liberty of adjusting the language from D&C 91:2–4: “There are many things contained therein that are not true, which are interpolations … therefore, whoso readeth it, let him” already have a good background in the subject.

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Personal Relative Pronoun Usage in the Book of Mormon: An Important Authorship Diagnostic

Stanford Carmack

Abstract: This study compares personal relative pronoun usage in the earliest text of the Book of Mormon with 11 specimens of Joseph Smith’s early writings, 25 pseudo-archaic texts, the King James Bible, and more than 200,000 early modern (1473–1700) and late modern (1701–1800+) texts. The linguistic pattern of the Book of Mormon in this domain — a pattern difficult to consciously manipulate in a sustained manner — uniquely points to a less-common early modern pattern. Because there is no matching of the Book of Mormon’s pattern except with a small percentage of early modern texts, the indications are that Joseph Smith was neither the author nor the English-language translator of this pervasive element of the dictation language of the Book of Mormon. Cross-verification by means of large database comparisons and matching with one of the finest pseudo-archaic texts confirm these findings.

“All they which fight against Zion shall be cut off” (1 Nephi 22:19)

Syntactostylistics is the study of the stylistic implications of syntactic variation. One of the most important areas of syntactostylistics in relation to the Book of Mormon, with clear authorship implications, is the systematic use of relative pronouns in the original text, in particular when these pronouns refer to persons. This kind of syntax is one of the most important pieces of evidence that the Book of Mormon is formulated with nonbiblical, archaic syntax. At this point, I have completed quite a few other studies of a similar nature that indicate or suggest the same. It is my aim to publish some of these studies in the near future. Among them, the Book of Mormon’s verb complementation pattern, though archaic, stands out clearly as nonbiblical and non-pseudo-archaic.
I currently know of no external textual evidence that might suggest that Joseph Smith would have formulated the Book of Mormon’s clausal complementation patterns in the way we find them in the text (more than 500 instances: sustained, heavy finite usage). The frequent use of the modal auxiliary *shall* as a subjunctive marker in certain contexts, such as in clauses governed by verbs of influence, is another archaic syntactic marker that makes the text stand out from pseudo-archaic texts. The Book of Mormon’s pervasive periphrastic *did* usage is another one. The text’s partly nonbiblical and often non-pseudo-archaic subordinate *that* usage is another one. And so forth.

The Book of Mormon’s personal relative pronoun usage has been less thoroughly covered in an earlier article and in the text-critical volume *The Nature of the Original Language* (NOL). For that NOL study, large database comparisons had not been as fully carried out, nor had the view been expanded to 25 pseudo-archaic texts or to Joseph Smith’s earlier epistolary writings (see the appendix for how these pseudo-archaic texts were chosen). Now I have finished making WordCruncher databases — both large and small — of these texts and writings. In the case of the larger textual record of English, I am now able to closely compare Book of Mormon usage with about 10 billion words first published between the years 1473 and 1829 (the early modern corpus, EEBO, has texts dated between 1473 [the first printed book in English] and 1700; the late modern corpus, ECCO, has texts dated primarily between 1701 and 1800, with a relatively small number of texts first published after the year 1800).

Before considering the textual evidence, it is important to clarify the version of the Book of Mormon that must be analyzed. The dictation language must be our object of inquiry, and not the 1837 edition or the 1840 edition, so as to avoid biasing the outcome. If Joseph Smith was the author or English-language translator of the Book of Mormon, then that will reveal itself in the dictation language. If he was not the author or English-language translator, then that might or might not reveal itself in a later lifetime edition, depending on what syntax and lexis is being studied, since the second and third editions contain readings that were greatly altered by conscious editing. In no other linguistic domain is that more applicable than in the text’s personal relative pronoun usage, since so many of these were changed for the second edition. Because of this, we must study the earliest text to avoid possibly predetermining the outcome of this linguistic study as well as others.
Another important point to bear in mind is that we look to pseudo-archaic texts to see what linguistic elements their authors were able to control and alter, elements that are usually a matter of nonconscious production, such as relative pronoun usage. In composing their texts, pseudo-archaic authors attempted to alter various formal and structural features of their native language. They were able to alter linguistic usage to an extent, and morphosyntactic features such as verb agreement and verb endings were more readily imitated than other kinds of syntax. Nevertheless, they were able to go beyond mere morphosyntactic alteration, modifying other syntactic and lexical features. We may grant to Joseph Smith, as a presumed author or translator from revealed ideas, the ability to be among the finest pseudo-archaic stylists, such as Richard Grant White, the Shakespearean scholar. The working assumption, then, is that Joseph Smith, though dictating a text with complex content, might have focused on meaning-neutral personal relative pronoun usage. But I do not assume that he was able to produce what no pseudo-archaic author produced in this domain. To go beyond that level is to enter a gray area of possible supernatural control of vocabulary, forms, and structures.

With that in mind, I compared what Joseph Smith produced in this domain with what pseudo-archaic authors produced. An examination of these texts indicates that as far as personal relative pronoun usage is concerned, Joseph Smith was unlikely to have sustained conscious manipulation of usage patterns that varied substantially from modern usage beyond some slight biblical influence. Most pseudo-archaic authors show a modern pattern, heavy in *who* or *whom*. A few produced more personal *that* than was normal for their time, showing that they were able to imitate biblical usage a little more closely, but no one came very close to being biblical in this regard. Most telling is that no pseudo-archaic author produced usage that was heavy in personal *which*, such as representing more than half the relative personal pronoun usage, as we find in the Book of Mormon. Thus, even if Joseph Smith had been able to closely imitate biblical patterns in this domain, he almost certainly would not have produced the heavy personal *which* of the Book of Mormon.

A reasonable conclusion is that the original dictation language does not present as a pseudo-archaic text in this syntactic domain. This is a pattern that is a pervasive, integral part of the language and not merely found in scattered portions of the text (there are more than 1,600 instances in mostly nonbiblical sections).
Personal Relative Pronouns and Variation

As an introduction to personal relative pronouns, consider these two pairs of simple English expressions:

- A friend that was at the party told me.
- A friend who was at the party told me.
- Someone who was here last night left those keys.
- Someone that was here last night left those keys.

The words highlighted above have to do with the variable syntax of relative pronoun selection. In the above examples, there is a choice to be made among that and who after the noun friend and the indefinite pronoun someone. As shown, there is variation in the relative pronoun used. Both that and who are acceptable to most native English speakers. When we say things like this, we do not think about which relative pronoun we use, and we probably do not even have a sense of how often we use one or the other, and after what words and in what contexts we use one more than the other. Personal relative pronoun (PRP) usage patterns are shaped by our linguistic environment — what sounds right to us depends heavily on what we have heard and read growing up.

In earlier English, there was yet another PRP option commonly available to speakers and writers: personal which. This is the option we see most often in the original Book of Mormon text. We can replace that or who above with which to get a sense of how this option sounds/reads:

- A friend which was at the party told me.
- Someone which was here last night left those keys.

Even today, we occasionally encounter the use of personal which in prepositional phrases — in phrases such as “many of which” or “some of which” — but besides that, we either do not encounter it or hardly ever encounter it.12

We can see in the textual record that English underwent broad pattern shifts over time. Usage of personal which (as a relative pronoun) had become rare for most English speakers well before the 19th century. By the early 1800s, the decades when Joseph Smith was absorbing information from his linguistic environment, a bare minimum of personal which usage was the norm for most English speakers and in most dialects, including in Joseph’s own American English dialect. This can be seen in Google’s Ngram Viewer,13 where we can compare usage rates of “anyone/someone who/that/which.”
Figure 1 indicates that anyone who and someone who were dominant in the 1820s over anyone that and someone that; and anyone which and someone which are two orders of magnitude below the who variants. In the early 1700s, “anyone/someone that” was still dominant, but by the late 1700s “anyone/someone who” was dominant. Though it would not be unusual to find scattered instances of personal which in Joseph’s day, including in his own early writings (there are two of them), the use of personal which was dwarfed by competing options.

It is important to keep in mind that PRP selection can vary considerably, even for a single author. It would be unusual for an earlier English author or translator, in a lengthy text, to use just one of the three PRP options all of the time. This can be seen in many writings of the past, including the King James Bible and the Book of Mormon. Here are four examples of PRP variation after the demonstrative personal pronoun those:

Ezra 8:35 Also the children of those that had been carried away which were come out of the captivity,

Mosiah 15:21 yea, even a resurrection of those that have been and which are and which shall be,

1574, EEBO A69056 So then what shall become of those that have nothing but infirmity, and which have scarcely received three drops of courageousness to sustain themselves withal in the mids[t] of their afflictions?

1690, EEBO A30434 we must likewise believe that he loves those that are truly good, and are conformable to
his own nature, and that he has an aversion
to those who are contrary to it, and that are
defiled and impure:

In these excerpts, we see those that varying closely with “those ... which.” The last excerpt has those that, then those who, followed by “those ... that.” These are examples of nearby PRP variation, which was and still is part of natural language use.

This study compares the PRP usage found in the Book of Mormon and the following:

- Joseph Smith’s early writings (10 letters and his 1832 personal history)
- 25 pseudo-archaic writings (see the appendix)
- the King James Bible
- tens of thousands of early modern and (late) modern texts (EEBO [1473–1700] and ECCO [1701–1800+])

If Joseph was the author or translator of the text, then we reasonably expect a number of syntactic structures in the Book of Mormon to roughly match any of three things: King James–style, which he was presumably imitating; the usage of various pseudo-archaic authors, who were trying to mimic biblical and/or archaic usage; or his own way of expressing things. Examining how these sources employed PRPs reveals that Book of Mormon usage is unexpected and out of the ordinary.

The approach taken for this study was to compare complete datasets with each other and syntactically sampled sets with each other. In particular, all instances found in the Book of Mormon have been compared against all instances found in Joseph Smith’s early writings. Also, syntactically and semantically sampled instances from the Book of Mormon have been compared to syntactically and semantically sampled instances taken from the first three items listed above. Finally, a more limited type of PRP usage was compared between all the texts and corpora, as discussed below.

A Complete Comparison of PRP Patterns

In comparing the PRP usage of Joseph Smith’s early writings and the Book of Mormon, all potential instances were noted, except those occurring in sections heavy in biblical quoting. Nonbiblical language was targeted, as it is hypothetically more likely to represent Joseph’s own usage, without external linguistic influence or contamination. Both texts have easily identifiable biblical quotations as well as instances of biblical
blending. I did not include the PRP usage found in the most obvious biblical quotations, but it was included in borderline cases involving biblical blending.

With these exclusions, the distribution of PRP selection in the Book of Mormon and Joseph’s early writings is shown in Table 1.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>that</th>
<th>which</th>
<th>who(m)</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Book of Mormon, nonbiblical</td>
<td>370</td>
<td>939</td>
<td>300</td>
<td>1,609</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Early writings, nonbiblical</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>49</td>
<td>64</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

$X^2 \approx 132.6, p \approx 2 \times 10^{-29}; p \approx 6 \times 10^{-10}$ ($n = 50$).

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>23.0%</th>
<th>58.4%</th>
<th>18.6%</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Book of Mormon, nonbiblical</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Early writings, nonbiblical</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 1. PRP instances and rates in the Book of Mormon and Joseph Smith’s early writings (nonbiblical sections).

Because chi-square tests can be very sensitive to large $n$’s — as occur in the King James Bible and the Book of Mormon in this case — I ran chi-square tests for all the texts using not only the raw numbers, but also using $n = 50$ as a common baseline. In order to achieve $n = 50$, seven texts had their observed numbers reduced and eight texts had their observed numbers increased (see Table 4 for a complete listing of the raw numbers and the chi-square tests; Table 5 shows the tests run on reduced numbers).

![Personal relative pronoun usage (nonbiblical)](image)

**Figure 2.** PRP rates in the Book of Mormon and Joseph’s early writings (nonbiblical).
This comparison shows large differences in the case of *which* and *who(m)*. In the Book of Mormon, *which* is strongly preferred, with *that* slightly exceeding *who(m)*. In contrast, Joseph Smith had a strong personal preference for *who(m)* over *that*, with *which* a distant third. Figure 2 graphically shows that Joseph’s native PRP usage pattern was markedly different from that of the Book of Mormon.

The big picture is that the Book of Mormon is more than half personal *which*, and Joseph Smith’s native preference was more than two-thirds *who* or *whom*.

**A Comparison of Large Subsets of PRP Instances**

Next to check were authors who were trying to emulate biblical/archaic patterns, to find out whether they produced anything like the Book of Mormon’s pattern. For the above comparison, I noted virtually all instances of PRP usage. But in comparing Book of Mormon usage with what is found in 25 pseudo-archaic texts and the King James Bible, I sampled a large portion of PRP usage systematically, noting usage in contexts with higher frequency antecedents and without any intervening punctuation (thus reducing false positives as well as focusing on relative clauses mostly restrictive in function). Thus the sampling was not randomly determined but was based on syntax and semantics, so the comparisons were more likely to have greater relevance.

Among the 25 pseudo-archaic texts examined, there was no matching whatsoever with the Book of Mormon’s PRP patterns, whether we consider the 12 longer pseudo-archaic texts or the 13 shorter ones. In the 12 longer texts, none of the authors preferred *which* over the other two possibilities. Eight of the 12 clearly preferred *who(m)* to *that*, with *which* a distant third. This preference is a modern profile and it matches what we see in Joseph Smith’s personal writings, as shown above. As a result, the chi-square tests between these eight texts and his early writings are not statistically significant — that is, p > 0.05. The pattern of these eight longer pseudo-archaic texts, then, was the most likely one for Joseph to have produced in an effort to produce biblical archaism.

Three of the 12 longer texts reflected, to a slight degree, a biblical preference for personal *that*. This was the second most likely result for the Book of Mormon, had it been the result of a pseudo-archaic effort. Only one of the 12 split usage among personal *that* and *who(m)*. Ten of the 12 did not employ any personal *which* in the targeted contexts, and the two that did employ personal *which* employed it at far lower rates.
than occurs in the Book of Mormon, especially Gilbert Hunt, whose personal *which* usage in *The Late War* stands at only three percent.\(^{21}\)

The only pseudo-archaic author who employed personal *which* at a non-negligible rate was the Shakespearean scholar Richard Grant White, who wrote his text, *The New Gospel of Peace*,\(^{22}\) three decades after the Book of Mormon. His greater familiarity with Early Modern English might explain his somewhat elevated personal *which* usage. Nevertheless, White’s personal *which* usage rate of 18 percent is still far below the Book of Mormon’s rate in the targeted context, 52 percent.\(^{23}\)

White’s pseudo-archaic text is one of the best in terms of producing earlier usage, in several different ways, not just in PRP usage. As an example from this domain, among all pseudo-archaic texts, White’s text is the only one with instances of personal *them which* (14 of them), as in the following excerpt:

2:6:14 they fell upon *them which* were already free in Gotham

The King James Bible has more than 100 instances of the string “them which” and the Book of Mormon has 34 in nonbiblical contexts, as in these two examples:

Judges 14:19 and gave change of garments unto *them which* expounded the riddle

3 Nephi 3:14 — or of all *them which* were numbered among the Nephites —

The occurrence of personal “them which” in a text is either a small sign of true archaism, knowledge of earlier archaism, or a great ability to reproduce biblical archaism.

The rates of PRP selection in the King James Bible compared with the Book of Mormon (syntactically and semantically sampled) are as shown in Table 2.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th><em>that</em></th>
<th><em>which</em></th>
<th><em>who(m)</em></th>
<th><strong>Total</strong></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>King James Bible</td>
<td>86%</td>
<td>10%</td>
<td>4%</td>
<td>3,194</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Book of Mormon</td>
<td>31%</td>
<td>52%</td>
<td>17%</td>
<td>837</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

\(X^2 = 1067, p = 2\times10^{-22}; p = 1\times10^{-7} (n = 50)\)

**Table 2.** PRP rates in the King James Bible and the Book of Mormon with high-frequency antecedents and in restrictive relative clauses (no intervening punctuation).

Figure 3 shows how different from each other these usage patterns are. In restrictive relative clauses, the King James Bible is dominant
in personal that (more than 75 percent) and the Book of Mormon is dominant in personal which (more than 50 percent). The biblical pattern was the dominant early modern profile, and the Book of Mormon’s pattern was a much less common early modern profile.\footnote{24}

![Personal relative pronoun usage (partial)](image)

Figure 3. PRP rates in the Bible and Book of Mormon.

**A Comparison of PRP Usage After He and They**

In order to reliably tally PRP usage in tens of thousands of texts, without individual inspection, we can reduce the number of false positives by limiting the antecedents to subject pronouns, the most frequent being *he* and *they*. By limiting searches to the following strings —

- he that • he which • he who(m)
- they that • they which • they who(m)

— we obtain tallies of textual usage that allow us to determine closeness of fit with the Book of Mormon’s pattern somewhat more easily. The databases I inspected — EEBO and ECCO — yielded 26,101 texts\footnote{25} with at least 20 instances of “he/they <rel.pron.>” (no intervening punctuation allowed).

Besides facilitating a reliable scan of tens of thousands of texts without generating very many false positives, this is also a way to focus on greater archaism, since a high usage rate of “he/they <rel.pron.>” is more characteristic of earlier modes of expression. In other words, texts with relatively large amounts of “he/they <rel.pron.>” tend to be more
Alternatives such as “(any/some) one” and “those” began to be used more heavily as time went on.

The Book of Mormon has a striking pattern divergence that hinges on whether the antecedent is *he* or *they* \( (n = 228, \text{nonbiblical sections}) \). Personal *which* is dominant after *they*; personal *that* is dominant after *he*, as shown in Figure 4.

![Book of Mormon PRP usage after he and they](image)

**Figure 4.** Divergence in PRP rates after *he* and *they* in the Book of Mormon \([X^2 \approx 91.5, \ p \approx 1 \times 10^{-20}; \ p \approx 1 \times 10^{-10} (n = 50)]\)

The entire EEBO database was found to have 82 texts \( (n \geq 20; \text{a handful of these near duplicates}) \) in which the raw tallies were a close fit with this particular Book of Mormon usage pattern. In some of these texts, all instances of “they that/which” are personal; in other texts, some
instances are nonpersonal. For example, in the closest matching text — Thomas Cartwright [1535–1603] (attributed name), *A second admonition to the parliament* (1572), A18079 — all instances of “they that/which” are personal. But in Thomas Elyot’s *The Castle of Health* (1536), some instances of “they that/which” are nonpersonal, and the closeness of fit with the Book of Mormon is slightly less than the raw result.²⁸

Figure 5. Comparison of “he/they <rel.pron.>” in the Bible and Book of Mormon. 

\[ N_{(\text{King James Bible})} = 1,134; N_{(\text{Book of Mormon})} = 228, \text{ nonbiblical sections;} \]

\[ X^2 \approx 1067, p \approx 2 \times 10^{-232}; p \approx 0.0003 \ (n = 50) \]

In the Book of Mormon, the divergence is limited to pronominal antecedents and not necessarily related to number — that is, it is not a general singular/plural divergence, since singular noun phrases do not show a preference for personal that over personal which. Both singular and plural noun phrases, when divided into two groups, show a preference for personal which. However, plural noun phrases do take which to a higher degree than singular noun phrases (approximately 80 percent versus 60 percent).

These closely matching EEBO texts provide evidence that this pattern divergence occurred in earlier English. The average matching date is 1604, and the weighted average date, taking into account publication rates increasing over time, is close to 1580. Shown in Figure 6 is the EEBO text whose PRP usage after he and they matches Book of Mormon usage most closely.
Out of just over 195,000 mostly 18th-century ECCO volumes (many thousands of these near duplicates, and some of these early 19th-century texts), only five distinct texts were found to match the Book of Mormon closely (a sixth text was a near duplicate). All five turned out to be early modern texts. One was by an author born in 1589, Timothy Rogers (1618, CW0122204280 [1784]: *A Righteous Man’s Evidence(s) for Heaven*). Two texts contained extracts from John Foxe’s *Book of Martyrs*, first published in the 1560s (CW0117792407, 1751; CW0117389458, 1761). A fourth ECCO text contained memorials from the time of Queen Elizabeth and King James I (CW0106210422, 1725). A fifth text was a 1575 translation of a Galatians commentary by Martin Luther (CW0119359562, 1774).

Only the longer pseudo-archaic texts turned out to have instances of “he/they <rel.pron.>” (10 of the 12 longer texts). Of these 10, five had at least 19 instances. Among these five pseudo-archaic texts, there was no close fit with the Book of Mormon’s pattern. The Book of Mormon has 73 instances of “he that” and 100 instances of “they which.” The five pseudo-archaic texts have between 6 and 19 instances of “he that,” but only one text had instances of “they which” (five of them): Richard Grant White’s
*New Gospel of Peace* (1863). Figure 7 compares the Book of Mormon with the sum of the 10 longer pseudo-archaic texts in this domain.

![Comparison of personal relative pronoun usage after *he* and *they*](image)

**Figure 7.** Comparison of “he/they <PRP>” in the Book of Mormon and 10 longer pseudo-archaic texts.

\[
[N_{\text{Book of Mormon}}] = 228; N_{\text{pseudo-archaic}} = 257; \chi^2 \approx 189.8, \\
p \approx 4 \times 10^{-39}; p \approx 3 \times 10^{-7} (n = 50)
\]

The distribution profiles are noticeably different, with the most noticeable differences between “he/they who(m)” and “they which” usage.

It is also instructive to make “he/they <rel.pron.>” comparisons of White’s 1863 pseudo-archaic text \((n = 63)\) with texts from the EEBO and the ECCO databases that have at least 20 instances. The Shakespearean scholar White knew much more Early Modern English in his time than Joseph Smith did in the 1820s. While the Book of Mormon closely matches 82 EEBO texts, White’s *New Gospel of Peace* closely matches only 40 EEBO texts, about half the number. The average year of these closely matching texts is 1665 (the weighted average year is about 1650; publication dates range between 1600 and 1700). The weighted average years of texts that closely match the “he/they <rel.pron.>” patterns of the Book of Mormon and White’s pseudo-archaic text are 70 years apart. Furthermore, if publishing rates of titles had been steady across the decades of the early modern period, then the Book of Mormon would have probably closely matched between five and ten times as many EEBO texts as White’s pseudo-archaic text.
In comparisons of more than 18,000 eighteenth-century texts (ECCO database, \(n \geq 20\)), White’s text closely matches 93 texts, many of these actually 18th-century texts (an unknown number of these are duplicates or from the early modern era).\(^\text{30}\) As mentioned, the Book of Mormon closely matches only five distinct texts (six total), all early modern. Thus, the Book of Mormon presents as an older and even a genuinely archaic text in this domain, while White’s text, though linguistically speaking a fine pseudo-archaic effort, is a borderline early/late modern case, and much less archaic than Joseph’s dictation language. Table 3 summarizes these results.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>EEBO Texts</th>
<th>ECCO Texts</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Book of Mormon</td>
<td>82 (avg. yr: 1580)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>New Gospel of Peace</td>
<td>40 (avg. yr: 1650)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 3. Close matching with the “he/they <rel.pron.>” profiles of the Book of Mormon and Richard Grant White’s 1863 pseudo-archaic text.\(^\text{31}\)

Conclusion

The statistical argument for each scenario outlined above is compelling — whether we look at all PRP usage, a subset involving high-frequency antecedents, or just contexts involving the subject pronouns he and they. We can tell with exceptionally high confidence that the Book of Mormon’s PRP patterns were not derived from Joseph Smith’s own patterns, from the King James Bible, or from attempting to imitate biblical and/or archaic style. We can also tell that the patterns do match a less-common pattern that prevailed during the middle portion of the early modern period, but not in the 18th century — a pattern with an overall preference of personal which over that or who(m).

In the case involving more antecedents than just he and they, a simple examination of the dramatic differences shown here or an application of standard chi-square tests of the raw numbers (see the appendix) indicate that the Book of Mormon’s PRP pattern would not have been achieved by closely following the patterns of the King James Bible, pseudo-archaic works, or Joseph’s own dialectal profile, which at times was biblically influenced. The large differences in PRP usage between the Book of Mormon and the King James Bible and pseudo-archaic works indicate a different authorial preference for these sets of texts — a preference that is mostly nonconscious, as shown by an inability of pseudo-archaic authors to sustain archaic/biblical usage over long stretches. The Book of Mormon is not a match with the usage in Joseph’s
personal writings, as his own patterns fit comfortably in the late modern period, as do most contemporary pseudo-archaic works.

This point has been made in other contexts, including various iterations of stylometric analysis, but the force of the data is difficult to deny, even though it is based on only a single linguistic feature. (These PRP comparisons are in effect a kind of focused, precise stylometry.) Furthermore, the data lead us clearly away from Joseph as author or English-language translator and toward a specific time period — the only time when we find textual matching with the Book of Mormon’s archaic PRP distribution rates: the early modern era, and primarily the second half of the 1500s and the first decade of the 1600s. The textual evidence establishes the early modern period as the best and only fit for these Book of Mormon patterns. Indeed, the early modern sensibility of this aspect of the syntax is undeniable. These distinctive PRP patterns as well as the text’s striking preference for finite clausal complementation and the archaic nature of the verbal system, in all its complexity, go a long way toward establishing the vast majority of its syntax as early modern. This means that Book of Mormon content occurs within a framework of mostly early modern syntax.

A reviewer noted that this evidence favors Book of Mormon authenticity over the idea that the text was a flight of Joseph Smith’s fancy, but was interested in finding a reason for the divergent “he that” ~ “they which” usage. This syntactic pattern is not a calque of Hebrew usage, nor is the broader pattern, as classical/biblical Hebrew did not have three synonymous PRPs. What we encounter in the original Book of Mormon text is a less-common pattern of Early Modern English. Furthermore, it has been noted that positing a simple singular–plural that ~ which distinction fails to explain the data as well.

Obviously, this is a data-driven effort to catalog and accurately characterize the original English usage of the Book of Mormon text in this domain. The comparative project as a whole reveals the clear presence of many nonbiblical, early modern elements and patterns. I prefer to avoid speculation here and will simply note that one of the important side effects of the nonbiblical, archaic syntax and lexis is to rule out Joseph Smith as the author. While we may not know why the Book of Mormon is the way it is, we can assess what it is and what it is not, based on data. And the data consistently show unexpected archaic elements that undermine theories that Joseph Smith was the one who worded the translation.
Unless we accept that Joseph consciously and dramatically altered his native PRP pattern during the 1829 dictation in a sustained fashion, as no known pseudo-archaic author did, then we can conclude that he did not select these relative pronouns for the Book of Mormon in more than 1,600 instances. By extension, unless we want to assume that Joseph’s control of the text continually shifted during the dictation, we should conclude that he was not directly responsible for wording the text, in almost every instance. A considerable amount of additional syntactic and lexical evidence supports this view.

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Appendix:
The Pseudo-Archaic Corpus

A pseudo-archaic text is one in which an author attempted to emulate earlier English usage or King James style — including syntax and lexical usage — in writing a history or related work. Scriptural-style texts of widely varying lengths were popular from about the mid-1700s into the 1800s, in both the British Isles and America.

In order to make the corpus of 25 pseudo-archaic writings, I first consulted Eran Shalev’s article on pseudo-biblicism and the following website: https://github.com/wordtreefoundation/books (contributors: Duane Johnson, Matt White, and Chris Johnson). Then I communicated with Shalev and Duane Johnson by email, asking them whether they knew of other pseudo-archaic texts. In the process, I added a few other texts that I found on my own or that I saw mentioned online. My current corpus has longer texts up to 1863, 34 years after the Book of Mormon was set down in writing. It is more likely to be deficient in shorter pseudo-archaic texts, as there are probably many very short pseudo-archaic writings in early newspapers. Yet these are much less important for purposes of comparison with the Book of Mormon, since for the most part we are interested in sustained usage and patterns, which the shorter texts cannot provide.
Here is a list of the pseudo-archaic texts examined for purposes of comparing subordinate that usage; these 25 texts contain approximately 585,000 words total:

**Longer pseudo-archaic texts (12)**

A. Robert Dodsley, *Chronicle of the Kings of England* (1740) [London] [about 16,500 words]

B. Jacob Ilive, *The Book of Jasher* (1751) [London] [about 22,800 words]

C. John Leacock, *American Chronicles* (1775) [Philadelphia] [about 14,500 words]

D. Richard Snowden, *The American Revolution* (1793) [Philadelphia] [about 49,300 words]

E. Matthew Linning, *The First Book of Napoleon* (1809) [Edinburgh] [about 19,000 words]

F. Elias Smith, *History of Anti-Christ* (1811) [Portland ME] [about 15,000 words]

G. Gilbert Hunt, *The Late War* (1816) [New York] [about 42,500 words]

H. Roger O’Connor, *Chronicles of Eri* (1822) [London] [about 131,700 words]

I. W. K. Clementson, *The Epistles of Ignatius and Polycarp* (1827) [Brighton UK] [about 18,000 words]

J. Philemon Stewart, *Sacred Roll* (1843) [Canterbury NH] [about 62,000 words]

K. Charles Linton, *The Healing of the Nations* (1855) [New York] [about 111,000 words]

L. Richard Grant White, *The New Gospel of Peace* (1863) [New York] [about 59,000 words]

**Shorter pseudo-archaic texts (13)**

M. Horace Walpole, *Book of Preferment* (1742) [London] [about 2,700 words]

N. *The French Gasconade Defeated* (1743) [Boston] [about 900 words]

O. Benjamin Franklin, *Parable Against Persecution* (1755) [Philadelphia] [about 400 words]

P. *Chronicles of Nathan Ben Saddi* (1758) [Philadelphia] [about 3,000 words]
Methodology

Personal relative pronoun usage can be broken down in many different ways. For instance, it can be broken down according to the antecedent involved and whether the relative pronoun is restrictive or nonrestrictive and whether the relative functions as a subject pronoun or an object pronoun. I did not differentiate on the basis of subject/object function for this study, but I did focus on restrictive contexts.

For a number of the PRP comparisons, I targeted the following high-frequency antecedents: those, they, them, he, him, man, men, people, you, ye, many, some, one, brother, brethren, and prophet(s). Contexts were targeted where the PRPs were immediately adjacent to these antecedents, without intervening punctuation, as a way to screen out many false positives. Consequently, the vast majority of the PRPs ended up being restrictive. With these constraints on searches, occurrences of personal that, which, and who(m) were separately tallied.

In the case of the King James Bible, the 25 pseudo-archaic texts, and Joseph’s early writings, false positives were deleted by inspection. In the case of the Book of Mormon, no false positives had to be deleted by inspection, since a text tagged for part of speech was used, with all the PRPs specifically tagged. Thus, the only potential false positives were where a PRP tagging error might have affected a targeted context.

Two sets of PRP rates were calculated for the Book of Mormon and the early writings: the complete rates given first in this paper, and rates derived from a subset of their usage, as described immediately above. This was done for purposes of making the remaining comparisons align
with each other. The subset turned out to be a little more than half their total PRP usage.

Data

Table 4 shows the PRP profiles, rates, and chi-square tests for the King James Bible, the Book of Mormon, and 12 longer pseudo-archaic texts. In this case, contexts involving a limited number of high-frequency antecedents were counted. However, the two rows at the bottom marked “complete” include all known PRPs, except those that occur in longer biblical quotations. Those two data sets have only been compared against each other, showing the distinctness between Joseph Smith’s and the Book of Mormon’s usage distribution.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>that</th>
<th>which</th>
<th>who</th>
<th>TOTAL</th>
<th>KJB $\chi^2$</th>
<th>BoM $\chi^2$</th>
<th>JS-EW $\chi^2$</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>King James Bible (1611)</td>
<td>2750</td>
<td>325</td>
<td>119</td>
<td><strong>3194</strong></td>
<td>2E-232</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Book of Mormon (1829)</td>
<td>259</td>
<td>437</td>
<td>141</td>
<td><strong>837</strong></td>
<td>2E-101</td>
<td>1E-19</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Early Writings (1829–1833)</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>28</td>
<td><strong>35</strong></td>
<td>2E-08</td>
<td>0.0003</td>
<td>0.003</td>
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<tr>
<td>Chronicle of the Kings (1740)</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>5</td>
<td><strong>15</strong></td>
<td>3E-62</td>
<td>1E-12</td>
<td>0.14</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Book of Jasher (1751)</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>21</td>
<td><strong>33</strong></td>
<td>7E-76</td>
<td>6E-15</td>
<td>0.72</td>
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<tr>
<td>American Chronicles (1775)</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>4</td>
<td><strong>23</strong></td>
<td>5E-06</td>
<td>1E-07</td>
<td>5E-06</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>American Revolution (1793)</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>112</td>
<td><strong>128</strong></td>
<td>5E-64</td>
<td>1E-07</td>
<td>0.12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Napoleon the Tyrant (1809)</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>19</td>
<td><strong>23</strong></td>
<td>7E-16</td>
<td>6E-15</td>
<td>0.72</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>History of Anti-Christ (1811)</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>45</td>
<td><strong>50</strong></td>
<td>2E-166</td>
<td>5E-34</td>
<td>0.29</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Late War (1816)</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>34</td>
<td><strong>46</strong></td>
<td>2E-108</td>
<td>3E-21</td>
<td>0.75</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chronicles of Eri (1822)</td>
<td>44</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>77</td>
<td><strong>121</strong></td>
<td>2E-164</td>
<td>1E-36</td>
<td>0.02</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ignatius and Polycarp (1827)</td>
<td>29</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>22</td>
<td><strong>51</strong></td>
<td>7E-42</td>
<td>1E-12</td>
<td>0.0008</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sacred Roll (1843)</td>
<td>54</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>116</td>
<td><strong>170</strong></td>
<td>1E-225</td>
<td>9E-52</td>
<td>0.02</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Healing of the Nations (1855)</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>159</td>
<td><strong>177</strong></td>
<td>&lt;1E-290</td>
<td>6E-83</td>
<td>0.04</td>
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<tr>
<td>New Gospel of Peace (1863)</td>
<td>85</td>
<td>38</td>
<td>87</td>
<td><strong>210</strong></td>
<td>2E-114</td>
<td>3E-21</td>
<td>0.0001</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

<p>| | | | | | | | |</p>
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th></th>
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<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Book of Mormon, complete</td>
<td>370</td>
<td>939</td>
<td>300</td>
<td><strong>1609</strong></td>
<td>2E-29</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Early Writings, complete</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>49</td>
<td><strong>64</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 4. PRP usage compared — chi-square tests based on raw numbers.

According to chi-square tests, no pseudo-archaic text came close to either the King James Bible or the Book of Mormon. As shown in Table 5, the closest texts have p-values of 0.008 and 0.0009, respectively. In contrast, most pseudo-archaic texts, when compared to Joseph Smith’s earlier writings, have p-values greater than 0.05.
A reviewer asked for additional comparisons to be done between the PRP usage of the Book of Mormon and Joseph Smith’s early writings and early Doctrine and Covenants revelations. The assumption of most Latter-day Saint scholars is that Joseph Smith worded Doctrine and Covenants revelations. The way to determine whether this assumption is accurate is by thorough lexical and syntactic analysis, which to my knowledge has never been done, besides some initial work I began to do in this area a few years ago. Preliminary work suggests that it was unlikely that Joseph Smith worded many or most Doctrine and Covenants revelations. For example, section 9, which has no PRPs, has a few linguistic features that Joseph Smith was unlikely to produce in a pseudo-biblical effort. Because most Latter-day Saint scholars are convinced that Joseph Smith worded many or most Doctrine and Covenants revelations, they think that the English usage of these revelations reflects his pseudo-archaic style. However, because that view has not been established and could very well be wrong, it is certainly wrong to proceed on that basis.

Doctrine and Covenants revelations present the analyst with various difficulties. I will mention two here. First, in many instances we do not have the original manuscripts, and so we cannot be sure of the original readings, especially when all we have in some cases are copies of copies. Some of what is extant shows that editing for style and grammar occurred in the copying process. Second, the individual revelations are short and
their textual histories are unique and their PRP profiles are very limited and often dissimilar. All this makes statistical comparisons less reliable and less consequential.

In any event, I compared the complete PRP profiles of the Book of Mormon and Joseph Smith’s early writings with the complete PRP profile of the earliest full versions of early Doctrine and Covenants revelations, from section 3 to section 19 ($n = 50$). I also compared these profiles with the complete PRP profile of the King James version of Genesis. The p-values of chi-square tests show that the pattern found in the earliest full versions of early Doctrine and Covenants revelations is statistically indistinguishable from that of the Book of Genesis ($n = 148; \chi^2 \approx 0.88, p \approx 0.64$). In contrast, the early D&C PRP pattern is not statistically similar to that of the Book of Mormon ($n = 1,609; \chi^2 \approx 22.9, p \approx 1 \times 10^{-5}$) and even more different from the PRP pattern of Joseph Smith’s early writings ($n = 64; \chi^2 \approx 35.7, p \approx 2 \times 10^{-6}$). These results, though their reliability is low, tend to reinforce the views expressed in this paper. In addition, Joseph Smith’s PRP pattern compared to that of the Book of Genesis is $\chi^2 \approx 66.5, p \approx 4 \times 10^{-15}$, and the comparison of the Book of Mormon to the Book of Genesis is $\chi^2 \approx 41.6, p \approx 9 \times 10^{-10}$.

“Those <PRP>”

It is possible, of course, to focus on various subsets of the Book of Mormon’s PRP usage; one of these involves the antecedent those. The Book of Mormon has more than 200 instances of “those <PRP>,” as does the King James Bible, but their PRP profiles are clearly quite different, as shown in Figure 8.

In the case of the Book of Mormon, personal which is still dominant after those, but those who(m) exceeds those that, usage that is unlike its overall PRP profile.

A search was made among EEBO Phase 1 texts to see if there were any that closely matched the Book of Mormon in this regard. It was found that most texts did not. Among the few potential candidates that did come up, George Downham wrote a book in 1611 (EEBO A20733) whose usage profile of “those <PRP>” turned out, after individual inspection, to closely match the profile of the Book of Mormon, a text produced 218 years later. The “those <PRP>” profile of Downham’s work is $\{that = 26, which = 62, who(m) = 49; n = 137\}$; the Book of Mormon’s profile is $\{that = 37, which = 100, who(m) = 79; n = 213\}$. These PRP profiles are quite similar, as shown in Figure 9.
Here is an excerpt of Downham’s early 17th-century language, where we can read two instances of “those which,” usage that occurred in the dictation language of the Book of Mormon 100 times:
to prescribe orders for amendment of life, to excommunicate **those which** willfully and obstinately resist, to receive into grace **those which** be penitent,

George Downham (sometimes spelled Downname) was originally from Chester and became bishop of Derry in 1616.

**Comparing biblical and nonbiblical PRP rates in the Book of Mormon**

Examining the Book of Mormon’s biblical quotations, we find that the King James text clearly influenced PRP selection in those sections. This is the case even though a few instances of biblical personal *that* occurred as personal *which* in the dictation. As shown in Table 6, the influence is unmistakable because of the large difference in PRP distribution. This comparison supports the strong view that what we have in the Book of Mormon is biblical quoting, not biblical paraphrasing. In addition, because there is no support from the manuscripts or from dictation eyewitnesses that Joseph Smith used a King James Bible during the dictation, this is further indication that biblical material was transmitted to him in a pre-edited state.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>that</th>
<th>which</th>
<th>who(m)</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Biblical</td>
<td>70.9%</td>
<td>23.6%</td>
<td>5.5%</td>
<td>199</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nonbiblical</td>
<td>23.0%</td>
<td>58.4%</td>
<td>18.6%</td>
<td>1,609</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

$X^2 = 200, p = 3\times10^{-44}; p = 0.0003 (n = 50)$.

**Table 6.** Comparison of biblical and nonbiblical PRP rates in the Book of Mormon.

Note: Most instances of personal *which* in the biblical quotations were edited for the 1837 edition to read *who(m)*, even when personal *which* was the King James reading. See Royal Skousen, *Grammatical Variation* 1189ff for a complete listing of the edits.

**Endnotes**

1 Excerpt taken from the Book of Mormon with a personal relative pronoun shown in bold. This is the reading of the original text; see Royal Skousen, ed., *The Book of Mormon: The Earliest Text* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2009), 71; https://bookofmormoncentral.org/content/book-mormon-earliest-text; see also Joseph Smith, *The Book of Mormon* (Palmyra, NY:


When a verb is complemented by a clause in finite form, that object clause has a finite main verb or auxiliary verb. An example of finite verbal complementation in the Book of Mormon is “he can cause the earth that it shall pass away” (1 Nephi 17:46). In this excerpt, the verb cause takes an object, “the earth,” and an object clause, “that it shall pass away.” This is a complex finite construction since there is an extra constituent before the that-clause. This structure is quite different from how we normally express this concept, which is with infinitival complementation: “he can cause the earth to pass away.”


3 There are examples with shall functioning as a subjunctive marker in a discussion of verbs of influence in Carmack, “Is the Book of Mormon a Pseudo-Archaic Text?” 208–24; there are additional examples in a discussion of lest at pages 189–93.


7 WordCruncher is a software product for searching texts developed at Brigham Young University and currently supported by Digital Humanities at that university. It is freely available for download at https://wordcruncher.com/.


10 The term translator is used in the abstract and in the body of the paper with a default sense. The findings do not exclude Joseph Smith being a translator in another primary sense of the word. And in neither case — whether we take the revelation to be one of words or ideas — was he a translator in the usual sense of the word, since he did not know any of the source languages in 1829. This point has been misunderstood through the years, with some still assuming that Joseph was a translator in the default sense under a revelation of ideas but not under a revelation of words.


12 In “many of which,” etc., which is an object of a preposition rather than a relative pronoun.


14 “Google Books Ngram Viewer,” https://books.google.com/ngrams/graph?content=anyone+who%2Bsomeone+who%2Can yone+that%2Bsomeone+that%2Can yone+which%2Bsomeone+which&year_start=1701&year_end=1840&corpus=15&smoothing=10#. The actual personal that and which values are even lower.
than the curves shown in the chart, since these words do not function as PRPs after anyone and someone to as great a degree as they do after the relative pronoun who. Also, the who curve would be slightly higher if whom were included.


To repeat, with a little more detail, I compared all PRP instances in the Book of Mormon with all PRP instances in Joseph Smith’s early writings, and I also compared samples of PRP usage, selected semantically and syntactically (by antecedent and by
focusing on restrictive relatives, not nonrestrictive relatives), so that the comparisons were between very similar usage, not dissimilar usage. In this way, I sampled the usage occurring in the Book of Mormon, the King James Bible, pseudo-archaic texts, and Joseph Smith’s early writings; and then I compared their individual sampled usage with that of all these texts or corpora. And I also compared restrictive relative pronoun usage after he and they between texts or corpora that had material amounts of these.

17 Statistical analysis is actually not needed to illustrate the significance of the dramatic differences in usage, since a simple examination of the data or the charts in Figures 2 and 3 is sufficient, but chi-square results are provided for those interested. A chi-square test is a statistical hypothesis test used to determine whether there is a statistically significant difference between observed and expected frequencies in a contingency table, such as the above. Low p-values lead one to reject the null hypothesis. In this case, the null hypothesis might be that there is no statistically meaningful difference between the observed and the expected PRP patterns of the Book of Mormon and Joseph Smith’s early writings.

18 See the appendix for details.

19 Restrictive relative pronouns restrict or clarify the meaning of the nouns they refer to. For example, in the expression “he loves those that are truly good,” the scope of those is restricted by the relative clause to mean only those who are truly good.

20 This can be shown to be a more accurate sampling technique than mere random sampling, since the latter will inevitably include more false positives with nonpersonal antecedents. Some methodological details are found in the appendix.

21 Out of the 12 longer pseudo-archaic texts tested, Gilbert Hunt’s pseudo-archaic text has the highest p-value (p ≈ 0.70), indicating that his profile was the most like Joseph Smith’s profile.


23 A detailed view of the patterns within the longer pseudo-archaic texts is given in Table 5 in the appendix.
24 The EEBO Phase 1 database (EEBO\textsubscript{1}) has been examined systematically for PRP usage trends. It shows that personal \textit{that} was dominant in Early Modern English until the 1690s, when majority usage switched to \textit{who(m)}. The late 1500s was a time of peak personal \textit{which} usage, with a small percentage of writers preferring \textit{which} over \textit{that}, as in the Book of Mormon. EEBO\textsubscript{1} has 3,801 texts with at least 20 instances of “he/they <rel.pron.>” (no intervening punctuation). In most of these, “he/they that” is more frequent than “he/they which” or “he/they who(m).” Only 149 texts (3.92\%) employ \textit{which} more than \textit{that} or \textit{who(m)}. In addition, 17 texts (0.45\%) split primary usage between \textit{that} and \textit{which}, and one text (0.03\%) splits primary usage between \textit{which} and \textit{who(m)}: EEBO A01095 (1612). Breaking down year ranges into decades that align with centuries (beginning with year one), we find in EEBO\textsubscript{1} that the high point of personal \textit{which} usage after \textit{he} and \textit{they} occurred during six decades, between 1551 and 1610. In the 1550s, 11.8\% of texts (with at least 20 instances of “he/they <rel.pron.>”) show a preference for \textit{which} over the other two alternatives. In the 1560s, the percentage is 8.1\%; in the 1570s, 13.2\%; in the 1580s, 9.5\%; in the 1590s, 14.6\%; and in the first decade of the 1600s, 12.9\%. Therefore, even during the high point of personal \textit{which}, heavy usage never occurred in more than 15 percent of the texts in any given decade.

25 The EEBO corpus has a small amount of text duplication; the ECCO corpus has a large amount of text duplication.

26 See Randolph Quirk et al., \textit{A Comprehensive Grammar of the English Language} (London: Longman, 1985), 352, §6.20: “He or she followed by arelative clause belongs to a literary and somewhat archaic style. Present-day English prefers the use of the plural demonstrative in such contexts (cf 12.19). They cannot be used.”

27 As a convenient measure of fit, the standard Pearson’s correlation was used, and 0.9 was used as a cut-off. For continuous variables (not this case), a correlation would be a useful statistical measurement. (The p-value of a 0.9 correlation, n=6, two-tailed, is approximately 0.015.)

Here are the 82 texts that resulted from searching the EEBO corpus (r ≥ 0.9), listed in order of descending correlation (four are from the same author, Andrew Willet [1562–1621]): A18079 (1572), A19422 (1583), A15434 (1604), A19076 (1561), A15525 (1614), A37290 (1654), A21293 (1539), A33309 (1640), A21308 (1595),
A08964 (1570), A93680 (1646), A43676 (1652), A92321 (1661),
A06346 (1581), A06347 (1582), A01615 (1602), B23327 (1671),
A69278 (1539), A03792 (1546), A15396 (1602), A17696 (1592),
A10649 (1571), A14460 (1584), A00440 (1577), A19309 (1580),
A14468 (1548), A12099 (1635), A07407 (1548), A15418 (1604),
A10958 (1607), A17654 (1581), A20031 (1618), A05583 (1594),
A61107 (1663), A12592 (1588), A19723 (1553), B00941 (1550),
A19026 (1588), A18017 (1606), A05186 (1572), A05331 (1600),
A15082 (1624), A10966 (1639), A06112 (1548), A13966 (1589),
A37291 (1666), A15395 (1603), A16838 (1565), A09175 (1629),
A04215 (1599), A17018 (1632), A15385 (1614), A19306 (1581),
A03769 (1567), A14350 (1583), A67908 (1695), A47555 (1687),
A13065 (1591), A14408 (1602), A00294 (1617), A89219 (1655),
B12431 (1609), A08201 (1602), A15398 (1603), A19798 (1575),
A18601 (1624), A10976 (1624), A06492 (1575), A17590 (1577),
A17140 (1636), A58343 (1661), A07612 (1580), A14114 (1605),
A57460 (1641), A43131 (1675), B09229 (1676), A17014 (1625),
A67835 (1674), A14354 (1555), A13877 (1583), A09824 (1578),
A04911 (1603). The earliest composition date is 1536 and the latest
composition date is 1676 (publication dates range between 1539
and 1695).

28 There are three EEBO versions of this Thomas Elyot text, and the
“he/they <rel.pron.>” correlations — both unadjusted and adjusted
— vary slightly among the EEBO texts. The adjusted correlations
with the Book of Mormon in this subset of PRP usage are close
to 0.85. If this were a valid statistical test for this dataset, then \( p \)
would still be less than 0.05 (for \( df = 4 \) \([n = 6]\), \( p \approx 0.05 \) when \( r \approx
0.81\)).

29 This text is also in the EEBO Phase 2 database.

30 There is little point in averaging the publication dates of strongly
correlating ECCO texts without individual inspection, since so
many of the dates do not accurately reflect the time when the
excerpted language was composed.

31 The weighted average years are approximate.

32 Eran Shalev, ““Written in the Style of Antiquity’: Pseudo-Biblicism
and the Early American Republic, 1770–1830,” *Church History: Studies in

33 See note 16.
In the case of the King James Bible, false positives were deleted in randomly sampled sets, and the numbers of deleted false positives were multiplied and subtracted from the raw tallies.


Sections 9, 13, 15, 16, 17 did not have any PRP instances; section 13 would have been excluded anyway, since it is an extract from Joseph Smith’s personal history. Thus the PRP usage of 12 sections was noted.
Abraham’s Amen and Believing in Christ: Possible Applications in the Book of Mormon Text

Loren Spendlove

Abstract: Following the discovery of delocutive verbs and their likely usage in the Hebrew Bible, Meredith Kline proposed that the verb הָאָמַן (he’emin) in Genesis 15:6 — traditionally interpreted as a denominative verb meaning “he believed” — should be understood as a delocutive verb meaning “he declared ’amen.’” Rather than reading Genesis 15:6 as a passive statement — Abraham believed in Yahweh — Kline argued that we should interpret this verse in the active sense, that Abraham vocally declared his amen in Yahweh’s covenantal promise. In this light, I have analyzed various passages in the Book of Mormon that utilize similar verbiage — “believe in Christ,” for example — to examine how their meanings might be enhanced by interpreting the verbs as delocutives rather than denominatives.

In Genesis 15 we are told of a covenantal dialogue that took place between Jehovah and Abraham. A key verse in this chapter, Genesis 15:6, is foundational for Jews¹ and Christians alike: “And [Abraham] believed in the LORD; and he counted it to him for righteousness” (KJV).² The apostle Paul viewed this verse as doctrinally significant and employed its


2. Even though his name has not yet been changed from Abram (אביב) to Abraham ( אברהם) in Genesis 15, unless I am citing another author’s work, I consistently refer to the patriarch as Abraham in this paper.
use in his epistles to both the Romans (Romans 4:1–5) and the Galatians (Galatians 3:6–9). The passage in Romans reads:

What shall we say then that Abraham our father, as pertaining to the flesh, hath found? For if Abraham were justified by works, he hath whereof to glory; but not before God. For what saith the scripture? Abraham believed God, and it was counted unto him for righteousness. Now to him that worketh is the reward not reckoned of grace, but of debt. But to him that worketh not, but believeth on him that justifieth the ungodly, his faith is counted for righteousness. (Romans 4:1–5 KJV)

Martin Luther, the great Protestant reformer, based his doctrine of justification by faith alone (sola fide) on these teachings of Paul whose teachings were derived from Genesis 15:6:

Also [our churches] teach that men cannot be justified before God by their own strength, merits, or works, but are freely justified for Christ’s sake, through faith, when they believe that they are received into favor, and that their sins are forgiven for Christ’s sake, who, by His death, has made satisfaction for our sins. This faith God imputes for righteousness in His sight. Romans 3 and 4.

The apostle James, in what many believe to be in opposition to Paul’s approach, incorporated Genesis 15:6 into his treatment of justification through both faith and works:

But wilt thou know, O vain man, that faith without works is dead? Was not Abraham our father justified by works, when he had offered Isaac his son upon the altar? Seest thou how faith wrought with his works, and by works was faith made perfect? And the scripture was fulfilled which saith, Abraham believed God, and it was imputed unto him for righteousness: and he was called the Friend of God. Ye see then how that by

3. From the Greek πιστεύω (pisteuō) meaning “to trust.” The same Greek verb is used in the Septuagint translation of Genesis 15:6 for the Hebrew verb האמין (he’emin). Rather than conveying a delocutive meaning, pisteuō is more aligned with the denominative “believed” as האמין (he’emin) is rendered in the KJV translation of Genesis 15:6.

4. Throughout this paper, emphasis is mine unless otherwise indicated.

works a man is justified, and not by faith only. (James 2:21–24 KJV)

In these verses, James explained that Abraham’s initial expression of belief in Genesis 15:6 was perfected by his offering of Isaac upon the altar. In other words, according to one interpretation of James’ teaching, Abraham’s initial expression of belief was a righteous act but insufficient for justification; Abraham’s belief, unaccompanied by works, was alone and without redemptive power. That is to say, his belief would have been “dead” without his works. Although Martin Luther took issue with the book of James, I believe that Luther would have agreed, at least in principle, that works are locked in a close orbit around faith. Luther wrote:

Faith is God’s work in us, that changes us and gives new birth from God. (John 1:13). It kills the Old Adam and makes us completely different people. It changes our hearts, our spirits, our thoughts and all our powers. It brings the Holy Spirit with it. Yes, it is a living, creative, active and powerful thing, this faith. Faith cannot help doing good works constantly. It doesn’t stop to ask if good works ought to be done, but before anyone asks, it already has done them and continues to do them without ceasing. Anyone who does not do good works in this manner is an unbeliever.

In other words, Luther taught that good works naturally follow those who possess faith — good works are the evidence of real faith. In the sense that works always accompany true faith, by works is our faith made perfect also. In an effort to explain the apparent contradiction between Paul’s and James’ interpretations of Genesis 15:6, Larry Tyler wrote:

6. “In a word, St. John’s Gospel and his first Epistle, St. Paul’s Epistles, especially Romans, Galatians and Ephesians, and St. Peter’s first Epistle are the books that show you Christ and teach you all that it is necessary and good for you to know, even though you were never to see or hear any other book or doctrine. Therefore St. James’ Epistle is really an epistle of straw, compared to them; for it has nothing of the nature of the Gospel about it.” Martin Luther, Preface to the New Testament (1522), http://www.godrules.net/library/luther/NEW1luther_f8.htm.

The New Testament’s treatment of Old Testament passages do not settle questions of text-critical nature. When a New Testament writer quotes from the Old Testament, his primary concern is its application to a particular circumstance. Therefore, a certain liberty is exercised so that the passage cited accomplishes the purpose of the New Testament writer. It is not unusual then to see the New Testament writer focus on a particular aspect of the meaning of an Old Testament text. In light of this a quotation of an Old Testament text does not necessarily resolve all questions related to the exegesis of that text. Moreover, the usage of the Old Testament text by one writer of the New Testament does not absolutely control the manner in which another New Testament writer uses the same text. The significance of any Old Testament text may have various applications all of which may be valid in the framework of the Old Testament text.\(^8\)

**Delocutive Verbs**

The KJV’s translation of Genesis 15:6 has long been accepted as lexically correct and doctrinally sound: Abraham *believed* God, and God counted his belief as righteousness. However, in the mid to late 1950s, two linguistic scholars independently identified a new verb form that came to be called *delocutive* (meaning, *from locution* or *from speaking*).\(^9\) Although the following discussion of delocutives may appear to the reader to be disconnected from Genesis 15:6, its relevance will soon become apparent.

Delocutives can be described as verbs that represent vocal exclamations common to one’s culture. For example, in English it is very common to say *amen* at the end of a prayer, and for many Christians, even during the course of a prayer or sermon. While *amen* can be considered an exclamation in itself, it can also be expressed as a delocutive verb with the meaning of *to say amen*. Cecil Robeck provided a helpful example of this usage as he described a Christian revival in which a woman in the congregation seemed overcome by the Spirit:

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She jumped to her feet and some of the unregenerate who had looked on with open-mouthed wonder fled from the building in terror. But she didn’t intend to do any one any damage. She had received sanctification, and was simply expressing her joy in her own peculiar way. All the brethren and the sistern gathered around her and Amened and Hallelujahed until they were hoarse, evidently as happy as she was.\(^\text{10}\)

In this passage, the author used amened and hallelujahed as delocutive verbs (meaning, to say amen and to say hallelujah), each representing their respective exclamations. To be clear, in this sentence, amen and hallelujah function as delocutive verbs rather than the simple exclamations amen and hallelujah. The author could have rephrased the final passage like this: “All the brethren and the sistern gathered around her and shouted amen and hallelujah … ” In this reworked sentence amen and hallelujah are not verbs, but exclamations.

In a second example, Scott Cherney recounted a humorous story about an experience that he had in a movie theater. In this retelling Cherney wrote of an unruly and boisterous group in the theater audience:

I then proceeded to shush them. Yes, I said I shushed them …. I shushed them once. I shushed them twice. I shushed them three times, drawing it out a little bit more and even adding a “please.”\(^\text{11}\)

In this passage Cherney used the delocutive verb shush (meaning to say shush, or shh) five times, most likely without knowing that he was using a delocutive.

Although the identification of delocutives is quite recent, their usage is not. In the following passage from 1866, we are told of a boy named Gregory who was patted on the head repeatedly by guests at his family’s home:

Mrs. Granton comes in for her share of the male and female Boxedge attention, and little Gregory is patted on the head and “good boyed,” “fine boyed,” and “dear little fellowed” all over.\(^\text{12}\)


\(^{11}\) Scott Cherney, *In the Dark: A Life and Times in a Movie Theater* (n.p.: Scott Cherney, 2011), 121.

The three delocutive verbs in this passage — *good boyed*, *fine boyed*, and *dear little fellowed* — stand for the exclamations *good boy*, *fine boy*, and *dear little fellow*, respectively.

As can be seen from these examples, delocutive verbs represent common exclamations in a given culture and language. Jewish scholar José Faur helped explain the difference between delocutive verbs and denominative verbs\(^\text{13}\) (meaning *from a noun*):

> The delocutive verb is different from a denominative. The base term of a denominative is a noun or designation and stands in relation with “to do … ” denoting, therefore, action. The base of a delocutive is a call or formulaic expression and has the particular connotation of “to say … ” denoting, therefore, activities of discourse.\(^\text{14}\)

The denominative verb *to hammer* could be understood as being derived from the noun *hammer* and represents the action of beating on something with another object. Likewise, the delocutive verb *to yes sir* is derived from the expression “*yes sir*.”\(^\text{15}\) Regarding the scope and expanse of delocutive verbs, Frans Plank added that this verb form is widespread among multiple language groups and cultures:

> Although originally identified as such in, and illustrated exclusively from, Indo-European languages by Debrunner

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\(^{15}\) “‘I don’t know if I *yes-sired* and *no-sired* them, but that was definitely in the back of my mind,’ Matthews said.” Melanie Hauser, “Robert Brazile ‘last piece of puzzle’ for Houston Oilers in Hall of Fame,” Houston Chronicle, July 26, 2018, https://www.houstonchronicle.com/texas-sports-nation/texans/article/Robert-Brazile-last-piece-of-puzzle-for-Houston-13109033.php
(1956) and Benveniste (1958), delocutives are not confined to this family, but show a wide genetic and areal spread.

Finally, with respect to the legitimacy of delocutive verbs, Laurel Brinton summarized Frans Plank’s observations:

Delocutives are not marginal or even extragrammatical; in fact, they should be treated no differently than any other kind of denominative verb formation. They obey regular rules of syntax and do not show variation from speaker to speaker.

**Delocutive Verbs in Hebrew**

With Debrunner’s and Benveniste’s novel identification of delocutive verbs, scholars began the process of searching for their presence in non-Indo-European languages as well. Delbert Hillers was a pioneer in the identification of delocutives in biblical Hebrew:

A pair of especially clear examples of delocutive verbs in Hebrew is תsideq/hitsdiq (צדק/הצדק), “to say someone is in the right,” and תsideq/hitsdiq (המשפט “to say someone is in the wrong,” respectively. These have, of course, ordinarily been explained as cases of the “declarative” or “estimative” piel or hiphil, and later it will be necessary to set forth objections to this traditional classification. It seems best first to present the positive reasons for calling these verbs delocutives. … תsideq/hitsdiq do not mean “to make someone just” or “to behave justly” as one might expect from the analogy of such words as gadal (vb., qal), gadal (adj.) with related piel gadal (gidel) and hiphil gadil (higdil). As

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all agree, צדק [tsideq] and צדיק [hitsdiq] mean “to say that a person is in the right.”

The verb צדיק (hitsdiq) has been interpreted traditionally as meaning “to justify someone who is in the right” and הרשיע (hirshia) as meaning “to condemn someone who is in the wrong.” However, Hillers categorized these verbs as delocutives with the meaning of “to say/declare that someone is in the right” and “to say/declare that someone is in the wrong,” respectively. A good example of this usage can be found in Deuteronomy 25:1. The KJV renders this verse:

If there be a controversy between men, and they come unto judgment, that the judges may judge them; then they shall justify the righteous [והצדיקו את־הצדיק], and condemn the wicked [והרשיעו את־הרשע].

Young’s Literal Translation (YLT), published nearly 100 years before the discovery of delocutive verbs, more clearly rendered this verse:

When there is a strife between men, and they have come nigh unto the judgment, and they have judged, and declared righteous the righteous [והצדיקו את־הצדיק], and declared wrong the wrong-doer [והרשיעו את־הרשע].

With the benefit of this new understanding of delocutive verbs, a revised translation of this verse could be:

When there is strife between people and they come to the judgment, and they have judged, and declared the one in the right to be right [והצדיקו את־הצדיק], and declared the one in the wrong to be wrong [והרשיעו את־הרשע]. [author’s translation]

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21. In addition to using a phonetic transliteration style of Hebrew words into roman script, I also provide the Hebrew spelling for those who are able to read it. In my opinion, this two-fold method of presentation meets the needs of both common readers and Hebrew scholars better than the use of an academic transliteration style alone.

22. In agreement with Hillers, Williams' Hebrew Syntax recognizes a delocutive Hiphil verb form: “A Hiphil verb can be delocutive. For example, if it is delocutive, the Hiphil verb הצידיק [hitsdiq] ‘he justified’ means ‘he caused someone to say to someone, “you are צדיק [tsadiq] (in the right).’’ Similarly, if it is a delocutive, the Hiphil verb הרשיע [hirshia] ‘he condemned’ means ‘he caused someone to say to someone, “you are רשע [rasha] (guilty).’’” Ronald J. Williams, Williams' Hebrew Syntax (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2007), 62.
Whereas the KJV translation understood these verbs (הצדיק *hitsdiq* and הרשיע *hirshia*) as in the hiphil form, Hillers instead identified them as delocutives. So, rather than the judges “justifying” or “condemning” individuals, their job was actually *to declare* who was “in the right” and who was “in the wrong.” Faur helped explain the significance of properly identifying delocutive verbs in biblical Hebrew:

As a denominative, *lĕhaqdis*[*לֶחָקֵדִיש*] means “to sanctify” and refers to the performance of a ritual whereby something is “sanctified” (cf. the piʿel usage in Exodus 40:10; I Kings 8:64; Job 1:5; etc.), becoming, thereby, “holy.” As a denominative, it would be insulting to apply such a verb to God (e.g., Isaiah 8:13; 29:23; etc.) since it implies that God’s holiness is the effect of a ritual performed on Him by the worshiper. As a delocutive, it simply means the utterance of a formula declaring that something is *qâdôš* [*קדוש*] (“holy”). … These verbs do not derive from the adjective *qâdôš* [*קדוש*] “holy,” but from the formula *qâdôš* [*קדוש*]. They mean “to proclaim: [God is] Holy!” — not “to sanctify [God].” The same applies to other passages usually taken to mean the “sanctification of God,” as when God says: “*wĕniqdaštî* [*وحدאשתי*] among the children of Israel” (Leviticus 22:32). It means that He “will be declared Holy!” — rather than to be “sanctified.”

The KJV translation of Leviticus 22:32 interprets the verb *wĕniqdaštî* [*وحدאשתי*] as a denominative: “I will be hallowed [i.e., sanctified] among the children of Israel.” However, according to Faur, it would be more appropriate to understand the verb as a delocutive: “I will be declared holy among the children of Israel.” Faur added that another example of the delocutive usage of *qadosh* [*קדוש*] can be found in Isaiah 6:3. The KJV text for this verse reads:

> And one cried unto another, and said, Holy, holy, holy [*קדש קדוש קדוש*], is the LORD of hosts: the whole earth is full of his glory.

According to Faur, the employment of *qadosh* [*קדש*] in this verse aligns with the delocutive (*to declare holy*) rather than the denominative (*to be holy*, or *to sanctify*) verb structure. In the verse from Isaiah the seraphim cried out to each other and *proclaimed* three times that the Lord of hosts was *holy*. Another Jewish scholar, Jeffery Tigay, following

in Hillers’ footsteps, added to our understanding of delocutives in the Hebrew Bible:

Some verbs that are not derived in the first place from locutions have specific nuances that are. For example, the Piels of חזק [chazaq] and אמרות [emats], which both normally mean ‘strengthen’ (Isaiah 35:3, Job 4:4), also have a delocutive sense, ‘say the formula חזק [chazaq] or אמרות [chazeq veemats] “be strong” or “be strong and resolute” to someone’. In English, we could translate the idiom as ‘to haq (or haq ve’emats) someone’. This sense is found in such passages as Deuteronomy 1:38 and 3:28, where God commands Moses, with reference to Joshua,蔓 זך [oto chazaq], and胺צתוה חזקה [chazqehu veamtsnehu]. That these commands mean ‘say חזק (ומתר) [chazaq veemats] (“be strong [and resolute]!”) to him’, not ‘imbue him with strength (and courage)’ (NJPSV), is clear from Deuteronomy 31:7, where Moses carries out this instruction by saying to Joshua, חזק ואמרת [chazaq veemats] (cf. 31:23 and Joshua 1:6–9, 18).

So, while in the KJV translation of Deuteronomy 1:38 the Lord tells Moses to “encourage him” (meaning Joshua), following Tigay’s suggestion, the passage should read “say ‘be strong.’” This shift in interpretation introduced by delocutives may seem subtle, and even of little practical importance, but it is actually very meaningful and can dramatically impact our understanding of scripture, as will be demonstrated in the following section.

**Did Abraham Believe or Say Amen?**

In the opening verse of Genesis 15 we are told that “the word of the LORD ( דבר יהוה) came unto Abram in a vision” (KJV). In this vision, the Lord instructed Abraham to “look now toward heaven, and tell the stars, if thou be able to number them: and he said unto him, So shall thy seed be” (Genesis 15:5 KJV). In the KJV, we are told that Abraham’s reaction to the Lord’s covenantal promise was that he believed [האמין]

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he’emin] in the Lord (Genesis 15:6 KJV). However, Following Hillers’ discovery of delocutives in biblical Hebrew, Meredith Kline, a scholar in the fields of covenant theology and the Hebrew Bible, identified several more occurrences of delocutive verbs in the Bible. Among these is our passage under study in this paper, Genesis 15:6. Kline wrote:

Our suggestion is that האמין [he’emin] is another of these delocutive verbs and that its delocutive origin is discernible in Genesis 15:6 (and elsewhere). This verse will then state not (explicitly) that Abram’s inner attitude was one of faith but that Abram voiced his “Amen” (אמן) in audible response to the word of God.

According to Kline, the verb האמן (he’emin) in Genesis 15:6 did not mean that Abraham merely “believed” God. Rather, as a delocutive, it meant that Abraham audibly “declared amen.” Since the context of Genesis 15 is covenantal in nature, saying amen would have been an appropriate way for Abraham to respond:

The fact that that statement appears in the context of a formal procedure in which such an “Amen” was a customary form of response adds plausibility to the interpretation presented here. Genesis 15 is the account of a solemn covenant ritual and an

25. האמן (he’emin) in Genesis 15:6 is a defective spelling of האמן (he’emin). Unless I am citing another author’s work or quoting directly from the Masoretic text of Genesis 15:6, I use the plene, or full spelling of האמן (he’emin) in this paper.


27. In Hebrew, amen and believe are derived from the Hebrew root נ-מ-א, implying firmness or support. Koehler and Baumgartner explain that when האמן (he’emin) is followed by ב, as in Genesis 15:6, the hiphil verb form means “to have trust in, to believe in, God” [emphasis original]. Ludwig Koehler and Walter Baumgartner, The Hebrew and Aramaic Lexicon of the Old Testament, s.v. “אמנ.” (Hereafter HALOT.) However, HALOT does not include any discussion of the delocutive verb form, perhaps because it was originally published prior to the discovery of delocutive verbs.

28. “A survey of the biblical usages of האמן [he’emin] indicates that a delocutive meaning is in fact present in many (though not all) instances. Gen 15:6 most likely contains such an instance, and this fact is apparent both from the verse’s context and from the similarity of its use of האמן [he’emin] to delocutive uses of האמן [he’emin] elsewhere. The covenantal setting of Gen 15:6 commends a delocutive understanding of האמן [he’emin].” J. Bergman Kline, “The Hiphil Stem — Weak Verbs,” in Gary D. Pratico and Miles Van Pelt, Basics of Biblical Hebrew Grammar, 2nd ed. (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2007), 365.
“Amen” response by the covenant vassal in such ceremonies is attested in the records of both biblical and extra-biblical covenants.30

Kline reasoned that the verb הָאָמַן (he’emin) did not simply project Abraham’s passive “inner attitude.”31 Rather, it represented an active vocal response to God’s covenantal promise.32 Kline referred to the use of הָאָמַן (he’emin) in this verse as a confessional act by Abraham.33 Kline was also aware that while not every occurrence of הָאָמַן (he’emin) in the Bible can or should be translated as “to say amen,” many can and should

29. For example, see Deuteronomy 27:15-26.
31. Contrary to the traditional interpretation of Gen 15:6 — that Abraham “believed” God — and to Kline’s reading — that Abraham expressed an audible “amen” in Yahweh — Max Rogland argued that Abraham “kept believing Yahweh”.
32. This theophanic experience in which Yahweh promised Abraham countless seed and Abraham possibly responded with an audible “amen” can be profitably compared to the account of king David’s selection of Solomon as his successor: “And the king swareth and saith, Jehovah liveth, who hath redeemed my soul out of all adversity; surely as I sware to thee by Jehovah, God of Israel, saying, Surely Solomon thy son doth reign after me, and he doth sit on my throne in my stead; surely so I do this day” (1 Kings 1:29-30 YLT). Following this oath, king David relayed instructions to Zadok the priest, Nathan the prophet, and Benaiah son of Jehoiada to carry through on his oath. Benaiah responded: “Amen! so doth Jehovah, God of my lord the king, say” (1 Kings 1:36 YLT).
33. “Abram’s response to the word of God was faith. ‘And he believed in the Lord’ (v. 6). The Hebrew word translated ‘believed’ is ‘aman. In a typical covenant ceremony this was the actual response of one party to another in expressing agreement. It may have been that Abram expressed his faith by saying ‘aman at the appropriate place in a covenant ceremony. In Scripture the word ‘amen’ is always a strong affirmation of faith. Some writers have translated this phrase, ‘Abram said, “Amen” to the Lord.” Elmer L. Towns, A Journey through the Old Testament: The Story of how God Developed His People in the Old Testament (San Diego: Harcourt Brace, 1989), https://digitalcommons.liberty.edu/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=1007&context=towns_books.
be. Both “to believe” or “to say amen” can be appropriate translations of האמין (he’emin), depending on usage and context.\textsuperscript{34} Kline clarified:

The delocutive meaning coexists with other meanings of these verbs in the same conjugations. Thus, just as נזר [taher] means both “purify” and “pronounce, ‘It is pure,’” so [he’emin] means both “believe (in)” and “declare, ‘Amen’.”\textsuperscript{35}

Many biblical scholars have argued that Genesis 15 should be divided into two separate narratives: verses 1–6 comprising the first narrative, and verses 7–21 the second.\textsuperscript{36} Several arguments for this

\textsuperscript{34} While Hillers, Kline, Faur and other biblical scholars recognize the presence of the delocutive verb form in the Hebrew Bible, knowing how and when to identify a verb as delocutive is not always clear. For example, many explanations have been proffered for the use of האמין [he’emin] in Genesis 15:6, Victor Hamilton explains: “Hebraists wonder why the verb for put faith or ‘believe’ is in the Hiphil stem (which generally has a causative force), and why the verb is sometimes followed by the preposition be (23 times) and other times by the preposition le (14 times). … The first issue, the use of the Hiphil stem for ‘believe, have faith,’ has been explained in various ways. The standard nuance attached to the Hiphil, that is, a causative, ‘to make firm,’ is certainly ruled out for Gen. 15:6. Some commentators (e.g., Speiser) have suggested a declarative-estimative function: ‘he declared him (or considered him) firm, steadfast.’ This shifts the emphasis from the subject of the action to the object of the action, and so in 15:6 it is Yahweh who is highlighted, not Abram. This suggestion is ruled out grammatically by the fact that verbs used declaratively are followed by a direct object. he’emin, on the contrary, is followed by a preposition or is used absolutely (Ps. 116:10, ‘I have remained faithful’). Close to the latter suggestion is the idea that we have here a delocutive use of the Hiphil. Gen. 15:6 would be read something like: ‘He declared, “Amen” in Yahweh.’ Thus Abram gives not just a mental response, but a verbal, confessional statement, to which Yahweh responds in v. 6b. Grammatically there is not the same need for a direct object after a delocutive verb as there is after a declarative one. The traditional explanation has been to assign to the Hiphil of this verb an internal-transitive function, that is, ‘the entering into a certain condition and, further, the being in the same.’ Abram ‘became steadfast (or firm) in Yahweh.’ This nuance differs from the previous two in that it emphasizes the certainty and the sureness of the believer, rather than the certainty of the object or statement in which faith was placed. What prompted Abram’s faith was certainly the promise of the Lord, and that is the incentive to faith. But this is a theological observation, not a linguistic one.” Victor P. Hamilton, The Book of Genesis: Chapters 1-17 (Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1990), 423-424.

\textsuperscript{35} Meredith Kline, “Abram’s Amen,” 2n4.

arrangement have been proposed, but perhaps the most compelling is that while verses 1–5 contain dialogue between Abraham and the Lord, verse 6 has been viewed by many scholars as an editorial insertion — a summary statement lacking dialogue. In verse 7, the dialogue picks up again and continues for several more verses. However, if we accept Kline’s interpretation of Genesis 15:6, which presents Abraham declaring his *amen* to God’s promise of countless seed, then verses 1–9 offer a continuous, uninterrupted dialogue between Abraham and the Lord. O. Palmer Robertson agreed that interpreting האמין (*he’emin*) as a delocutive properly integrates Genesis 15:6 into the overall narrative rather than isolating it as a “theological analysis belonging to a later age.”

Kline was not the first to claim that Abraham did more than just believe in God’s promise, but that he vocally expressed his *amen*. As early as 1893 Christian pastors were promulgating this idea, still more than half a century away from the discovery of delocutives:

> The Lord called Abraham out and said, Look at the stars and tell the number of them, so shall thy seed be. Abraham said, “Amen.” That is the Hebrew, Abraham said, “Amen.” And the Lord said, “You are right.”

37. “In a similar fashion, the phrase ‘He believed God’ may depict a situation in which Abraham ‘declared his “Amen” to the promise of God. As a consequence, Genesis 15:6 would not appear as an interruption in the midst of a straightforward historical narrative which represented the theological analysis belonging to a later age. Under this construction of the passage, the narrative proceeds in a rather straightforward manner: God promises, Abraham declares his ‘Amen,’ and the Lord pronounces him righteous. ... Although absolute certainty cannot be suggested with reference to this analysis, it certainly captures the flavor of the affirmation of Genesis 15:6. Whether verbally or otherwise, Abraham declared his ‘Amen’ to the promise of God, and God reckoned his faith in the stead of righteousness.” O. Palmer Robertson, “Genesis 15:6: New Covenant Expositions of an Old Covenant Text,” *Westminster Theological Journal* 42, no. 2 (Spring 1980): 263.

38. “There was a prompt response to the Divine revelation. ‘Abraham believed.’ He had faith before, but now it was prominent and emphatic, a clearer, stronger, fuller trust in God. The original Hebrew for ‘believed’ comes from a root whence we derive our ‘Amen,’ and we might paraphrase it by saying that ‘Abraham said Amen to the Lord.’” W. H. Griffith Thomas, *Genesis I–XXV: A Devotional Commentary*, 3rd ed. (London: Religious Tract Society, 1909), 181.

The Babylonian Talmud, recorded in written form during the Amoraic period (roughly 200 to 500 CE), contains analysis and discussion of the law (תורה Torah) by Jewish scholars, the Amoraim. In Tractate Shabbat, we are given the following, which could be employed to bolster Kline’s theory:

Reish Lakish said: One who answers amen with all his strength, they open the gates of the Garden of Eden before him, as it is stated: “Open the gates, and a righteous nation shall come who keeps the faith” (Isaiah 26:2). Do not read: Who keeps [שומר shomer] the faith [אמונים emunim], but rather: Who says [שאומרים she’omrim] amen [אמן amen].

In this passage from the Talmud, we are told that we should read Isaiah 26:2 as “a righteous nation shall come who says amen” rather than “a righteous nation shall come who keeps the faith.” This reading requires some shifting of letters from one word to another, but this is not an uncommon practice in the Talmud. Below are the KJV translation, the Masoretic Text, and a literal translation (following Kline’s delocutive interpretation) of Genesis 15:6:

And he believed in the LORD; and he counted it to him for righteousness (KJV).

והאמן ביהוה ויחשבה לו צדקה

And he declared “amen” in Yahweh, and He reckoned to him righteousness (literal, with delocutive usage).

Saying “amen in Yahweh” is normative practice in both Christianity and Judaism. In the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints we are typically taught to end our prayers “in the name of Jesus Christ, amen.” However, since LDS doctrine also declares that Jesus Christ and Yahweh are the same person (cf. 1 Nephi 19:10), ending a prayer in this manner is functionally equivalent to saying “amen in Yahweh.” Additionally, according to another passage in the Babylonian Talmud the word amen is an acronym for “God, faithful King”:

40. Babylonian Talmud, Shabbat 119b.
41. The KJV for this passage reads: “that the righteous nation which keepeth the truth may enter in.”
42. “AMEN (Hebrew אני ; “it is true,” “so be it,” “may it become true”), word or formula used as confirmation, endorsement, or expression of hope and wish on hearing a blessing, prayer, curse, or oath.” Encyclopaedia Judaica, vol. 2 (Jerusalem, ISR: Keter Publishing House Ltd., 1971), 803.
What is the meaning of the term amen [אמן]? Rabbi Ḥanina says: It is an acronym of the words: God, faithful King [El Melekh ne’eman].

According to this Babylonian Talmud passage, the three Hebrew letters in the word אמן (amen) stand for the first letter in each word of the phrase אל מלך נאמן (el melekh ne’eman, literally God king faithful), or נ-מ-א (a-m-n). Isaiah even refers to the swearing of oaths “by the God called Amen” (בָּאלהי אמן) (Isaiah 65:16 Common English Bible). In other words, according to the Babylonian Talmud, God himself is the very Amen.

There are other passages in the Hebrew Bible where we can perceive additional possible delocutive uses of the verb האמין [he’emin]. For example, the KJV translation of Judges 11:20 begins with, “But Sihon trusted not Israel.” However, J. Bergman Kline explained that “it may be that the clause את-ישראל סיחון ولֹה-האמין [ve’lo he’emin Sichon et Israel] in Judges 11:20 is best translated, ‘Sihon did not declare ‘Amen’ with Israel.” In other words, Sihon, king of the Amorites, was unwilling to enter into a covenant of peace with Israel. This is evidenced by the fact that Sihon “gathered all his people together, and pitched in Jahaz, and fought against Israel” (Judges 11:20). Kline concluded:

Like father Abram all God’s servants will pronounce their “Amen’s” in Yahweh’s name (וְהָאָמִין). Yahweh will be the God of the confessional “Amen” (בָּאלהי אמן).

Possible Application to Selected Passages in the Book of Mormon

In this section I consider nine passages from the Book of Mormon that contain the phrase “believe in [Christ]” to see how these could be understood differently if they were to be read as “declare amen in [Christ].” It is important to clarify that this is not an attempt to

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44. The KJV translates בָּאלהי אמן as “in the God of truth.” Although the Hebrew word for truth is derived from the same root as amen and believe, truth could be more appropriately rendered as אמת (emet). See also Revelation 3:14 “These things saith the Amen, the faithful and true witness, the beginning of the creation of God.”
47. Or some other representation of the name of God.
“correct” these passages in the Book of Mormon. As Kline pointed out, the Hebrew verb הָאָמַן (he’emin) can be rendered as both to “believe” and to “say amen,” depending on whether one interprets the verb as a denominative or a delocutive, respectively. Since all of the verbs in the following passages from the Book of Mormon have been rendered as denominatives, my purpose in this section is simply to explore how the verses could be understood if these verbs were expressed as delocutives.

2 Nephi 6:14

And behold, according to the words of the prophet, the Messiah will set himself again the second time to recover them; wherefore, he will manifest himself unto them in power and great glory, unto the destruction of their enemies, when that day cometh when they shall believe in him; and none will he destroy that believe in him.

As with Genesis 15, 2 Nephi 6 is a covenantal chapter. Jacob tells us that “the Lord God will fulfil his covenants which he has made unto his children” (6:12), and that “the Mighty God shall deliver his covenant people” (6:17). Sandwiched between these two verses, Jacob informs us that Messiah will “set himself again the second time to recover” (6:14) his covenant people, “they who wait for him” (6:13). This recovery will occur “when [the covenant people] shall believe in him; and none will he destroy that believe in him (6:14).” The delocutive phrase “declare amen in him” as a replacement for “believe in him” fits nicely into the covenantal nature of this chapter. The Messiah will recover his covenant people “when they shall declare amen in him; and none will he destroy that declare amen in him.” Another way of expressing this idea is that the Messiah will set himself to recover his covenant people when they begin to worship and covenant in his name, Jesus Christ.

In the Babylonian Talmud we are told that the word amen is affiliated with the elements of oaths, acceptance, agreement, and confirmation, or in other words, covenantal language:

Rabbi Yosei, son of Rabbi Ḥanina, says with regard to the term amen: There is an element of oath within it, there is an element of acceptance of the statement and agreement within it, and there is an element of confirmation of the statement.48

2 Nephi 9:23–24

And he commandeth all men that they must repent, and be baptized in his name, having perfect faith in the Holy One of Israel, or they cannot be saved in the kingdom of God. And if they will not repent and believe in his name, and be baptized in his name, and endure to the end, they must be damned; for the Lord God, the Holy One of Israel, has spoken it.

This chapter (2 Nephi 9) is bookended by brief commentaries on covenants: “I have read these things that ye might know concerning the covenants of the Lord that he has covenanted with all the house of Israel” (9:1), and “behold how great the covenants of the Lord” (9:53). In the middle of the chapter, Jacob taught that believing in the name of God is essential for salvation (9:24). In order to fully appreciate this idea, verses 23 and 24 must be studied together, as each verse provides a list of requirements for salvation. While the two lists closely parallel each other, there are some differences in content and order (see Table 1).

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>2 Nephi 9:23</th>
<th>2 Nephi 9:24</th>
</tr>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. Repent</td>
<td>1. Repent</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. Be baptized in his name</td>
<td>3. Be baptized in his name</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. Have perfect faith in the Holy One of Israel</td>
<td>2. Believe in his name</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>4. Endure to the end</td>
</tr>
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Both verses teach that we must repent and be baptized in his name to be saved in the kingdom of God. And, while verse 24 states that we must “endure to the end,” verse 23 is silent on this requirement. But most importantly, in parallel phrases, verse 23 informs us that we must “have perfect faith in the Holy One of Israel,” while verse 24 states that we must “believe in his name.” These two phrases remind us of the previously cited passage from the apostle James:

Seest thou how faith wrought with his works, and by works was faith made perfect? And the scripture was fulfilled which saith, Abraham believed God, and it was imputed unto him for righteousness. (James 2:22–23)
James explained that by works was Abraham’s “faith made perfect,” while Jacob taught the importance of having “perfect faith” in the Holy One of Israel (קדש ישראל qedosh Israel). James also told us that “Abraham believed God,” while Jacob spelled out that we must “believe in his name.” These passages from James and Jacob can be expressed as parallel thoughts: perfect faith and believing in God. James’ phrasing, that “Abraham believed God” is a clear reference to Genesis 15:6, where we are told that Abraham (האמן ביהוה he’emin b’yahweh, or believed in Yahweh, if the verb is interpreted as a denominative). As previously noted, Kline stated that the verb (האמן he’emin) in Genesis 15:6 is best understood as a delocutive, meaning that Abraham “declared amen in Yahweh.” With these parallel connections between James and Jacob one could argue that Jacob’s use of “believe in his name” could also be rendered “declare amen in his name.” As previously discussed, declaring amen is integral to the covenantal process and demonstrates our “faith in the Holy One of Israel.”

Additionally, while believing in the name of Messiah can rightly be understood as a passive mental process, declaring amen is active. Graham wrote: “Belief exists; faith acts. Belief is a passive faith, and faith is an active belief.” Abraham did not merely engage in a passive thought process; he demonstrated his faith, or active belief, with his declaration of amen. According to James, Abraham’s faith was “made perfect” when he acted further by offering his son Isaac.

Ironically, the name James is derived from the Greek name Ἰάκωβος (iakōbos), which originates from the Hebrew name יַעֲקֹב (ya’aqov), or Jacob.

It is important to note that the Hebrew words for amen, believe, and faith are all derived from the Hebrew root (a-m-n), signifying firmness or support.


2 Nephi 10:7

But behold, thus saith the Lord God: When the day cometh that they shall believe in me, that I am Christ, then have I covenanted with their fathers that they shall be restored in the flesh, upon the earth, unto the lands of their inheritance.

2 Nephi 10 is a continuation of Jacob’s temple sermon from the previous chapter. In verse 7 we are told that one of the prerequisites for the covenant people to be restored is that “they shall believe in me, that I am Christ.” If we rephrase this verse as “they shall declare amen in me, that I am Christ,” we are faced with awkward English grammar. The Hebrew for this passage could be properly rendered as “יאמינו בי כי אני משיח (ya’aminu bi ki ani mashiach).” In biblical Hebrew the word כי (ki) can be translated as that, for, or because. In Exodus 6:7 the Hebrew כי אני יהוה (ki ani yahweh) is translated as “that I am the LORD” in the KJV, while in Leviticus 11:45 the same Hebrew phrase is translated as “for I am the LORD.” So, 2 Nephi 10:7 could be rendered as “When the day cometh that they shall declare amen in me, for I am Christ, then have I covenanted with their fathers that they shall be restored in the flesh, upon the earth, unto the lands of their inheritance.” With this reading, we can understand that the time will come that the covenant people will declare amen in Christ; they will worship and covenant in his name. In that day he will fulfill the covenant that he made with their fathers.

2 Nephi 25:24–25

And, notwithstanding we believe in Christ, we keep the law of Moses, and look forward with steadfastness unto Christ, until the law shall be fulfilled.

Although not clearly discernible in English, if we render this passage in Hebrew, we discover a simple alternate parallelism:

A And, notwithstanding we believe in Christ,
B we keep the law of Moses,
A’ and look forward with steadfastness unto Christ,
B’ until the law shall be fulfilled.
In Hebrew, the words believe, steadfastness, amen (or declare amen), and faith are all derived from the same root: נ-מ-א (a-m-n). So, “we believe in Christ” (or “we declare amen in Christ,” if we apply the delocutive sense) is parallel with “steadfastness unto Christ.” The second set of parallel phrases contrasts the Nephites’ keeping of the law of Moses with Christ’s fulfilling of it. Nephi also presents us with an apparent paradox: the purpose of the law of Moses was to point the people to Christ (cf. Jacob 4:5), but Nephi informs us that they already believed/declared amen in Christ.

In the subsequent verse (2 Nephi 25:25), presented below as a chiasm, we are told that the faithful were “made alive in Christ” because of their faith. More than a passive belief, the faith of which Nephi spoke was truly life-giving through Christ. Because of the shared root, נ-מ-א (a-m-n), this faith is related to steadfastness and the declaration of amen in Christ:

A   For, for this end was the law given;
B   wherefore the law hath become dead unto us,
B’  and we are made alive in Christ because of our faith;
A’  yet we keep the law because of the commandments (2 Nephi 25:25).

We could understand from these verses that the Nephites had entered into a covenant by declaring their amen in Christ. It was not the keeping of the dead law that demonstrated their faith in Christ. Rather, it is reasonable to believe that it was their declaration of amen in Christ, as part of their covenantal agreement, that demonstrated their faith in him.

2 Nephi 30:2

For behold, I say unto you that as many of the Gentiles as will repent are the covenant people of the Lord; and as many of the Jews as will not repent shall be cast off; for the Lord covenanteth with none save it be with them that repent and believe in his Son, who is the Holy One of Israel.

In this verse, Nephi informs us that personal repentance is imperative to being counted among the covenant people of the Lord. Nephi also tells us that a second requirement is to “believe in his Son.” Since this passage is covenantal in nature, it would also be appropriate to understand this

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54. Psalms 78:37: “For their heart was not right with him, neither were they stedfast (ne’emenu) in his covenant (KJV).” In this verse the English word “stedfast” is a translation of the Hebrew נאמנו, from the root נ-מ-א (a-m-n).
phrase in the delocutive: “declare *amen* in his son.” As Kline explained, *amen* is an appropriate and expected response to a covenantal agreement. In section 88 of the Doctrine and Covenants, also known as “the olive leaf,” we are told of a formal covenantal salutation that the teacher in the school of the prophets was to pronounce at the beginning of each class. Facing the members of the class he was to declare:

Art thou a brother or brethren? I salute you in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ, in token or remembrance of the *everlasting covenant*, in which *covenant* I receive you to fellowship, in a determination that is fixed, immovable, and unchangeable, to be your friend and brother through the grace of God in the bonds of love, to walk in all the commandments of God blameless, in thanksgiving, forever and ever. Amen. (D&C 88:133)

The members of the class were given the choice of answering this covenantal salutation by either repeating the salutation, or by merely saying the word *amen*, “in token of the same”:

And he that cometh in and is *faithful* before me, and is a brother, or if they be brethren, they shall salute the president or teacher with uplifted hands to heaven, with this same prayer and covenant, *or by saying Amen*, in token of the same. (D&C 88:135)

As described in this last passage, speaking the words of the covenantal salutation or simply declaring the word *amen* were substitutable responses. In other words, declaring *amen* was considered equivalent to speaking the covenantal oath. Likewise, declaring *amen* in the Son of God can be seen as an appropriate way to be counted among the “covenant people of the Lord.”

**Jacob 4:5**

Behold, they [the holy prophets which were before us]  
believed in Christ and worshiped the Father in his name, and

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55. “The saying of ‘Amen’ is equivalent to reciting the blessing itself, and such religious value has been attached to it, that it has been said to be superior to the benediction that occasioned the response (Ber. 53B; Maim., Yad, Berakhot 1:11).” *Encyclopaedia Judaica*, vol. 2 (Jerusalem, ISR: Keter Publishing House Ltd., 1971), s.v. “Amen,” 803.

56. See Jacob 4:4.
also we worship the Father in his name. And for this intent we keep the law of Moses, it pointing our souls to him; and for this cause it is sanctified unto us for righteousness, even as it was accounted unto Abraham in the wilderness to be obedient unto the commands of God in offering up his son Isaac, which is a similitude of God and his Only Begotten Son.

This passage in Jacob 4 is of particular interest because it combines multiple elements from our current study: believing in Christ, worshiping the Father in his name, being sanctified (or declared holy) for righteousness, and the inclusion of Abraham’s offering. The phrase “they believed in Christ,” if read as the delocutive “they declared amen in Christ,” is a hand-and-glove fit with the nearly synonymous ensuing phrase, “and [they] worshiped the Father in his name.” In addition, it is intriguing that this passage includes the idea that the keeping of the law of Moses was sanctified (made holy, or possibly declared holy) unto the Nephites for righteousness just as it was accounted to Abraham to be obedient unto God. Even more intriguing, nowhere in the story of Abraham’s offering up Isaac (see Genesis 22) do we find this type of language. It is possible that Jacob borrowed narrative elements from Genesis 15:6 and placed them into the later story in Genesis 22 of the offering of Isaac. This semantic borrowing strengthens the argument that Jacob’s use of “believed in Christ” could be properly rendered “declared amen in Christ.” In fact, it is possible that Abraham may have been Jacob’s primary allusion when he spoke of the “holy prophets which were before us.”

3 Nephi 11:32

And this is my doctrine, and it is the doctrine which the Father hath given unto me; and I bear record of the Father, and the Father beareth record of me, and the Holy Ghost beareth record of the Father and me; and I bear record that the Father commandeth all men, everywhere, to repent and believe in me.

This is a passage saturated with the idea of bearing record. To “bear record” can be understood as the functional equivalent of to “bear witness” or to “testify.” There are four record bearing interactions in this verse (see Diagram 1).

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57. The conjunction “and also” (ָּּנֶּ, vegam) is a very Hebraic expression (cf. Genesis 15:14).
The Father and Son testify of each other, and the Holy Ghost testifies of both of them. In addition, the Son testifies to “all men” that they need to do two things: repent and believe in him. This testifying, or record bearing, strongly implies the act of speaking aloud. Webster provided the following definition: “To show or exhibit; to relate; as, to bear testimony or witness. This seems to imply utterance, like the Latin fero, to relate or utter.” Likewise, if we employ the delocutive for the phrase “[to] believe in me” (להאמין בי lehe’emin bi) we have the spoken expression “[to] declare amen in me.” Even more than the denominative phrase, “believe in me,” this delocutive interpretation is in harmony with the overall tone of the passage.

3 Nephi 19:22

Father, thou hast given them the Holy Ghost because they believe in me; and thou seest that they believe in me because thou hearest them, and they pray unto me; and they pray unto me because I am with them.

During his ministry among the Nephites, Jesus “commanded his disciples that they should pray” (3 Nephi 9:17). Bowing himself to the earth, Jesus thanked the Father that the Holy Ghost had been given to the disciples “because they believe in me.” Jesus then provided evidence that the disciples believed in him: “Thou seest that they believe in me because thou hearest them, and they pray unto me.” If we apply the delocutive interpretation to this verse we have, “They declare amen in me; and thou seest that they declare amen in me because thou hearest them, and they pray unto me.” Interestingly, the disciples were praying to Jesus rather than to the Father. They must have been calling on his

name or using some other way of indicating that Jesus was the person to whom they were praying. As the Babylonian Talmud informed, the word *amen* was considered by the Jewish sages to be an acronym for the phrase “God, faithful King” [אל מלך נאמן, el melekh ne’eman]. So, one way of understanding the delocutive interpretation of “declaring *amen* in me” could be that they were calling Jesus their God and their faithful/true King as they prayed to him, perhaps even calling him their Amen.

### 3 Nephi 20:31

And they shall believe in me, that I am Jesus Christ, the Son of God, and shall pray unto the Father in my name.

Similar to 2 Nephi 10:7, this final passage contains the phrase “that I am Jesus Christ.” As discussed previously, this phrase can also be properly rendered “for I am Jesus Christ” in Hebrew. Additionally, this verse presents a parallel chiastic structure that is only apparent if we interpret the denominative phrase “and they shall believe in me” as the delocutive phrase “and they shall declare *amen* in me” (see Table 2).

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Original</th>
<th>Recast</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>A And they shall believe in me,</td>
<td>And they shall declare amen in me,</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>B that I am Jesus Christ,</td>
<td>for I am Jesus Christ,</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>B’ the Son of God,</td>
<td>the Son of God,</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A’ and [they] shall pray unto the</td>
<td>and [they] shall pray unto the Father in my name.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Father in my name.</td>
<td></td>
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The left column of the table shows the original wording presented as a chiasm, but only the two middle lines are parallel with each other. The first and fourth lines — “they shall believe in me” and “[they] shall pray unto the Father in my name” — are not truly parallel. The right column presents the verse with the first two lines modified to reflect the delocutive verb in line 1, and with “that” changed to “for” in line 2. With these modifications the chiasm becomes whole; line 1, “they shall declare amen in me” and line 4, “[they] shall pray unto the Father in my name,” are parallel statements. In terms of clarity and unity of message, the recast verse seems to present a more coherent and relevant message than even the original wording.

### Conclusion

The identification of delocutive verbs in the 1950s and, more specifically, the discovery of delocutives in the Hebrew Bible has broadened our
understanding of that ancient collection of sacred scripture. The KJV translation of Genesis 15:6 informs us that Abraham “believed in the LORD” and that this belief was accounted to him for righteousness. Kline, however, postulated that האמין [he’emin], the verb translated as “he believed” in the KJV, should be understood as a delocutive rather than a denominative in this verse. He proposed that the passage should be rendered “he declared amen in Yahweh.” This shift in interpretation transforms Abraham’s passive acknowledgment of God’s promise into an active, audible response. Since declaring amen is a typical covenantal response in the Hebrew Bible (cf. Deuteronomy 27) this interpretation fits nicely in the surrounding dialogue between Abraham and Jehovah in Genesis 15.

Applying this understanding of delocutive verbs to passages in the Book of Mormon that contain the phrase “believe in [Christ]” revealed interesting outcomes. Most of the Book of Mormon passages cited in the paper are part of a covenantal narrative where the declaration of amen would be an appropriate and even expected response. In these passages, “believing in Christ” can be replaced by “declaring amen in Christ” without doing harm to the integrity of the original wording. In fact, interpreting the verb as a delocutive can possibly add even greater insight. In the same way that Abraham’s passive belief in God’s promise can be interpreted as an active vocal response through the identification and application of the delocutive verb האמין (he’emin), related passages in the Book of Mormon can be profitably understand in a similar way. Our acceptance of God’s covenantal promise needs to be more than a passive “inner attitude”; it needs to include our active audible assent, followed by our faithful daily fulfillment of the covenantal agreement.

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The Book of Moses as a Temple Text

Jeffrey M. Bradshaw

Abstract: In this fascinating article, Jeff Bradshaw details how the Book of Moses might be understood as a temple text, including elements of temple architecture, furnishings, and ritual in the story of the Creation and the Fall. Bradshaw shows how the second half of the Book of Moses follows a general pattern of a specific sequence of covenants that will resonate with members of the Church who have received the temple endowment. The story of Enoch and his people provides a vivid demonstration of the final steps on the path that leads back to God and exaltation.

[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.


In this article, I will suggest how the Book of Moses might be understood as a temple text. I will begin by giving a brief summary of “temple theology” and what is meant by the term “temple text.” Distinctive aspects of Latter-day Saint temple teachings will be outlined.
I will then outline how the Book of Moses reflects elements of temple architecture, furnishings, and ritual in the story of the Creation and the Fall. Like other scripture-based temple texts, the general structure of the second half of the Book of Moses follows a pattern exemplifying faithfulness and unfaithfulness to a specific sequence of covenants that is familiar to members of the Church who have received the temple endowment. I argue that the story of Enoch and his people provides a vivid demonstration of the final steps on the path that leads back to God and up to exaltation.

**Temple Theology**

The term “temple theology” has its roots in the writings of Margaret Barker. Over the course of the last twenty-five years, she has argued that Christianity arose not as a strange aberration of the Judaism of Jesus’s time but rather as a legitimate heir of the theology and ordinances of Solomon’s Temple. In this view, the loss of much of the original Jewish temple tradition would have been part of a deliberate program by later kings and religious leaders to undermine the earlier teachings. To accomplish these goals, some writings previously considered to be scripture are thought to have been suppressed and some of those that remained to have been changed to be consistent with a different brand of orthodoxy. While scholars differ in their understanding of details about the nature and extent of these changes and how and when they might have taken place, many agree that essential light can be shed on questions about the origins and beliefs of Judaism and Christianity by focusing on the recovery of early temple teachings and on the extracanonical writings that, in some cases, seem to preserve them. Thus, John W. Welch describes the relevance of temple theology for Christianity in that it contextualizes and situates “images and practices that go hand in hand with the faith . . . [of] the temple that stands behind so many biblical texts.”

Temple theology can be understood by comparing it to other approaches to theology. What one might call philosophical theology, on one hand, has throughout its history wrestled with timeless questions of being, existence, and the attributes of God using the powerful tools of formal logic; and natural theology, on the other hand, has worked inductively from scientific observation of the world, relying on the tools of analogy and teleology. By way of contrast, temple theology approaches God through an understanding of “signs, symbols, and patterns (semiotics), . . . relationships, shared emotions and communications,
places of contact, ritual instruction, and human responses of thanks, praise, and covenant, binding man to God for purposes of protection, healing, blessing, and ultimate exaltation.”

Temple theology also focuses on the priests’ beliefs about themselves and what their rituals meant, on Wisdom and creation, and on Moses and Israel’s history as God’s chosen people. Thus, it strives to “project the fullness of the past . . . to give bearings in answering the so-called terrible questions of where we came from, why we are here, and where we are going: things as they were, as they are, and as they will be.” It explores attempts at emulating God’s character, being “interested as much in the God of nature as in the nature of God,” and it examines ceremonies of transformation that “take participants from one state, pass them through a liminal state, and then elevate them to a higher realm. . . . In sum, temple theology thrives on principles, practices, and models (temples are templates that orient us as humans in relation to the cardinal directions in heaven and on earth, and thus guide us in the beginning of an eternal quest).”

Finally, a text can be seen as a “temple text” if it “contains the most sacred teachings of the plan of salvation that are not to be shared indiscriminately, and that ordains or otherwise conveys divine powers through ceremonial or symbolic means, together with commandments received by sacred oaths that allow the recipient to stand ritually in the presence of God.” With this background, as will be seen, temple theology and temple studies are highly relevant to the Book of Moses.

Temple Theology in a Latter-day Saint Context

It is easy to see why temple theology holds a natural appeal for many Latter-day Saint scholars. It affirms Joseph Smith’s belief that the “many errors” present in the Bible as we now have it are due, at least in part, to what he styled as corruptions and omissions of “ignorant translators, careless transcribers, or designing and corrupt priests.” In addition, temple theology is consistent with prominent Church teachings about the loss and restoration of the knowledge and priesthood authority necessary to administer temple ordinances.

That said, areas of difference with some aspects of common ideas in temple theology. Such differences surface in relation to beliefs of Latter-day Saints regarding primeval stories that are believed to have formed an integral part of some ancient temple liturgies.
For example, some scholars of temple theology regard the stories of the divine-human mating of the watchers in 1 Enoch as an etiological account about the origin of all evil that predates Genesis and as a possible basis for the liturgy of Solomon’s temple. In addition, they regard the introduction of evil into the world as a tragic development. However, these ideas are inconsistent with Latter-day Saint beliefs. Latter-day Saints incorporate a version of the story of Adam and Eve as part of temple liturgy. Like some early Christians, they see the mismatched marriages of Genesis 6:1–4 as involving only mortals, not immortals. They regard the story of Enoch’s generation not as a means of explaining the origin of evil in the world but rather as merely paradigmatic—in other words, as an example of the way that evil operates time after time in every generation.

For Latter-day Saints, the events that brought “opposition” into the world (2 Nephi 2:11) came through the exercise of choice by Adam and Eve and were, in fact, a “necessary evil.” They believe that sin is an individual responsibility, not the result of evil forces beyond their control. Their scriptures teach that the purpose of earth life is to “prove” mankind “to see if they will do all things whatsoever the Lord their God shall command them” (Abraham 3:25). Through reliance on the enabling grace and power of the Atonement of Jesus Christ (2 Nephi 25:23), the means to overcome sin and death is provided and the way is opened for human salvation and exaltation. The test provided by this temporary earthly probation requires a fallen world, one that the devil himself helped institute through his temptation in the Garden of Eden. In his efforts to thwart Adam and Eve’s progression, Satan unwittingly advanced God’s own plan.

Happily, Latter-day Saints, like many fellow Christians, know that the story of the Fall “is not an account of sin alone but a drama about becoming a being who fully reflects God’s very own image. Genesis is not only about the origins of sin; it is also about the foundations of human perfection. The work that God has begun in creation, he will bring to completion.” Indeed, the Book of Moses avers that, after the killing of Abel by Cain, “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” (Moses 5:58–59).

Adam’s acceptance of the ordinance of baptism of the water and the Spirit is explicitly described in the Book of Moses (Moses 6:64–66), as are allusions to subsequent priesthood ordinances that were intended
to lead them—and their posterity—to the glorious end of the covenant pathway that leads to exaltation. Thus, we are told that Adam was “after the order of him who was without beginning of days,” and that he was “one” in God, “a son of God.” Through this same process—having received every priesthood ordinance and covenant and also having successfully completed the probationary tests of earth life—all may become sons of God (Moses 6:67–68).

Within the Latter-day Saint temple endowment, a narrative relating to selected events of primeval history provides the context for the presentation of divine laws and the making of covenants that are designed to bring mankind back into the presence of God.13 Because the Book of Moses is the most detailed account of the first chapters of human history found in Latter-day Saint scripture, it is already obvious to endowed members of the Church that the Book of Moses is a temple text par excellence, containing a pattern that interleaves sacred history with covenant-making themes. However, what may be new to some of them is that the temple themes in the Book of Moses extend beyond the first part of this story that contains the fall of Adam and Eve. There is a part two of the temple story related in the Book of Moses that culminates with the translation of Enoch and his city. An examination of the layout of the Garden of Eden and its correlation to the layout and furniture of Israelite temples will aid in understanding this two-part structure of the Book of Moses.

The Two-Part General Structure of the Book of Moses

Significant parallels have been identified between the layout of the Garden of Eden and that of Israelite sanctuaries.14 In light of these parallels, scholars have argued that the Garden of Eden can be seen as a “natural temple” that foreshadowed the configuration of the “heavenly temple” intended as the ultimate destination of this creation.15 Donald W. Parry describes the correspondence between Israelite temple ritual and Adam and Eve’s journey through the Garden of Eden as follows (see fig. 1):

Once a year on Yom Kippur, the Day of Atonement, Adam’s eastward expulsion from the Garden is reversed when the high priest travels west past the consuming fire of sacrifice and the purifying water of the laver, through the veil woven with images of cherubim. Thus, he returns to the original point of creation, where he pours out the atoning blood of the sacrifice, reestablishing the covenant relationship with God.16
Figure 1. Sacred topography of Eden and the temple. The outbound, down-road journey of the Creation and the Fall at left is mirrored in the inbound, up-road journey of the temple at right.

In modern temples, the posterity of Adam and Eve likewise trace the footsteps of their first parents, both as they are sent away from Eden and also in their subsequent journey of return and reunion (compare John 16:28). About this temple journey, Hugh Nibley commented, “Properly speaking, one did not go ‘through’ the temple—in one door and out another—for one enters and leaves by the same door, but by moving in opposite directions The Two Ways of Light and Darkness are but one way after all, as the wise Heraclitus said: ‘The up-road and the down-road are one’; which one depends on the way we are facing.”

In Moses 2–4 is found the story of the “down-road,” while chapters 5–8 follow the journey of Adam and Eve and the righteous branches of their posterity along the “up-road.” In Moses 4:31, the “up-road” is called the “way of the tree of life”—signifying the path that leads to the presence of God and the sweet fruit held in reserve for the righteous in
the day of resurrection. The down-road and the up-road are prefigured in the prophetic experience described in Moses 1 (fig. 2), which serves as a prologue to the Book of Moses as a whole.

Consigning specific details of the full pattern to allusions or omitting them altogether, Moses 1 epitomizes the down-road and up-road that was to be followed by Adam and Eve and their descendants. The account fits squarely the pattern of the heavenly ascent literature—not as a description of the sort of figurative ritual journey that is experienced in temple ordinances, but as an actual encounter with God in the “heavenly temple.” Elsewhere I have detailed the resemblances between the spirit world prologue, the fall to earth, the personal encounter with Satan, and the journey of heavenly ascent found both in Moses 1 and also the pseudepigraphal Apocalypse of Abraham. Significantly, each of these two accounts also concludes with a vision of the Creation, the Garden of Eden, and the Fall given to the prophet-protagonist.

The historical prologue that precedes in time the stories of the Creation and of the descent of Adam and Eve is given as a flashback in Moses 4:1–4. There the deliberations of the heavenly council that resulted in the acclamation of the “Beloved Son” as the Redeemer and the expulsion of Lucifer from heaven are detailed. The notice given to the reader that the latter “became Satan, yea, even the devil, the father of all lies, to deceive and to blind men, and to lead them captive at his will, even as many as would not hearken unto my voice” (Moses 4:4) should be read as an “announcement of plot” for the account of the Fall that immediately follows.

Moses 2–4: The Down-Road

Moses 2: Creation

Latter-day Saints have four basic Creation stories—found in Genesis, Moses, Abraham, and the temple. In contrast to versions of the Creation story that emphasize the planning of the heavenly council or the work involved in setting the physical processes in motion, the companion accounts of Genesis and the Book of Moses provide a structure and a vocabulary that seem deliberately designed to relate the creation of the cosmos to temple symbolism.

Louis Ginzberg’s reconstruction of ancient Jewish sources is consistent with this overall idea, as well as with the proposal that Genesis 1 may have been used as part of Israelite temple liturgy (fig. 3):
God told [the angels]: On the first day of creation, I shall make the heavens and stretch them out; so will Israel raise up the Tabernacle as the dwelling-place of My glory. On the second day, I shall put a division between the terrestrial waters and the heavenly waters; so will [my servant Moses] hang up a veil in the Tabernacle to divide the Holy Place and the Most Holy. On the third day, I shall make the earth to put forth grass and herb; so will he, in obedience to My commands, . . . prepare showbread before Me. On the fourth day, I shall make the luminaries; so will he make a golden candlestick [menorah] for Me. On the fifth day, I shall create the birds; so will he fashion the cherubim with out-stretched wings. On the sixth day, I shall create man; so will Israel set aside a man of the sons of Aaron as high priest for My service.  

Carrying this idea forward to a later epoch, Exodus 40:33 describes how Moses completed the Tabernacle. The Hebrew text strongly parallels the account of how God finished Creation. Referring to the day the Tabernacle was raised in the wilderness, Genesis Rabbah comments, “It is as if, on that day, I actually created the world.” In other words, we are meant to understand that “the Temple is a microcosm of creation, the creation a macro-temple.” Or, in the words of Hugh Nibley, that the
temple is a “scale model . . . [of] the universe,” a place for taking bearings on the cosmos and finding one’s place within it.\textsuperscript{29}

**Moses 3–4: The Garden of Eden and the Fall of Adam**

The movements of Adam and Eve between different areas of the Eden “temple” are best understood through a top-down view. The inward/outward movement in figure 4 corresponds to the upward/downward orientation of figure 1. Consistent with strands of Jewish tradition and the views of Ephrem the Syrian, a fourth-century Christian, the tree of knowledge is pictured “as a sanctuary curtain hiding the Holy of Holies, which is the Tree of Life higher up.”\textsuperscript{30}

![Figure 4. Top-down view of the sacred precincts of the Eden temple.](image-url)

Western art typically portrays Adam and Eve as naked in the Garden of Eden, and dressed in “coats of skin” after the Fall. However, the Eastern Orthodox tradition depicts the sequence of their change of clothing in reverse manner. How can that be? The Eastern Church remembers accounts that portray Adam as a king and priest in Eden, so naturally he is shown there in his regal robes.\textsuperscript{31} Moreover, Orthodox readers interpret the “skins” that the couple wore after their expulsion
from the Garden as being their own, now fully human, flesh. Gary A. Anderson interprets this symbolism to mean that “Adam has exchanged an angelic constitution for a mortal one”\(^{32}\) — in Latter-day Saint parlance, they have lost their terrestrial glory and are now in a telestial state.

Recalling the parallels between the layout of the Garden of Eden and Israelite houses of God, Anderson points out that

the vestments of the priest matched exactly those particular areas of the Temple to which he had access. Each time the high priest moved from one gradient of holiness to another, he had to remove one set of clothes and put on another to mark the change:

(a) Outside the Tabernacle priests wear ordinary clothes.
(b) When on duty in the Tabernacle, they wear four pieces of clothing whose material and quality of workmanship match that of the fabrics found on the outer walls of the courtyard (see Exodus 28). (c) The High Priest wears those four pieces plus four additional ones — these added garments match the fabric of the Holy Chamber where he must go daily to tend the incense altar.

In Eden a similar set of vestments is found, again each set suited to its particular space. (a) Adam and Eve were, at creation, vested like priests and granted access to most of Eden. (b) Had they been found worthy, an even more glorious set of garments would have been theirs (and according to St. Ephrem, they would have entered even holier ground). (c) But having [transgressed], they were stripped of their angelic garments and put on mortal flesh. Thus, when their feet met ordinary earth — the realm of the animals — their constitution had become “fleshly,” or mortal.\(^{33}\)

According to Brock, the imagery of clothing in the story of Adam and Eve is “a means of linking together in a dynamic fashion the whole of salvation history; it is a means of indicating the interrelatedness between every stage in this continuing working out of divine Providence.” To Latter-day Saints, this imagery also makes clear the place of each priesthood ordinance “within the divine economy as a whole.”\(^{34}\)
Moses 5–8: The Up-Road

Covenant Making and Covenant Breaking

The stories in the second half of the Book of Moses also illustrate temple elements, as might be recognized by endowed Latter-day Saints. Discussing Latter-day Saint temple ordinances is a sensitive matter, since endowed Church members agree to keep certain things they learn in the temple confidential. However, the general topic of the temple covenants is not subject to this restriction. For example, in 1977, Elder Ezra Taft Benson, then a member of the Quorum of the Twelve Apostles, outlined these covenants to a general audience as including “the law of obedience
and sacrifice, the law of the gospel, the law of chastity, and the law of consecration."³⁵

Mark J. Johnson has argued that temple covenant-making themes in former times influenced both the structure and the content of the material included in the Book of Moses.³⁶ He observed that the author frequently “stops the historic portions of the story and weaves into the narrative framework ritual acts such as sacrifice, . . . ordinances such as baptism, washings, and the gift of the Holy Ghost; and oaths and covenants, such as obedience to marital obligations and oaths of property consecration.” For example, Johnson goes on to suggest that while the account of Enoch and his city of Zion was being read, members of the attending congregation might have been “put under oath to be a chosen, covenant people and to keep all things in common, with all their property belonging to the Lord.”

An analogous scriptural account that seems to conform with a pattern of covenant-making is discussed in Welch’s analysis of the Sermon on the Mount. In that sermon the commandments “are not only the same as the main commandments always issued at the temple, but they appear largely in the same order.”³⁷ In a similar vein, biblical scholar David Noel Freedman highlighted an opposite pattern of covenant-breaking in the “Primary History” of the Old Testament. He concluded that the biblical record was deliberately structured to reveal a sequence where each of the ten commandments was broken in specific order one by one.³⁸

Figure 6 illustrates the progressive separation of the “two ways” due to analogous sequences of covenant keeping and covenant breaking highlighted in the Book of Moses.³⁹ An interesting aspect of looking at the history of Adam through Enoch as a temple text is that — like the Sermon on the Mount, the Sermon at the Nephite temple, and the biblical text of the Primary History — the series of covenant-related themes unfolds in what appears to be a definite order of progression. Moreover, the ultimate consequences of both covenant-keeping and covenant-breaking are poignantly illustrated at the conclusion of the account: in the final two chapters of the Book of Moses, Enoch and his people receive the blessing of an endless life as they are taken up to the bosom of God (Moses 7:69), while the wicked experience untimely death in the destruction of the great Flood (Moses 8:30).⁴⁰
Moses 5a: Obedience vs. Defiance

Figure 7 depicts the creation of Eve as well as Adam and Eve receiving the “first commandments” (Alma 12:31) that were given before the Fall. Gary Anderson points out an interesting divergence between the Genesis story and the drawing: “Whereas Genesis 2 recounts that Adam was created first (Genesis 2:4–7), given a commandment (Genesis 2:16–17), and only then received a spouse (Genesis 2:19–24), the Hortus Deliciarum has it that Adam was created, then Eve was drawn from his rib, and finally both were given a commandment.41

In the panel at left, a Tree of Life has sprouted human faces resembling Adam and Eve, attesting to ancient traditions about individual premortal existence. This “Tree of Souls” which, in Jewish legend, represented a heavenly “tree of life,” was thought to produce “new souls, which ripen and then fall from the tree into the guf, the Treasury of Souls in Paradise. There the soul is stored until the angel Gabriel reaches into the treasury and takes out the first soul that comes into his hand” so it can be born into mortality.42
In the panel at right, God gestures toward the tree of knowledge in warning as he takes Adam by the wrist. At the same time, Eve raises her arm in what seems a gesture of assent to God’s commandment. Latter-day Saint scripture recounts that God gave Adam and Eve a set of “second commandments” (Alma 12:37) after the Fall, which included a covenant of obedience. This idea recalls a Christian tradition that God made a covenant with Adam “ere he came out of the garden, [when he was] by the tree whereof Eve took [the fruit] and gave it him to eat.” The law of sacrifice, a companion to the law of obedience, was also given to Adam and Eve at this time, before they came to live in the mortal world.

Moses 5:1–6 highlights the obedience of Adam and Eve to these “second commandments” (Alma 12:37) by enumerating their faithfulness to each of them. Adam, with his fellow-laborer Eve, began to “till the earth, and to have dominion over all the beasts of the field, and to eat his bread by the sweat of his brow” (Moses 5:1; compare similar tilling by King Benjamin and his people following their covenant-making, Mosiah 6:6–7). Eve fulfilled the commission she had received in the Garden of Eden and “bare . . . sons and daughters, and they began to multiply and to replenish the earth” (Moses 5:2). Likewise, “Adam was obedient unto the commandments of the Lord” in keeping the law of sacrifice and offering “the firstlings of their flocks” (Moses 5:5).
Later, in defiant counterpoint, Satan came among the children of Adam and Eve co-opting their allegiance to God and demanding they obey him instead: “he commanded them, saying: Believe it not; and they believed it not.” Thenceforth, many of them openly demonstrated that they “loved Satan more than God,” becoming “carnal, sensual, and devilish” (Moses 5:13).

**Moses 5b: Sacrifice vs. Perversion of Sacrifice**

Once Adam and Eve had passed their initial test of obedience to the laws they had been given in the Garden of Eden, God, seeing that it was “expedient that man should know concerning the things whereof he had appointed unto them[,] . . . sent angels to converse with them . . . [and] made known unto them the plan of redemption” (Alma 12:28–30). To Adam was explained that the law of sacrifice “is a similitude of the sacrifice of the Only Begotten of the Father, which is full of grace and truth” (Moses 5:7). Abel followed the pattern of his father in perfect obedience to God and offered a lamb in sacrifice (Moses 5:20). By way of contrast, Cain, at the command of Satan, “offered the fruit of the ground as a sacrifice, which was not symbolic of Christ’s great act of redemption.”

Speaking of the reason Cain’s sacrifice was rejected, Joseph Smith explained that “ordinances must be kept in the very way
God has appointed,” in this case by “the shedding of blood . . . [as] a type, by which man was to discern the great Sacrifice which God had prepared.”

**Moses 5c: The Gospel vs. Works of Darkness**

Moses 5:58 tells how through Adam’s effort “the Gospel began to be preached, from the beginning.” Similar to the story of the three envoys described in Mandaean tradition, Adam and Eve were tutored by holy messengers (Moses 5:7–8, 58; Doctrine and Covenants 29:42). They in turn “made all things known unto their sons and their daughters” (Moses 5:12). The mention of the Holy Ghost falling upon Adam (Moses 5:9) carries with it the implication that he had at that point already received the ordinance of baptism (Moses 6:64), something that might have logically occurred soon after the angel’s explanation of the meaning of the law of sacrifice (Moses 5:6–8). The ordinance of baptism was followed by additional instruction concerning the plan of salvation given “by holy angels . . . and by [God’s] own voice, and by the gift of the Holy Ghost” (Moses 5:58; compare Moses 6:52–64). It is implied that bestowals of divine knowledge, the making of additional covenants, and the conferral of priesthood accompanied these subsequent teachings (Moses 6:67–68).
The Book of Moses records that, despite Adam’s efforts to the contrary, “works of darkness began to prevail among all the sons of men” (Moses 5:55). Rejecting the covenants, the ordinances, and the universal scope of the brotherhood of the gospel, they reveled in the exclusive nature of their “secret combination,” by whose dark arts “they knew every man his brother” (Moses 5:51), and they engaged in “wars and bloodshed[,] . . . seeking for power” (Moses 6:15).

**Moses 6: Chastity vs. Licentiousness**

The law of chastity is not mentioned specifically in the Book of Moses, but this teaching is implied by the way the book values the paradigm of orderly family lines in contrast to problems engendered by marrying outside the covenant. Moses 6:5–23 describes the ideal family order established by Adam and Eve. A celestial marriage order can also be inferred from Moses 8:13, where Noah and his righteous sons are mentioned. The patriarchal order of the priesthood, “which was in the beginning” and “shall be in the end of the world also” (Moses 6:7; compare Doctrine and Covenants 107:40–41 and Abraham 1:26), is depicted as presiding over a worthy succession of generations, beginning with Seth, who was in the likeness and image of Adam (Moses 6:10), just as Adam and Eve had been made in the image and likeness of God (Moses 6:9, 22).

![Figure 10. The Sons of God and the Daughters of Men, 1350.](image)
In what may be contrasted with the righteous conduct of “preachers of righteousness” in Moses 6:23, extracanonical traditions speak of all manner of “fornication . . . spread by the sons of Cain.” In the Book of Moses, the apogee of wickedness was reached in the days of Noah (Moses 8:13–21). Both the disregard of God’s law by the granddaughters of Noah who “sold themselves” in marriage outside the covenant and the subversion of the established marriage selection process by the “children of men” are summed up by the term “licentiousness” (from Latin licentia = “freedom,” in a derogatory sense). As for the mismatched wives, Nibley describes how the “daughters who had been initiated into a spiritual order, departed from it and broke their vows, mingling with those who observed only a carnal law.” Additionally, the so-called “sons of God” in Moses 8:21 (a self-designation made in sarcasm by way of counterpoint to Noah’s description of them as the “children of men” in the preceding verse) were under condemnation. Though the Hebrew expression that equates to “took them wives” (Moses 8:14) is the normal one for legal marriage, the added words “even as they chose” (or, in Westermann’s translation, “just as their fancy chose”) would not have been as innocuous to ancient readers as they seem to modern ones.

Figure 11. Detail of a wall hanging illustrating a Manichaean account of Enoch showing palaces at the top of a tree-like sacred mountain that surround a larger palace of Deity. Corresponding texts seem to describe events similar to the Book of Moses story of how Enoch and his people ascended to the bosom of God.
Thus, the choice of a mate is portrayed as a process of eyeing the “many beauties who take [one’s] fancy” rather than “discovery of a counterpart, which leads to living as one in marriage.” The Hebrew expression underlying the phrase “the sons of men saw that those daughters were fair” deliberately parallels the temptation in Eden: “The woman saw that the tree . . . became pleasant to the eyes.” The words describe a strong intensity of desire fueled by appetite, which Robert Alter renders in his translation as “lust to the eyes.” In both cases, God’s law is subordinated to the appeal of the senses. Richard D. Draper and his coauthors observe that the words “eating and drinking, and marrying and giving in marriage” “convey a sense of both normalcy and prosperity,” conditions of the mindset of the worldly in the time of Noah that Jesus said would recur in the last days (Matthew 24:37–39). The wining, dining, courtships, and weddings continue right up to the great cataclysm of the Flood “while superficially all seems well. To the unobservant, it’s party time.”

Moses 7–8: Consecration vs. Corruption and Violence

Moses 7 describes how Enoch succeeded in bringing a whole people to dwell “in righteousness” (Moses 7:18). In Zion, the “City of Holiness” (Moses 7:19), the people “were of one heart and one mind, and dwelt in righteousness; and there was no poor among them” (Moses 7:18). As the result of living this culminating temple principle, Enoch’s people realized the promise of being “received . . . into [God’s] own bosom” (Moses 7:69).

Just as the life of Enoch can be regarded as a type of the spirit of consecration, so Lamech, who also lived in the seventh generation from Adam, serves as a scriptural example of its antitype. While Enoch and his people covenanted with the Lord to form an order of righteousness to ensure that there would be “no poor among them” (Moses 7:18), Lamech, along with others members of his “secret combination” (Moses 5:51), “entered into a covenant with Satan” (Moses 5:49) to enable the unchecked growth of his predatory order. Lamech’s “secret works” contributed to the rapid erosion of the unity of the human family, resulting in a terrifying chaos where “a man’s hand was against his own brother, in administering death” and “seeking for power” (Moses 6:15).

The meanings of the terms corruption and violence, as used by God to describe the state of the earth in Moses 8:28, are instructive. The core idea of being “corrupt” (Hebrew sāhath) in all its occurrences in the story of Noah is that of being “ruined” or “spoiled” — in other words completely beyond redemption. Like the recalcitrant clay in the hands of the potter of Jeremiah 18:3–4, the people could no longer be formed
to good use. The Hebrew term ḥamas (violence) relates to “‘falsehood,’ ‘deceit,’ or ‘bloodshed.’ It means, in general, the flagrant subversion of the ordered processes of law.”68 We are presented with a picture of humankind, unredeemable and lawless, generating an ever-increasing legacy of ruin and anarchy. This description is in stark contrast to the just conduct of Noah (Moses 7:27).

Having witnessed the culmination of these bloody scenes of corruption and violence, God concluded to “destroy all flesh from off the earth” (Moses 8:28, 30). Thus, the successive breaking of each of the covenants triggered the same sort of “three-strikes-and-you’re-out” consequence that David Noel Freedman described in his analysis of the Primary History of the Old Testament.

Transgressing vs. Transcending the Divine-Human Boundary
Building on the prior discussion, I will now describe in more detail ways in which the Latter-day Saint Enoch story fittingly serves as the culminating episode of a temple cycle, namely in his transcending the boundary that divides the human from the divine.

In a seminal article relating to the story of Noah, Genesis scholar Ronald Hendel makes the case that one of the most prominent themes in the first eleven chapters of the Bible is “a series of . . . transgressions of
boundaries” that had been set up in the beginning to separate mankind from the dwelling place of Divinity. Likewise, Robert Oden highlights the “human aspirations to divine status” as an underlying theme in all these stories, and the fact that such status “is ultimately denied them.” This general thesis is useful as far as it goes. In the transgression of Adam and Eve and in the stories of the rebellion of Cain, of Lamech, of the “sons of God” who married the “daughters of men,” and of the builders of the Tower of Babel, one cannot fail to observe the common thread of a God who places strict boundaries between the human and the divine.

Surprisingly, however, a significant and opposite general theme has received much less attention by scholars: namely, the fact that within some of these same chapters God is also portrayed as having sought to erase the divine-human boundary for a righteous few, drawing them into His very presence. The prime examples of this motif are, of course, Enoch and Noah, the protagonists of Moses 7–8. Of them, it is explicitly said that they “walked with God”—meaning, according to some, that these two patriarchs attained “eternal life” while still in mortality. Indeed, Enoch and Noah, whose names are mentioned together three times in modern scripture (Moses 8:2; Moses 8:19; JST Genesis 9:21–24), are the only two included in the genealogical list of the patriarchs whose deaths are not mentioned. Both “found life amid the curse of death,” both were rescued from death by the hand of God, and each in his turn was a savior to many others.

Enoch’s Prophetic Commission

The Book of Moses gives a compelling account of how Enoch was given “power from on high” in his call to the ministry. Joseph Smith’s account of Enoch’s prophetic commission begins as follows: “And it came to pass that Enoch journeyed in the land, among the people; and as he journeyed, the Spirit of God descended out of heaven, and abode upon him. And he heard a voice from heaven, saying: Enoch, my son, prophesy unto this people” (Moses 6:26–27).

The closest biblical parallel to the wording of these opening verses is not found in the call of any Old Testament prophet but rather in John the Evangelist’s description of events following Jesus’s baptism. Though a superficial study might explain similar imagery in Moses 6:26–27 and the baptism of Jesus as an obvious case of Joseph Smith’s borrowing from the New Testament, an article by Samuel Zinner argues for the likelihood that the ideas behind the baptismal passages “arose in an Enochic matrix.”
Next, Enoch was told, “Open thy mouth, and it shall be filled” (Moses 6:32). A parallel to this is with Moses, who was told that the Lord would “be with” his mouth and teach him what to say (Exodus 4:12). Similarly, in 2 Enoch 39:5, Enoch avers, “It is not from my own lips that I am reporting to you today, but from the lips of the Lord I have been sent to you.” After the opening of Enoch’s mouth, the Book of Moses says that his eyes were washed and “opened,” actions with unmistakable temple connotations: “And the Lord spake unto Enoch, and said unto him: Anoint thine eyes with clay, and wash them, and thou shalt see.” And he did so. And he beheld the spirits that God had created; and he beheld also things which were not visible to the natural eye; and from thenceforth came the saying abroad in the land: A seer hath the Lord raised up unto his people” (Moses 6:35–36).

As a sign of their prophetic callings, the lips of Isaiah and Jeremiah were touched to prepare them for their roles as divine spokesmen (Isaiah 6:5–7; Jeremiah 1:9). By way of contrast, in the case of both the Book of Moses and 1 Enoch, Enoch’s eyes “were opened by God” to enable “the vision of the Holy One and of heaven.” The words of a divinely given song recorded in Joseph Smith’s Revelation Book 2 stand in agreement with 1 Enoch: “[God] touched [Enoch’s] eyes and he saw heaven.” This divine action would have had special meaning to Joseph Smith, who
alluded elsewhere to instances in which God touched his own eyes before he received a heavenly vision.\textsuperscript{84}

It is beyond the scope of this article on temple matters to explore Enoch’s subsequent fulfillment of his prophetic commission in detail, including the many significant resemblances between the Book of Moses and ancient Enoch texts.\textsuperscript{85} However, with relevance to the present examination of the Book of Moses as a temple text, it is significant that Enoch’s teachings in Moses 6 recapitulate the temple-themed events of Moses 2–5, beginning with the Creation (Moses 6:43–44), the Fall (Moses 6:45–49), and the plan of salvation effected through the Son of Man, who is identified with Jesus Christ (Moses 6:50–57).\textsuperscript{86}

In Moses 6, Enoch’s teachings about the Son of Man culminate in a discussion of the ordinances, with specific details given about Adam’s baptism (Moses 6:64–66) and a brief mention of the highest priesthood order by which Adam became a son of God (Moses 6:67–68), in likeness of the Son of Man Himself.\textsuperscript{87}

As reflected elsewhere in Latter-day Saint teachings, the highest order of the priesthood is known by different names. For example, in the Doctrine and Covenants we read about “they who are priests and kings, who have received of his fulness, and of his glory” (Doctrine and Covenants 76:56). They are described in relation to variously named orders as being “after the order of Melchizedek, which was after the order of Enoch, which was after the order of the Only Begotten Son” (Doctrine and Covenants 76:57).\textsuperscript{88} Moses 6:67–68 makes it clear that to receive the fulness of the priesthood is to become “a son of God” “after the order of him who was without beginning of days or end of years.”\textsuperscript{89} Margaret Barker describes how the concept of becoming a son of God can well relate both to ordinances in the earthly temple as well as to actual ascents to the heavenly temple:

The high priests and kings of ancient Jerusalem entered the holy of holies and then emerged as messengers, angels of the Lord. They had been raised up, that is, resurrected; they were sons of God, that is, angels; and they were anointed ones, that is, messiahs.

Human beings could become angels, and then continue to live in the material world. This transformation did not just happen after physical death; it marked the passage from the life in the material world to the life of eternity.\textsuperscript{90}
Figure 14. High priests and kings emerged as messengers, angels of the Lord.

Significantly, the last verse of Moses 6 includes the words “and thus may all become my sons.” This statement presages the translation of Enoch and his people, reported in Moses 7.91

**The Exaltation of Enoch and His People**

The Bible simply relates that “Enoch walked with God: and he was not; for God took him” (Genesis 5:24). However, Moses 7 gives a detailed account of how and why this happened—not only to Enoch but also to a city of his followers. Enoch’s adoption as a son of God, with a right to God’s throne (see Moses 7:59), is described in verses 2–3:92

As I was journeying, and stood upon the place Mahujah, and cried unto the Lord, there came a voice out of heaven, saying—Turn ye, and get ye upon the mount Simeon.98

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.

The pseudepigraphal books of 2 Enoch and 3 Enoch also purport to describe the process by which Enoch was “clothed upon with glory” in some detail. As a prelude to Enoch’s introduction to the secrets of Creation, both accounts describe a “two-step initiatory procedure” whereby “the patriarch was first initiated by angel(s) and after this by the Lord”93 Himself. In the initiation scene described in 2 Enoch, God commanded his angels to “extract Enoch from (his) earthly clothing. And anoint him with my delightful oil, and put him into the clothes of my
glory.” Philip S. Alexander speaks of this event as an “ontological transformation which blurred the distinction between human and divine,” amounting to “deification.” In the Book of Moses, Moses underwent a similar transformation (see Moses 1:2, 11, 13–15, 18, 25, 31). By way of explanation, Moses said that if he had seen God without such a change, he would have “withered and died in his presence; but his glory was upon me; and . . . I was transfigured before him” (Moses 1:11). After Enoch was changed, he is said to have resembled God so exactly that he was mistaken for him.

Summarizing the ancient Jewish literature relevant to this passage, Charles Mopsik concludes that the exaltation of Enoch is not meant to be seen as a unique event. Rather, he writes that the “enthronement of Enoch is a prelude to the transfiguration of the righteous — and at their head the Messiah — in the world to come, a transfiguration that is the restoration of the figure of the perfect Man.”

In Latter-day Saint theology, such a transfiguration is not the result of an arbitrary, capricious act of God but rather a sign of love and trust made in response to individuals’ demonstration of their determination to serve God “at all hazard.” Only such individuals will be privileged to hear the solemn, personal oath from the Father Himself that they shall obtain the fulness of the...
joys of the celestial kingdom forever and ever (2 Nephi 31:20). For example, although Abraham previously had received the blessings of patriarchal marriage and then had been made a king and a priest under the hands of Melchizedek (Genesis 14:17–24; JST Genesis 14:25–40), Abraham’s “election sure” came only afterward, when he demonstrated his willingness to sacrifice his son Isaac.100

This total dedication of oneself to the interests of God and fellow man, the complete emptying of selfishness from the heart and the concomitant replenishment of the soul with pure love in sympathetic union with the Divine, is the essence of the final and most challenging of the temple covenants, the law of consecration—the giving of oneself and one’s all to the purposes of God and the blessing of humankind, in similitude of the great Redeemer. According to Terryl and Fiona Givens, the experience of Enoch as part of his grand vision in Moses 7 is a compelling demonstration “of what the actual process of acquiring the divine nature requires Enoch is raised to a perspective from which he sees the world through God’s eyes.”101 Moses 7:41 reads, “And it came to pass that the Lord spake unto
Enoch, and told Enoch all the doings of the children of men; wherefore Enoch knew, and looked upon their wickedness, and their misery, and wept and stretched forth his arms, and his heart swelled wide as eternity; and his bowels yearned; and all eternity shook.”

Here is imagery that foreshadows the Atonement of Jesus Christ as described in a later revelation of Joseph Smith: “He that ascended up on high, as also he descended below all things, in that he comprehended all things, that he might be in all and through all things, the light of truth” (Doctrine and Covenants 88:6). When an agonized Joseph Smith pleaded for an end to his sufferings in Liberty Jail, he was gently rebuked in a reminder of the agonies of his Lord: “The Son of Man hath descended below them all. Art thou greater than he?” (Doctrine and Covenants 122:8). Here the heights of greatness are equated with the utter depths of lowliness and sorrow (compare Matthew 18:4; 23:11). Since Christ was “made perfect” “by the things which he suffered” (Hebrews 5:8, 9), so Enoch “could not be made perfect” “without sufferings.”

Remarkably, Enoch succeeded in bringing a whole people to be sufficiently “pure in heart” (Doctrine and Covenants 97:21) to live the law of consecration fully. In Zion, the “City of Holiness” (Moses 7:19), the people “were of one heart and one mind, and dwelt in righteousness; and there was no poor among them” (Moses 7:18). In the end, “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).

**Conclusion**

The brief and tentative arguments outlined in this chapter call for more careful and sustained examination of the entire Book of Moses as a temple text. For Latter-day Saints who, like Hugh Nibley, believe Joseph Smith’s teachings that the essential elements of the Latter-day Saint temple ordinances “are as old as the human race,” the presence of a temple-themed story cycle in the Book of Moses raises the question of whether an earlier version of a work containing stories similar to this book of scripture could have been “ritually understood and transmitted” as part of an ancient temple liturgy, with some details omitted or left as allusions in the version of the text that has come to us. Even those who study those aspects of Latter-day Saint temple rituals that seem to be of more recent origin may find the correspondences between elements of ancient temple worship described in the Book of Moses and modern Latter-day
Saint rituals to be of interest. The results of the present exploration provide a partial explanation of how Joseph Smith received his tutoring in temple and priesthood themes.\(^\text{107}\)

Speaking personally, I find these and other evidences convincing reasons to conclude that the Book of Moses and others of Joseph Smith's early revelations\(^\text{108}\) presuppose a detailed understanding of the covenants and sequences of blessings associated with current forms of Latter-day Saint temple worship. The Book of Moses was revealed to Joseph Smith in 1830, more than a decade before he began to teach them in ritual plainness to the Saints in Nauvoo. It seems that he knew early on much more about these matters than he taught publicly, problematizing the view that the temple endowment was simply an invention of the final few years of his life.\(^\text{109}\)

**Acknowledgments**

This chapter is an updated and expanded version of “The LDS Story of Enoch as the Culminating Episode of a Temple Text.” *BYU Studies Quarterly* 53, no. 1 (2014): 39–73. https://scholarsarchive.byu.edu/byusq/vol53/iss1/5/ (accessed July 8, 2021). I appreciate the kindness of David J. Larsen, Danel Bachman, David Calabro, Jared Ludlow, Chris Miasnik, Jacob Rennaker, Stephen D. Ricks, John S. Thompson, John W. Welch, and anonymous reviewers in providing helpful comments and suggestions. I also extend my thanks to Roger Terry and Tim Guymon for their expert assistance with technical editing and the final preparation of the previously published version of this chapter.

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Notes on Figures


Figure 2. Figure © Jeffrey M. Bradshaw. Published in 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.

Figure 3. Figure © Jeffrey M. Bradshaw. Adapted from figure 1.


Figure 6. Figure © Jeffrey M. Bradshaw.

Figure 7. Bibliothèque Nationale de France, Add. 144.a. Fol., with the assistance of Mme Zerkane and Ingrid Appert, as well as the help of Elizabeth Witchell of the Warburg Institute. From Rosalie Green, Michael Evans, Christine Bischoff, and Michael Curschmann, eds. The Hortus Deliciarum of Herrad of Hohenbourg: A Reconstruction. 2 vols. London, England: Warburg Institute, 1979. Vol. 1, Original fol. HD 17r. (Figure 21); see also Vol. 2, p. 31, Figures 17-18, from the Bastard Calques plate 12, tracings of the original made ca. 1840.


Figure 9. From the Legend of the True Cross Fresco Cycle in Arezzo, Italy. Web Gallery of Art. https://www.wga.hu/support/viewer_m/z.html (accessed July 8, 2021).


Figure 13. Published in Fr. John H. Stapleton, A Helping Hand (May 9, 2016). http://theradicalcatholic.blogspot.com/2016/05/a-helping-hand.html (accessed July 7, 2021).

Figure 14. Published in Mapa de Palestina en tiempos de Jesús y su historia, Megareligiones. https://megareligiones.com/c-catolicismo/mapa-de-palestina-en-tiempos-de-jesus/ (accessed July 7, 2021).


Figure 16. With kind permission of the artist.

Notes

1 See Margaret Barker, Temple Theology (London: Society for Promoting Christian Knowledge, 2004), for a convenient summary of her approach to temple studies.


4 See Welch, “Temple, the Sermon on the Mount,” 62–63, citing Barker, Temple Theology, 14, 35, 11. All quotations in this paragraph are from Welch.

5 John W. Welch, “The Temple in the Book of Mormon: The Temples at the Cities of Nephi, Zarahemla, and Bountiful,” in Temples of
the Ancient World, ed. Donald W. Parry (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 1994), 300–301.


7 Scholars who are sympathetic to the possibility that the 1 Enoch story of the watchers formed part of the ritual of the First Temple include, among others, Margaret Barker, Robert Murray, John C. Reeves, and Jonathan Smith. For example, Murray recognizes in the Book of the Watchers elements of a creation myth that is older than Genesis 1, with “roots reaching back to ancient Mesopotamian wisdom” and containing “mythical notes of a kind which were severely controlled, by being deprived of all indications of their ritual Sitz im Leben, in the post-exilic revision of the older religion,” in particular, he stresses the 1 Enoch themes of “cosmic order (2:1–5:3) contrasted with human disorder and rebellion (5:4–9)” and “the changing of the old temple calendar by the post-exilic establishment in Jerusalem” that “gave rise to the literature insisting on the old solar calendar.” Those responsible for these changes “are nothing less than the counterparts on earth of the rebellious ‘watchers’ in heaven.” Robert Murray, The Cosmic Covenant: Biblical Themes of Justice, Peace and the Integrity of Creation (Piscataway, N.J.: Georgias Press, 2007), 7–8. Why then does the current Hebrew Bible feature the story of Adam and Eve as the origin of sin rather than the story of the rebel angels? According to Murray, it was part of a deliberate didactic program by the authors-redactors who wanted to “teach future generations that sin is our human responsibility and all we have to do is obey God, who has graciously revealed his commandments. To ascribe any causality of evil to supernatural beings would have been to undermine this luminously simple catechetical programme.” Murray, Cosmic Covenant, 15.

Other scholars have argued for a view of the Book of the Watchers that is more in line with traditional Jewish and Christian theology. For example, in an erudite and nuanced work on “imperialism and Jewish society” that contains arguments on this “complicated, controversial, and poorly understood” issue, Seth Schwartz differs with views that argue for the primacy of 1 Enoch over Genesis. He reads the Book of Watchers as a dramatic expansion of the
biblical Flood story, in which the entire mythological narrative is compressed into the few generations between the descent of the sons of the gods and Noah, with the Flood serving as the final act of the drama.” Minimizing the idea that political developments were the motivation behind the authoring of this account to the same degree they were in the more historical apocalypses (for example, Daniel 7–12), Schwartz notes: “It is only in the first and last chapters of 1 Enoch that the compiler of the collection made an explicit link between the book’s expanded Enoch story and the ‘present.’” Seth Schwartz, *Imperialism and Jewish Society, 200 BCE to 640 CE* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 2001), 75, 79.


9 For a sampling of early Christian, Islamic, and Latter-day Saint views on this subject, see, for example, Jeffrey M. Bradshaw and David J. Larsen, *In God’s Image and Likeness 2: Enoch, Noah, and the Tower of Babel* (Salt Lake City: Eborn, 2014), 201.

10 Suter sees the paradigmatic approach as being inherent in the *Damascus Document* of the Dead Sea Scrolls, “where the story of the Watchers functions at the beginning of a list of great sinners, who go astray individually by walking ‘in the stubbornness of their hearts’ or through ‘thoughts of a guilty inclination and lascivious eyes’ (García Martínez 1996). The approach in the book of Jude in the New Testament is similar. The implication involved in the use of lists of sinners is that each generation goes astray in the same manner, pointing toward a paradigmatic use of the myth.” David W. Suter, “Theodicy and the Problem of the ‘Intimate Enemy,’” in *Enoch and Qumran Origins: New Light on a Forgotten Connection*, ed. Gabriele Boccaccini (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2005), 333.


See Bradshaw, *In God’s Image* 1, 282.
20 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


23 Louis Ginzberg, ed., The Legends of the Jews, 7 vols. (Philadelphia, PA: Jewish Publication Society of America, 1909–1938; repr., Baltimore, MD: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1998), 1:51. See also Brown, Seven Pillars, 40–41; Peter J. Kearney, “Creation and Liturgy: The P Redaction of Exodus 25–40,” Zeitschrift für die alttestamentliche Wissenschaft 89, no. 3 (1977); and Crispin H. T. Fletcher-Louis, “The Cosmology of P and Theological Anthropology in the Wisdom of Jesus ben Sira,” http://www.marquette.edu/maqom/Sirach1.pdf, 10–11. According to Walton, “the courtyard represented the cosmic spheres outside of the organized cosmos (sea and pillars). The antechamber held the representations of lights and food. The veil separated the heavens and earth—the place of God’s presence from the place of human habitation.” Walton, Lost World, 82. Note that in this conception of creation, the focus is not on the origins of the raw materials used to make the universe but rather their fashioning into a structure providing a useful purpose. The ancient world viewed the cosmos more like a company or kingdom that comes into existence at the moment it is organized, not when the physical structures or the people who participate in them were created materially (Lost World, 26, 35, 43–44, 53). This view of creation as organization


28 Hahn, “Christ, Kingdom,” 125.


31 Anderson, Genesis of Perfection, 119; compare Alexander, From Eden, 76–78. See a Muslim parallel in Rachel Milstein, Karin Rührdanz, and Barbara Schmitz, Stories of the Prophets: Illustrated Manuscripts of Qisas Al-Anbiya, Islamic Art and Architecture Series, ed. Abbas Daneshvari, Robert Hillenbrand, and Bernard O’Kane (Costa Mesa, CA: Mazda, 1999), b&w plate 2. The idea of Adam as priest and king is consistent with the Prophet Joseph Smith’s teachings that Adam obtained the First Presidency and its keys (that is, the keys necessary to direct the kingdom of God on the earth) “before the world was formed.” Andrew F. Ehat and Lyndon W. Cook, The Words of Joseph Smith (Provo, UT: Grandin, 1991), 8. Similarly, the Book of the Cave of Treasures records that immediately following his creation, “Adam was arrayed in the apparel of sovereignty, and there was the crown of glory set upon his head, there was he made king, and priest, and prophet, there did God make him to sit upon his honorable throne, and there did God give him dominion over all creatures and things.” E. A. Wallis Budge, trans., Book of the Cave of Treasures (1927; repr. London: Religious Tract Society, 2006), 53.

32 Anderson, *Genesis of Perfection*, 127. Thus, in a sense, Adam and Eve could be seen as having received two “garments of skin”: the first when they were clothed with mortal flesh, and the second when they were clothed by God in coats of animal skin. Confusion in many commentaries may have resulted from the conflation of these two events. Moreover, rabbinical wordplay equated the coats of skin (‘or) with garments of light (‘ur) (Neusner, *Genesis Rabbah* 1, 20:12:1, p. 227) which, notes Nibley, has also led to “a great deal of controversy.” Nibley, *Temple and Cosmos*, 124. See also Stephen D. Ricks, “The Garment of Adam in Jewish, Muslim, and Christian Tradition,” in *Temples of the Ancient World*, 706–8; John A. Tvedtnes, “Priestly Clothing in Bible Times,” in *Temples of the Ancient World*, 651–54.


39 Specifics about these sequences are discussed in greater detail in Bradshaw, *In God’s Image* 1, 342–51.
In the Book of Moses, Enoch’s people are translated, so that they will never taste of death, but nowhere is it explicitly asserted that they received eternal life and exaltation at that time, in the full sense of Doctrine and Covenants 132:29 and Moses 1:39. Of course, the endless life of Enoch’s people and the untimely death of the wicked in the Flood prefigure the ultimate fates of eternal life or spiritual death for the most righteous and most wicked of God’s children.

Despite the fact that the story of Noah is a fitting ending for the Book of Moses as a whole due to its tragic, large-scale depiction of destruction as the consequence of covenant breaking, the fact that the Book of Moses ends where it does is somewhat of a historical accident. For an insightful exploration of alternative ending points, see David Rolph Seely, “The Book of Moses: Exploring the World Of the Text,” in this proceedings.


See Bradshaw, In God’s Image 1, 681–86


46 See, for example, Bradshaw, *In God’s Image* 1, 649–50.


49 *The Evening and the Morning Star* 2, no. 18 (March 1834): 143.

50 Note that the term “gospel” is mentioned in only two places in the Book of Moses: in 5:58–59, just preceding the description of the righteous family line of Adam in chapter 6; and, on the other hand, in 8:19, just prior to Noah’s encounter with the self-designated “sons of God” who were involved in marriages outside the covenant.

51 *Ginza (Right)*, 3:1. See Bradshaw, *In God’s Image* 1, 869.


56 Satan made the same duplicitous self-assertion as these men in Moses 5:13, saying: “I am also a son of God.”


58 Claus Westermann, ed., *Genesis 1–11: A Continental Commentary* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1994), 364. Generally speaking, ancient marriages were negotiated with the father of the bride and were not necessarily arranged according to the preferences of the bride or groom.

59 See Bradshaw, “Moses 6–7 and the *Book of Giants*,” in this proceedings.


66 In describing the motive for Lamech’s murder of his conspiratorial brother, Moses 5:50 shows how the sin of greed that impelled Cain’s slaying of Abel was now taken to a whole new level: “Wherefore Lamech, being angry, slew him, not like unto Cain, his brother Abel, for the sake of getting gain, but he slew him for the oath’s sake.” For more discussion of this topic, see Bradshaw, *In God’s Image* 1, 395–99.

68 Sarna, *Genesis*, 51; compare Umberto Cassuto, *A Commentary on the Book of Genesis, Part Two: From Noah to Abraham*, trans. Israel Abrahams, 1st English ed. (Jerusalem: Magnes Press, Hebrew University, 1949, repr. 1997), 52–53. Leon Kass graphically describes the scene: “Self-conscious men . . . betake themselves to war and to beautiful (but not good) women, seeking recognition for their superhuman prowess. Whether from rage over mortality, from jealousy and resentment, or from a desire to gain favor from beautiful women, or to avenge the stealing of their wives and daughters, proud men are moved to the love of glory, won in bloody battle with one another. The world erupts into violence, the war of each against all. What ensues is what [English philosopher Thomas] Hobbes would later call ‘the state of nature,’ that is, the state characterized by absence of clear juridical power and authority, in which the life of man is nasty, brutish, and—through violence—short. Bloody destruction covers the earth.” Kass, *Beginning of Wisdom*, 162.


71 Regarding the application of this phrase to Enoch and his people, see Genesis 5:24; Doctrine and Covenants 107:49; Moses 6:34, 39; 7:69. Regarding Noah and his sons, see Moses 8:27. The only other scriptural occurrence of walking “with” God is found in a description of those who have been declared worthy of exaltation (Revelation 3:4): “They shall walk with me in white: for they are worthy,” in addition, Abraham is commanded by the Lord to “walk before me” in Genesis 17:1, and Isaac speaks of “The Lord,
before whom I walk” in Genesis 24:40. See also Genesis 3:8; 48:15; Leviticus 26:12; Deuteronomy 23:14; 1 Samuel 2:30; 1 Kings 11:38; 2 Chronicles 7:17; Psalms 56:13; 89:15; 116:9; Micah 6:8; 1 Nephi 16:3; Mosiah 2:27; 4:26; 18:29; Alma 1:1; 45:24; 53:21; 63:2; Helaman 15:5; Ether 6:17, 30; Doctrine and Covenants 5:21; 11:12; 18:31; 20:69; 21:4; 46:7; 68:28; 90:24; Moses 5:26.


74 Sailhamer, “Genesis,” 74.

75 Sailhamer, “Genesis,” 75.

76 Enoch, in establishing a city so righteous that it could be received into God’s “own bosom” (Moses 7:69), and Noah, in making an ark that saved specimens of living creatures and a remnant of mankind from the Flood.

77 Taking the liberty to borrow the apt expression from Luke 24:49.


85 Considering the relative brevity of the *Book of Giants*, the number of currently identified thematic resemblances to Moses 6–7 is remarkable. These resemblances range from general themes in the storyline to specific occurrences of rare terms or phrases in appropriate contexts. For a comprehensive discussion of the *Book of Giants* resemblances, as well as a discussion of resemblances to other ancient Enoch books, see Jeffrey M. Bradshaw, “Moses 6–7 and the Book of Giants,” in this proceedings.

86 For a discussion of messianic themes and titles in ancient Enoch traditions analogous to those found in Moses 6, see Brown and Bradshaw, “Man and Son of Man,” in this proceedings. For a more complete exposition of Enoch’s teachings about Jesus Christ in the wider context of Latter-day Saint scripture and doctrine, see Jeffrey M. Bradshaw and Matthew L. Bowen. “By the Blood

87 One is reminded of the surprise ending at the close of the Book of Similitudes in 1 Enoch where, after witnessing glorious visions of the Son of Man, Enoch is declared to be himself the Son of Man—or perhaps, more consistent with Latter-day Saint theology, a Son of Man. For more on these and related topics, see S. Kent Brown and Jeffrey M. Bradshaw. “Man and Son of Man: Probing Theology and Christology in the Book of Moses and in Jewish and Christian Tradition,” in this proceedings.


91 Compare Moses 7:1: “Many have believed and become the sons of God.”


Charles Mopsik, ed., Le Livre hébreu d’Hénoch ou Livre des Palais, Les Dix Paroles (Lagrasse, France: Éditions Verdier, 1989), 214. Regarding arguments by scholars discounting the possibility that the Enoch Son of Man and the Jesus/Pauline Son of Man concepts grew out of the same soil, see the discussion in Bradshaw and Larsen, In God’s Image 2, 190–91 endnote M7–14.


See also Smith, Teachings, 150. For extensive discussions of this and related topics, see Bruce R. McConkie, Doctrinal New


102 See JST Hebrews 11:40 in 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), 545: “Without sufferings they could not be made perfect.” Compare JST Hebrews 11:35: “Others were tortured, not accepting deliverance; that they might obtain the first resurrection.” Faulring, Jackson, and Matthews, Joseph Smith’s New Translation, 545). In a later epistle, Joseph Smith explicitly connected Hebrews 11:40 to the ordinances of the temple: “As Paul says concerning the fathers—that they without us cannot be made perfect—neither can we without our dead be made perfect” (Doctrine and Covenants 128:15). These essential earthly ordinances include a representation of the “ultimate glorification.” Harold W. Attridge and Helmut Koester, eds., Hebrews: A Commentary on the Epistle to the Hebrews, Hermeneia—a Critical and Historical Commentary on the Bible (Philadelphia, PA: Fortress, 1989), 352. This ultimate glorification comes to the faithful when they meet God face to face in heaven. Luke Timothy Johnson concurs with this general line of thinking, stating “that

103 Jed L. Woodworth, “Extra-Biblical Enoch Texts in Early American Culture,” in Archive of Restoration Culture: Summer Fellows’ Papers 1997–1999, ed. Richard Lyman Bushman (Provo, Utah: Joseph Fielding Smith Institute for Latter-day Saint History, 2000), 192, sees this idea as one of the most significant differences between Joseph Smith’s Enoch and the pseudepigraphal 1 Enoch: “Enoch in the Book of Moses walks with God not alone, but with all the redeemed prodigals.” Regarding ancient precedents for this idea, see Bradshaw, “Moses 6–7 and the Book of Giants,” in this proceedings

104 Nibley, Message of the Joseph Smith Papyri, xxviii.

105 Welch, Sermon at the Temple and Sermon on the Mount, 83

106 David Calabro has argued eloquently for the intriguing suggestion that the Book of Moses, as we have it today, may be rooted in a first-century Christian baptismal liturgy, perhaps having inherited more ancient fragments going back to the temple of Solomon. See David Calabro, “An Early Christian Context for the Book of Moses,” in this proceedings


For example, the oath and covenant of the priesthood found in Doctrine and Covenants, section 84. See Bradshaw, *Temple Themes in the Oath*.


Abstract: This paper describes and compares the Book of Mormon’s 12 instances of complex finite cause syntax, the structure exemplified by the language of Ether 9:33: “the Lord did cause the serpents that they should pursue them no more.” This is not King James language or currently known to be pseudo-archaic language (language used by modern authors seeking to imitate biblical or related archaic language), but it does occur in earlier English, almost entirely before the year 1700. In the Book of Mormon, the syntax is always expressed with the modal auxiliary verbs should and shall. Twenty-five original examples of this specific usage have been identified so far outside of the Book of Mormon (not counting two cases of creative biblical editing — see the appendix). The text’s larger pattern of clausal verb complementation after the verb cause, 58 percent finite in 236 instances, is utterly different from what we encounter in the King James Bible and pseudo-archaic texts, which are 99 to 100 percent infinitival in their clausal complementation. The totality of the evidence indicates that Joseph Smith would not have produced this causative syntax of the Book of Mormon in a pseudo-archaic effort. Therefore, this dataset provides additional strong evidence for a revealed-words view of the 1829 dictation.

Example: “… the Lord did cause the serpents that they should pursue them no more” (Ether 9:33)¹

In grammar, a complement is one or more words added to another to complete the meaning. Complementation is completion of the meaning by the addition of a complement. In this paper, we are interested in clausal complementation — specifically, where the complement that completes the meaning of the verb cause is another verb phrase. Finite complementation means that there is a tensed verb in the complement
clause. In the Book of Mormon, these tensed verbs are very often auxiliary verbs, most often shall and should. Infinitival complementation means there is no tensed verb in the complement, only an infinitive. This will all become clear as we consider quite a few examples.

In carrying out these syntactic studies, the issue I am primarily interested in is whether the Book of Mormon was the result of a revelation of ideas or a revelation of words. Much of the hard linguistic evidence I have analyzed indicates to me that it was a revelation of words. The unique clausal verb complementation of the Book of Mormon is strong evidence of that.\(^2\) I have not encountered any text that has the sustained heavily finite verb complementation of the Book of Mormon: hundreds of instances with quite a few different verbs.

Within the syntactic domain of verb complementation, we can break down usage by verb. Each verb has its own idiosyncrasies. For this paper, the verb of interest is cause, a verb of influence. Within these causative constructions, one syntactic subtype is the focus of this paper.

In the Book of Mormon, clausal complementation after the verb cause occurs 236 times (see page 577 of the critical-text volume The Nature of the Original Language [NOL]).\(^3\) Table 1 shows the three types of clausal complementation and the number of instances, in descending order, that occur in the Book of Mormon. The last type, complex finite complementation, is the focus of this paper.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Complementation</th>
<th>Instances</th>
<th>Example (see Helaman 16:20)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Simple finite</td>
<td>124</td>
<td>to cause that we shall/should believe</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Infinitival</td>
<td>100</td>
<td>to cause us to believe</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Complex finite</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>to cause us that we shall/should believe</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 1. Types and instances of clausal complementation after the verb cause in the Book of Mormon.

Following the terminology used in NOL, this paper refers to the two types of finite verb complementation as simple finite and complex finite. The terminology is less important than being generally aware of the syntactic structures, which readers can grasp intuitively.

It is also important to make clear that though the form of the expression is different in these three types, the meaning that is conveyed is essentially the same. In other words, the differences in the syntactic structures are meaning-neutral.

As shown in Table 1, the simple finite is the most common type of complementation occurring after the verb cause in the Book of Mormon, followed by the infinitive type, and then the complex finite type.
The Book of Mormon is 58 percent finite and 42 percent infinitival, in 236 instances. This is an extraordinarily high finite rate for this verb and a very large number of finite instances. In view of this, the Book of Mormon presents us with a pattern quite unlike virtually any text we might consult. It is possible that no other text with at least 20 instances of this causative language has this heavily finite pattern. So far, database searches have not revealed any text that has 24 simple finite constructions after the verb *cause*, let alone 124.4

In Joseph Smith’s time, infinitival complementation after the verb *cause* was almost always used, and complex finite complementation was obsolete. We can see in two early letters that Joseph Smith used infinitival complementation: “cause to be brought” (1831); “has caused me to overlook” (1833). The simple finite construction was still in use, but it was only rarely used. Even before the year 1700, during the early modern period,5 infinitival complementation was dominant, with the simple finite uncommon, and the complex finite very uncommon. The last structural type shown in Table 1 — the complex finite construction with the related modal auxiliary verbs *shall* and *should* — was very rare language after the year 1700.

That there are 12 instances in the text shows that it was not an aberration, that it was either intentional on the part of Joseph Smith or that it reflected the apparent early modern sensibilities of the Book of Mormon’s English-language translation. The latter is by far the more likely reason for the usage, as well as for the text’s heavy finite complementation after this verb and other similar verbs of influence.6 In other words, the English-language translation seems to have involved implicit, wide-ranging knowledge of Early Modern English, beyond biblical knowledge, as well as knowledge of some earlier and later English.

At this point, only 25 complex finite instances similar to what we read in the Book of Mormon have been identified outside of the text, 23 of them before the modern period of English began after 1700.7 The original Book of Mormon text thus contains nearly one-third of currently identified instances of this specific syntax.

The rest of this paper will provide a brief comparative treatment of this syntactic structure, one presumably formed from imitating biblical language. Yet it is a syntactic type that no known biblical imitators actually used. It is certainly language that is out of place in a book first written down in 1829 and published in 1830.
Complex Finite Example

Consider the following excerpt, as it was originally dictated by Joseph Smith in 1829:

1 Nephi 17:46  he can cause the earth that it shall pass away

The Book of Mormon has 12 instances of this complex finite syntax.\(^8\) (For a discussion of Doctrine and Covenants usage, see pages 310–12 of my 2017 article.\(^9\))

All 12 of these syntactic structures consistently occur with either shall or should as the auxiliary verb, so I will confine the discussion to this consistent Book of Mormon type, even though the textual record has more examples of “«cause» NP that S” language without any auxiliary or with other auxiliaries besides shall and should. After a verb like cause, shall and should are mandative in function, a term that means “pertaining to command.”\(^10\)

The Book of Mormon’s overall modal auxiliary usage is, generally speaking, early modern in orientation and sometimes sophisticated and nonbiblical. Nonbiblical aspects indicate that the overall usage was not something that Joseph Smith came up with based on a knowledge of King James idiom.

Textual databases currently indicate that the above complex finite syntactic structure involving the verb cause was effectively obsolete a long time before Joseph Smith’s birth. It appears to have been in the process of becoming obsolete during the early part of the 1700s. If it had been biblical, then its obsolescence would have been delayed.

Simple Finite Examples

A modified, simple finite version of 1 Nephi 17:46 would read as follows:

1 Nephi 17:46  * he can cause that the earth shall pass away

This general simple finite structure occurs 124 times after the verb cause in the Book of Mormon, and hundreds of times after other verbs of influence, so readers of the text in English are quite familiar with this syntax. The way the King James Bible would have worded this is with an infinitival complement. Had 1 Nephi 17:46 been phrased like a rare biblical simple finite construction, it would have been without a future subjunctive shall, either with no auxiliary or with the modal auxiliary may:
1 Nephi 17:46  * he can cause that the earth (may) pass away

The biblical text does not use a subjunctive *shall* after most verbs of influence, including the high-frequency verbs *cause, command, desire,* and *suffer.*

Simple finite constructions were still used in the early 19th century, but they were very uncommon by then. A contemporaneous example of this simple finite syntax is the following, taken from the Google Books database:

1828, sj4AAAAAYAAJ

and to cause that the proprietor thereof shall not be able to live,

**Infinitival Example**

The construction that we almost always hear and use today is the one with an infinitive:

1 Nephi 17:46  * he can cause the earth to pass away

This was the heavily dominant causative syntax of Joseph Smith’s day, and it was also the most likely pseudo-archaic form, since the 25 pseudo-archaic texts consulted for this study are all infinitival after the verb *cause.*

In some contexts, such as with pronouns, the difference in textual usage rates between the finite and the infinitival was very large. In the late 1700s, for example, the simple finite occurred only about 0.1 percent of the time with pronominal arguments (one out of a thousand, on average).

**On the Complex Finite**

Book of Mormon language like “king Mosiah did cause his people that they should till the earth” (Mosiah 6:7) is biblical-sounding, yet the specific syntax is not biblical. We can encounter a limited number of analogs in the King James text with other verbs. The above complex finite construction with this verb does not appear in the King James Bible or in the 25 pseudo-archaic texts consulted for this study. So it was not biblically imitative by analogy with other verbs, such as the verbs *command* and *desire.*

The King James Bible has only three instances of simple finite syntax (“<cause> that S”), out of 303 constructions with the verb *cause;* the rest are infinitival (“<cause> NP to <infin. phrase>”). To repeat, the King James text is 99 percent infinitival after the verb *cause,* and one percent simple finite. In a direct comparison with the Book of Mormon, these
dramatic differences yield a large chi-square statistic and an extremely low p-value ($X^2 = 222.4; p < 10^{-48}$).\textsuperscript{16}

Furthermore, the 25 pseudo-archaic texts examined for this study have only infinitival complementation in this domain. They do not even have simple finite syntax after the verb *cause*, in 115 instances. To repeat, these pseudo-archaic writings have infinitival complementation after the verb *cause* 100 percent of the time.\textsuperscript{17}

**Summary of Findings**

By way of summary, complex finite *cause* syntax has not been found to occur in

- the King James Bible (including the Apocrypha: about 932,000 words)
- 25 pseudo-archaic texts (first published between 1740 and 1888)
- Joseph Smith’s early writings (10 letters and his 1832 personal history)\textsuperscript{18}
- any original writings first published after 1713,\textsuperscript{19} outside of the Book of Mormon

As just mentioned, 25 close matches with the Book of Mormon’s complex finite *cause* syntax have been identified so far (in 24 texts), and their dates of composition range between the late 15th century and the early 18th century. This specific causative structure occurred mainly before the 18th century, and at markedly higher rates during the first half of the early modern period. One-half of the 24 texts with this language are older than the King James Bible, which was first printed in 1611. Because far fewer texts were published in the 16th century than in following centuries, this indicates that the popularity of this syntactic structure was much greater in earlier years.

**Complex Finite Examples with Mandative *Shall***

Of the 12 instances of the Book of Mormon’s complex finite *cause* syntax, two have mandative *shall* and 10 have mandative *should*. Here are the two with mandative *shall*, with the linked arguments (objects and subjects) in bold and the auxiliary verb in italics:

1 Nephi 17:46 he can cause the earth that it shall pass away
3 Nephi 29:4 he will cause it that it shall soon overtake you\textsuperscript{20}

At this point, 14 syntactic matches with this specific Book of Mormon construction have been identified in the earlier textual record, ranging in
time between 1469 and 1713. Here are two examples that closely match the above language (see the beginning of the appendix for all 14 of them):

c1469, EEBO A21703 (1485)\(^ {21} \) that shall cause me that I shall not be known

1701, ECCO CW0106164956\(^ {22} \) for this will cause it, that it shall not easily come off

The 1701 example is a nearly perfect syntactic match with 3 Nephi 29:4. Not only is there complex finite complementation with a repeat of the pronoun it, but in each case, there is an adverb following mandative shall.\(^ {23} \)

**Complex Finite Examples with Mandative Should**

Here are the Book of Mormon’s 10 complex finite examples with mandative should, the most common variety of this specific syntactic structure in the text:

- + 2 Nephi 5:17 I Nephi did cause my people that they should be industrious and that they should labor with their hands
- Mosiah 6:7 king Mosiah did cause his people that they should till the earth
- * Alma 21:3 they did cause the Lamanites that they should harden their hearts that they should wax stronger in wickedness
- Alma 55:25 he did cause the Lamanites … that they should commence a labor
- Alma 58:11 and did cause us that we should hope for our deliverance in him
- Alma 60:17 causing them that they should suffer all manner of afflictions
- Helaman 16:20 to cause us that we should believe
- 3 Nephi 2:3 causing them that they should do great wickedness
- Mormon 3:5 I did cause my people … that they should gather themselves together
- + Ether 9:33 the Lord did cause the serpents that they should pursue them no more but that they should hedge up the way

**Note:** The two marked with a plus sign (+) have two verb-dependent object clauses. The one marked with an asterisk (*) might have a second object clause, if it is asyndetically conjoined. If not, then it is a resultative clause.
At this point, 11 syntactic matches with this Book of Mormon construction have been identified in the earlier textual record, ranging in time between 1494 and 1700. Here are the earliest and latest examples that closely match the above language (see the appendix for all 11 of them):

1494, A00525 (1533) he by his secret means caused the Germans that they should take no party with Brunhilda
1700, A92940 to cause them that they should not go up to Jerusalem,

**Complex Finite Usage by Century**

Here is the breakdown by century of currently known textual instances of complex finite complementation after the verb *cause*, where the auxiliary is mandative:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Century</th>
<th>Late 15c &amp; 16c</th>
<th>17c</th>
<th>18c</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Instances</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Number of titles (ESTC)</td>
<td>10,603</td>
<td>70,815</td>
<td>302,074</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rate (per 100,000 ESTC titles)</td>
<td>94</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>0.7</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Table 2.* Instances and textual rates of “*cause*” NP that *S* syntax with mandative *shall* or *should* — as found in the greater textual record and arranged by century.

Table 2 shows that thirteen 17th-century instances is a rate effectively equivalent to more than 20 times the 18th-century rate. Similarly, ten late 15th-century and 16th-century instances is effectively equivalent to more than 100 times the 18th-century rate. Though uncommon, complex finite complementation after the verb *cause* was primarily an early modern construction (as mentioned, there are even more instances in databases without a mandative auxiliary). It was very rare or obsolete by the middle of the 18th century.

**Complex Finite Usage by Auxiliary**

Table 3 shows the usage broken down according to whether the auxiliary verb is *shall* or *should*. The Book of Mormon has nearly one-half of currently known instances of this specific syntactic construction with *should*. Only one text has two instances (see immediately below), and 10 texts have one instance each. This means that the Book of Mormon is unique in this respect, and it is an additional indication that Joseph Smith was not responsible for choosing this specific syntax.
Repeated Complex Finite Usage

One EEBO text has two consecutive instances of “«cause» NP that S” syntax with should:

1603, B11962 cannot he that caused the fire that it should not touch the three children make it burn thee quickly, cannot he that caused the lions that they should not touch Daniel, cause them to crush thee softly;

In addition, another early 17th-century text (1616, A00419) has four instances of complex finite cause syntax, but without mandative shall or should. Four instances of complex finite cause syntax are possibly the most that occur in a single text, besides the Book of Mormon, which has three times as many.

Conjoined Complementation

Two or three of the Book of Mormon’s complex causative constructions have additional conjoined that-clauses: 2 Nephi 5:17, Alma 21:3 (possibly — see the above note), and Ether 9:33 (all of these are shown above). This extended, conjoined syntax is a rare configuration; in the greater textual record it has also been found in EEBO A69038. Here are two examples laid out so that the matching can be easily seen:

1620, A69038 and I will cause you that you shall walk in my precepts,
2 Nephi 5:17 I Nephi did cause my people that they should be industrious
1620, A69038 and that you shall observe and keep my commandments.
2 Nephi 5:17 and that they should labor with their hands.

This 1620 textual example is thus a rare, exclusively early modern match with Book of Mormon usage, and it provides an additional small point in favor of the Book of Mormon exhibiting real archaism rather than pseudo-archaism. For many, the thought has been that Joseph Smith dictated a text whose grammar was pseudo-archaic. Yet the text has
so much Early Modern English usage beyond known pseudo-archaic production that it appears that Joseph dictated a text that had already been elaborated with early modern expertise. By this, I don't mean to say that the text is entirely early modern. What I mean is that it’s not fake early modern — that is, it’s not pseudo-archaic.

Such conjoined syntax is more often found in simple finite constructions during the early modern period, but it hardly ever occurred even in that simpler syntax. Here are two rare examples (spelling modernized):

1550, A13758 And to the surplusage, promised that they would perforce themself to cause that the Beotians and Corinthians should enter into the treaty and that Panacte should be rendered to the said Athenians.

1623, A11802 which they refusing, he caused that his engines should play, and that a general assault should be given.

Complex Finite Usage Co-occurring with Early Modern (Non-emphatic) “Did Cause”

The Book of Mormon also exhibits combined archaism in this domain, since seven of the instances with mandative should co-occur with non-emphatic “did cause” (see Book of Mormon examples above). Here are four simple finite examples with non-emphatic “did cause,” taken from EEBO (in the original spelling):

1576, A09316 And also it is written, that God by hys death vpon the crosse dyd cause that his sonne should haue emperiall, rule, and be the onely Lord, ouer all his enimyes

1607, A13820 for sometimes the peculiar or vulgar speech, or the eloquency of wordes did cause that I should do so

1643, A89026 that that very image of the Beast, which the false prophet did give life unto, did cause that whosoever shall not worship the image of the Beast should be slaine

1659, A76798 Not that the Holy Ghost was the father of Christ, but that the Holy Ghost did cause that a Virgin should conceive without a man
When the same EEBO search was repeated, no examples of “did cause” with simple finite complementation came up in the largest 18th-century database, ECCO, which has more than nine billion words.

**Conclusion**

Because of the strong growth in the publishing of new titles, we would need to find nearly 300 original examples of this complex finite *cause* syntax in ECCO (as this database is currently constituted) in order to come close to matching the observed popularity of the first half of the early modern era. At this point, this appears to be an impossibility, since EEBO indicates that the usage diminished in popularity in the 1600s and because ECCO currently indicates that it died out in the early 1700s. (The ECCO database does stand in need of significant improvement, but what is currently available has been carefully searched.)

As databases improve and expand, known instances of this syntax occurring outside the Book of Mormon will likely increase over time. Yet it will be difficult to alter the position that Joseph Smith was unlikely to produce this kind of language on the basis of revealed ideas. First, the heavily finite verb complementation sustained throughout the Book of Mormon, after quite a few different verbs, argues against a revealed-ideas approach. From what I have seen so far in my detailed searches of the EEBO and ECCO databases, only some of William Caxton’s late 15th-century translations out of Latin and French have anything like the Book of Mormon’s patterns in this regard.26 Second, a lack of contemporary, early 19th-century textual support for this specific construction argues against a revealed-ideas approach. A finding of several contemporary authors who use multiple, original instances of this specific syntactic structure should be necessary in order to overturn this position. Third, the combined archaism and the redundant pronominal usage and even perhaps the extended, multiple complementation argue against a revealed-ideas approach.

This distinctive construction, then, is a prime example of how the language of Joseph Smith’s 1829 dictation differed from what biblical imitators produced, with the Book of Mormon using esoteric forms of expression missing from the King James Bible. It is this kind of comparative study — which in the case of the Book of Mormon is not a one-off proposition — that leads one to consider rejecting a biblical imitation hypothesis for its English, and to consider accepting that the text might actually contain genuine nonbiblical archaism.
Stanford Carmack has a linguistics and a law degree from Stanford University as well as a doctorate in Hispanic Languages and Literature from the University of California, Santa Barbara, specializing in historical syntax and textual analysis. He currently researches Book of Mormon syntax and lexis as they relate to English usage and contributes to aspects of the Book of Mormon critical text project carried out by Royal Skousen.

Appendix

Complex Finite Complementation with Shall

So far, 14 instances of syntax of the form “«cause» NP that NP shall <infinitive>” have been noted in the textual record before the time of the Book of Mormon (see further below for two biblically reworked examples):

- c1469, A21703 (1485) that shall cause me that I shall not be known
- 1548, A06510 for that shall cause us that we shall not be so secure and so sluggish in ourselves,
- 1579, A14461 and that he will cause them that they shall not swell over as a flood doth his waters,
- 1590, A16509 to cause a ship that she shall not sink
- 1592, A19165 but also causeth other stones near adjoining that they shall not burn
- 1618, A04062 to cause him that he shall not have time to hold his wind,
- + 1620, A69038 and I will cause you that you shall walk in my precepts, and that you shall observe and keep my commandments.
- 1634, A09763 the great … teeth … of a wolf, being hanged about an horse neck, cause him that he shall never tire and be weary,
- 1654, A85510 God … will cause those that are his, that they shall perform the duty,
- a1665, CW0117833677 (1718) and cause thee that thou shalt not be able to open thy mouth to praise the Lord.
1668, A30582 he gives such grace as shall cause the soul that it shall have admiring thoughts of it;
1672, A54660 to cause us that we shall not be slothful for this will cause it, that it shall not easily come off
1701, CW0106164956 to put his fear into them, and cause them that they shall not depart from his ways:

Twelve of these date from the early modern period, when far fewer texts were published. In the above set of examples, this complex finite syntax occurs 10 times with two linked pronouns.

**Complex Finite Complementation with Should**

So far, 11 instances of “«cause» NP that NP should <infinitive>” syntax have been noted in the textual record before the time of the Book of Mormon:

1494, A00525 (1533) he by his secret means caused the Germans that they should take no party with Brunhilda
1550, A00327 what reasons adduced and caused me that I should wish and desire such a matter to be brought to pass
1550, A22686 their works and deeds do not cause him that he should perform that which he hath promised
1577, A03448 the brute … caused Malcolm for very fear that he should not be able in any part to match him
1580, A08447 Therefore God being willing to cause man that he should come unto him,
1602, A13971 mercy caused thee that thou shouldest take upon thee all my evils
(2×) 1603, B11962 cannot he that caused the fire that it should not touch the three children make it burn thee quickly, cannot he that caused the lions that they should not touch Daniel, cause them to crush thee softly;
1613, A19420 for to doubt and stand in a mammering, would cause you that you should never truly love God,
1626, A17306  For how is it mere mercy, if any good in us foreseen, first caused it that it should offer a Savior to us?

1700, A92940  to cause them that they should not go up to Jerusalem,

All of these are from the early modern period, when far fewer texts were published compared to the following 18th century. In the above set of examples, this complex finite syntax occurs six times with two linked pronouns. In total, two linked pronouns occur 16 out of 25 times. This same redundant pronominal expression occurs in the Book of Mormon after the verb cause five out of 12 times.

The above are the closest overall matches with Book of Mormon usage, although as noted above, similar examples with other auxiliary verbs do occur, such as “this shame caused him that he would not ask any help of the king” (1598, A16164) and “the veil of blindness … caused them that they could neither apprehend nor comprehend this light” (1659, A89447).

Complex Finite Complementation without *Shall* or *Should*

Many attempts have been made to find original late modern instances of complex finite complementation with the verb cause leading up to the time of the Book of Mormon, using the largest databases. It has been verified that most examples found in the large 18th-century ECCO database represent much earlier language from the early modern period and even before.

The following 11 examples found in ECCO have linked pronouns but no *shall* or *should* auxiliary. Of these 11, seven or eight are from the late middle and early modern periods, and just three originated in the late modern period:

- c1430, CW0103915588 (1787) which causeth me that I labour no farther therein,
- c1460, CW0103916108 (1787) and truly that caused me that I and my fellowship tarried,
- 1523, CW0103201134 (1767) but that is great hurte to the ewes, and wyll cause them, that they wyll not take the ramme at the tyme of the yere for pouertye,
c1580, CW0103400026 (1761) till the force of the flame and smoak caused him that he could see no more;

1662, CW0117799011 (1753) It was a fever, which caused him that he could scarce sleep that night.

1682, CW0121068093 (1707) and you shall cause me that I dwell securely with you,

1685, CB0131970053 (1801) which causeth us, that we cannot obey them and God.

1716 (1679), CB0126722335 (1794) When this epistle is read among you, cause it that it be read also in the church of the Laodiceans,

1727, CW0108152992 and which causes them that they are not stock’d with half that variety as they ought,

a1732, CW0119093951 (1773) causing them that they may trust one another.

1744, CW0117084319 or cause them that they have to be new tinned, cleansed, etc.

The 1716 example is a paraphrase of Colossians 4:16, which occurs as a simple finite construction in the King James Bible. This 1716 paraphrase matches the language first appearing in a 1679 book, which could have been the later author’s source (this 1716 book was reprinted in 1794). Setting this one aside leaves only three early 18th-century pronominal examples of the complex finite construction without shall or should. Of course, some later examples could be found as databases like ECCO and Google Books improve in quality, but for now the syntax appears to have been in a fairly complete state of obsolescence by the middle of the 18th century, an observation that is also supported by its apparent absence from the 5,012 texts consulted in the Evans database, a 17th- and 18th-century early American corpus.

Two Biblical Reworkings with Complex Finite Complementation

One even later example of the Book of Mormon’s complex finite cause syntax that I found for this study is an artificially created instance that is different from even pseudo-archaic production. It was published 65 years before the Book of Mormon was set down in writing. It is from Anthony Purver’s “Quaker Bible” and is a reworking or retranslation of Revelation 11:3. It reads as follows:
1764, CW0119450491

And I will cause my two witnesses, that they shall prophesy a thousand two hundred sixty days, clothed with sackcloth.

In the King James Bible, this passage does not have a causative verb, and it reads with the conjunction and, not that:

Revelation 11:3

I will give power unto my two witnesses, and they shall prophesy a thousand two hundred and threescore days, clothed in sackcloth.

Greek δώσω, δίδωμι “(will) give” and καί “and”.

This 1764 outlier is the result of an author consciously tinkering with an established King James wording, and doing so by investigating the language of other English versions, as well as the Latin Vulgate and the original Greek. In contrast, every Book of Mormon instance of this complex finite structure is an original English expression that works within the surrounding extrabiblical narrative. And of course Joseph Smith did not know any other languages in 1829 when he dictated the Book of Mormon. He was a monolingual English speaker.

What Purver might have done first was change the verb from give to cause, even though the original Greek equivalent means “will give,” as shown above. The object of give in this passage is power, and this word is italicized in the King James Bible, meaning that it does not occur in the original Greek. This might have prompted a revision in the first place. If Purver first replaced give with cause, and deleted “power unto,” he would have then been faced with a choice as to what to do with the independent King James clause that begins with “and they shall prophesy.” His initial rewrite probably gave him “I will cause my two witnesses.” Unlike the King James clause with give, such a clause with cause is ungrammatical without a following complement. Because of that, he would have needed to create a complement. He could have replaced “and they shall” with to, making an infinitival complement, but instead he decided on a simpler replacement of and with that, creating the archaic, complex finite causative construction.

Writing for the *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography* (ODNB), David Norton had this to say about Anthony Purver’s Bible: “In its renderings and its language, his ‘Quaker’s Bible’ sometimes anticipates later versions, but it was rarely appreciated. Not only was the language constantly unlike that of the King James Bible but it was often decidedly colloquial.”27 Charles Spurgeon said of Purver’s work: “Often
ungrammatical and unintelligible. Not without its good points, but much more curious than useful.”

We can see in some of Purver’s notes that he consulted Tyndale’s original language and the Latin Vulgate and the views of various scriptural experts. Yet he avoided Tyndale’s similar syntax in a slightly earlier passage — wording that found its way into the King James Bible:

2 Peter 1:8 they *make you* that ye *shall* neither be barren, nor unfruitful in the knowledge of our Lord Jesus Christ.

Purver’s version they will *make you* not idle, nor unfruitful in the knowledge of our Lord Jesus Christ.

The above King James language is the best model for the complex finite causative syntax of the Book of Mormon, yet despite its presence in the biblical text, it does not occur in the 25 pseudo-archaic writings, and the syntax was hardly ever produced, except in the early modern era. Besides this complex finite case, the King James Bible does not have any other finite examples with the verb *make*, whether simple or complex. The Book of Mormon has several finite examples after the verb *make*, including a simple finite instance with *shall* at 1 Nephi 17:12.

Suppose we were to argue, on the basis of Purver’s work or even 2 Peter 1:8, that because Joseph Smith was likewise saturated with biblical language, this led to his producing 12 complex finite constructions with the verb *cause*. The argument fails at the outset, of course, since no known pseudo-archaic author produced original examples of the syntax, even though many of them were also saturated with King James idiom. Indeed, no pseudo-archaic author is known to have produced even simple finite syntax after the verb *make*. Among the 25 texts, clausal complementation following *make* is all infinitival. Yet there are several complex finite examples in the Book of Mormon, as well as the simple finite with *shall* at 1 Nephi 17:12. Structurally speaking, then, this means that in the case of the verb *make*, just as in the case of *cause*, the Book of Mormon’s syntax does not present as any known pseudo-archaic production.

Joseph Bryant Rotherham’s *Emphasised Bible* provides us with an odd late 19th-century example of complex finite complementation after the verb *cause*:
Revelation 3:9; EYt3pKfob2UC (1890)\textsuperscript{29}

I will cause \textbf{them that they shall} have come,

This is from the tenth edition of the \textit{Emphasised Bible}, first published in 1872.

The finite \textit{that}-clause appears here because Rotherham literally translated the Greek conjunction ἵνα ”that”. In the King James Bible, the last part of this verse reads with infinitival complements:

Revelation 3:9

\textit{behold, I will make them to come and worship before thy feet, and to know that I have loved thee}

The co-occurrence of future tense “will cause” with a verb-dependent \textit{perfect} tense “shall have come” (more specifically, a future subjunctive perfect) is a nonstandard tense sequence. The EEBO Phase 1 database does not have this language; it does not even have a simple finite example of “will cause that NP shall have <past.pple>.” Rotherham’s rewording also has conjoined “shall worship” and “shall get to know,” which is more standard syntax.

**Likely Alternatives to the Causative Construction in 3 Nephi 29:4**

If Joseph Smith had been responsible for expressing the relevant portion of 3 Nephi 29:4 in 1829 (the first \textit{it} was deleted for the 1837 edition), based on specific ideas that were revealed to him, he would have had a few choices available to him. Here are those choices, ordered according to what syntactic studies indicate would have been likely for him in the early 19th century:

**Infinitival**

\textbf{JS 1st choice} he will cause \textbf{it to overtake you soon}

**Simple finite**

\textbf{JS 2nd choice} he will cause \textbf{that it overtake you soon}
\textbf{JS 3rd choice} he will cause \textbf{that it will/may soon overtake you}
\textbf{JS 4th choice} he will cause \textbf{that it shall soon overtake you}

**Complex finite**

\textbf{JS 5th choice} he will cause \textbf{it that it overtake you soon}
\textbf{JS 6th choice} he will cause \textbf{it that it will/may soon overtake you}
\textbf{JS 7th choice} he will cause \textbf{it that it shall soon overtake you}

\textbf{Note:} Biblical usage is not to use a future modal auxiliary verb in this context; such simpler usage might have also been generally preferred in the late modern period. In addition, Joseph’s early writings show that he preferred the future auxiliary \textit{will over shall}. (There is a similar example with \textit{will}}
rather than shall after the verb suffer at 1 Nephi 13:30, and an analogous 1598 example with caused and would given above.) The modal auxiliary may was also a possibility that might have been more likely than shall in 1829. Some fluidity in the position of the adverb soon was possible in this case, but these possibilities have not been counted as additional choices. For example, the adverb could have split the infinitive in choice 1: “to soon overtake you.”

The actual language of the text at 3 Nephi 29:4 was likely to have been far from Joseph’s preferred native expression. There are many other ways he probably would have preferred to have phrased it. It is evidence like this — something we frequently encounter in the Book of Mormon — which strongly suggests that he was not responsible for wording the text.

**Endnotes**

1 Excerpt taken from the Book of Mormon showing an example of complex finite complementation after the verb cause. Quotes are taken from Royal Skousen, ed., *The Book of Mormon: The Earliest Text* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2009), https://bookofmormoncentral.org/content/book-mormon-earliest-text. This short excerpt now reads with a who instead of a which.


4 In searching a large early modern database for texts with at least 20 causative constructions with the verb cause, I found hardly any whose finite complementation rate exceeded 10 percent.

5 Early Modern English is often taken to span the years 1500 to 1700, but sometimes it is taken to begin a little earlier, reaching
back to the first printed book in English, which was published in either 1473 or 1474.

6 That the text contains a very large amount of early modern syntax and lexis — often nonbiblical and far beyond any known pseudo-archaic effort — points to early modern competence as the reason.

7 Two additional examples of the syntax, those currently known as first appearing closest in time to the Book of Mormon (in 1764 and 1872), are artificially constructed examples made by considering original biblical language, other translations, and other English versions. Because they are different from original pseudo-archaic production, they are not included as part of the general discussion in the body of this paper. See the section of the appendix on biblical reworking for these two examples and some discussion.

8 The syntactic structure, simply stated, is “«cause» NP that S” («cause» stands for various forms of the verb, NP stands for the causee (a noun phrase), and S stands for a verb-dependent sentence-like clause, in this case “it shall pass away.” The technical term for “«cause» NP that S” language is ditransitive clausal complementation (see Randolph Quirk et al., A Comprehensive Grammar of the English Language (London: Longman, 1985) [CGEL], 1170–71, 1212–13 [§16.20, §16.59]). The term ditransitive indicates that two objects follow the verb cause, with the second object being a that-clause.

This complex finite syntax can be less simply stated as:

<subj.> «cause» NP_{(obj.)} [that NP_{(subj.)} <modal aux.> <infinitive> ]_{(obj. clause)}

The first NP, “the earth,” is an object (historically, an indirect object) and a full noun phrase; the second NP, it, is a subject pronoun that refers back to “the earth” (a pronoun is also technically a [short] noun phrase).

suggests that it was unlikely that Joseph Smith worded most Doctrine and Covenants revelations.

10 The term mandative subjunctive is a classification of some grammarians; see, for example, CGEL 156–57 (§3.59).

11 The King James Bible does have one instance of mandative shall after the main verb make — see the biblically reworked section of the appendix.


14 For example, the largest 18th-century database of English texts, Eighteenth Century Collections Online (ECCO), https://www.gale.com/primary-sources/eighteenth-century-collections-online, currently has 18,845 instances of “caused <pers.obj.pron.> to” during the last 30 years of the century (1771–1800) (no intervening punctuation; 8,341 texts). In contrast, ECCO only has 17 instances of “caused that <pers.subj.pron.>” (no intervening punctuation; 16 texts). Over this span of time, then, ECCO has slightly more than 1,000 times as many infinitival instances with personal pronouns as finite instances.

15 Taking the issue of biblical analogy further, we find that the textual data oblige us to conclude that any thorough attempt to explain Book of Mormon English on that basis fails in many instances.

16 See NOL 577. The Bible also has hundreds of causative constructions with the verb make — all but one infinitival (see the appendix for the only finite example).

nine simple finite instances with the verb *cause*, but none with *shall* or *should* as modal auxiliaries. In addition, most of her verb complementation after the verb *cause* is infinitival. Thus her usage in this syntactic domain, though containing a comparatively large number of finite examples, is noticeably different from that of the Book of Mormon.

Observation subject to change; excluding consciously modified biblical language; see the section of the appendix on biblical reworking.

This is the only instance of complex finite cause syntax that has been edited out of the text; see ATV under this verse for the textual history: Royal Skousen, Analysis of Textual Variants of the Book of Mormon (Provo, UT: FARMS, 2004–2009); Analysis of Textual Variants of the Book of Mormon, 2nd edition (Provo, UT: FARMS, 2018).

This an identifier in Early English Books Online (http://name.umdl.umich.edu/A21703.0001.001), the largest database of Early Modern English texts. EEBO A21703 is Thomas Malory’s Le Morte d’Arthur, written about 1469, first published in 1485.

This an identifier in Eighteenth Century Collections Online (https://go.gale.com/ps/advancedSearch.do?inputFieldValues[0]=CW0106164956&inputFieldNames[0]=RN&method=doSearch&searchType=AdvancedSearchForm&prodId=ECCO), the largest 18th-century database of English texts. ECCO CW0106164956 is the 8th edition (with additions) of a 1673 text written by William Salmon.

The adverbs are soon and not; the pronoun it in 3 Nephi 29:4 seems to refer back to the sword of the Lord’s justice, mentioned earlier in the verse.

ESTC stands for the English Short Title Catalogue (http://estc.bl.uk/), a listing of over 480,000 items published between 1473 and 1800. The EEBO and ECCO databases currently contain between 60 and 75 percent of ESTC titles; as a result, there are still many texts to be searched, although many of these are very short texts.

Complex finite complementation after the verb cause probably died out earlier than it did after the verb command, because infinitival complementation was much more strongly favored after the verb cause during the early modern period.

And even in those Caxton texts, verb complementation that is heavily finite is confined to the verb command.


The Word of the Lord
as a Metonym for Christ

Loren Spendlove

Abstract: The word of the Lord and the word of God are common expressions in the Bible. Frequently, these phrases refer to the written or spoken covenantal words of God to his people as given through the prophets. However, exegetical study of these expressions has revealed that they also serve as metonyms, or substitutions for the name of God himself. In this paper I explore these metonymous usages of the Word of the Lord and the Word of God as stand-ins for Christ in the Bible and in the Book of Mormon.

The word of the Lord and the word of God are important terms in the Old and New Testaments. In the New Testament the apostle John introduces us to the idea that the Word of God is metonymous with Jesus Christ. In the opening chapter of the gospel of John we read:

In the beginning was the Word [ὁ λόγος, o logos], and the Word was with God [θεόν, Theou], and the Word was God. … And the Word was made flesh, and dwelt among us, (and we beheld his glory, the glory as of the only begotten of the Father,) full of grace and truth.” (John 1:1, 14 KJV, emphasis added)

In 1 John 5:7 we are told, “For there are three that bear record in heaven, the Father [ὁ πατήρ, ho pater], the Word [ὁ λόγος, ho logos], and

1. Metonymy has been defined as, “In rhetoric, a trope in which one word is put for another; a change of names which have some relation to each other; as when we say, ‘a man keeps a good table,’ instead of good provisions. ‘We read Virgil,’ that is, his poems or writings. ‘They have Moses and the prophets,’ that is, their books or writings. A man has a clear head, that is, understanding, intellect; a warm heart, that is, affections” [emphasis in original]. American Dictionary of the English Language, Noah Webster 1828, Original Facsimile Edition (San Francisco: Foundation for American Christian Education, 2010), s.v. “metonymy.”
the Holy Ghost [τὸ Ἁγιόν Πνεῦμα, to Hagion Pneuma]: and these three are one” (KJV, emphasis added). Also, in the introductory verses of the book of Revelation we are given:

The Revelation of Jesus Christ, which God gave to him, to show to his servants things which must shortly come to pass; and he sent and signified it by his angel [ἄγγελος, angelos] to his servant John: Who bore testimony of the word of God [τὸν λόγον τοῦ θεοῦ, ton logon tou Theou], and of the testimony of Jesus Christ, and of all things that he saw. (Revelation 1:1–2 WEB, emphasis added)

Again, in the book of Revelation, John recorded a vision that he beheld of Christ, the Faithful and True, riding on a white horse:

I saw heaven standing open and there before me was a white horse, whose rider is called Faithful and True. With justice he judges and wages war. His eyes are like blazing fire, and on his head are many crowns. He has a name written on him that no one knows but he himself. He is dressed in a robe dipped in blood, and his name is the word of God [ὁ λόγος τοῦ θεοῦ, ho logos tou Theou]. (Revelation 19:11–13 NIV, emphasis added)

In this passage, not only does John identify the Word of God with Christ, but he also declares the Word of God to be Christ’s name. The apostle Peter appears to echo John’s view: “For you have been born again, not of perishable seed, but of imperishable, through the living and enduring word [λόγου, logou] of God [θεοῦ, Theou]” (1 Peter 1:23 NIV, emphasis added). The only other location in the New Testament where we encounter this idea of being born again is in the third chapter

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2. Many Bible scholars believe that there is a textual problem with 1 John 5:7. It is only in eight late Greek manuscripts that most of the verse appears; earlier Greek manuscripts of 1 John record a much-shortened text. As such, modern translations typically present the verse as only reading, “For there are three that testify” (NIV). See Daniel D. Wallace, “The Textual Problem in 1 John 5:7–8,” Bible.org, June 25, 2004, https://bible.org/article/textual-problem-1-john-57-8.

3. This passage can be displayed as a parallelism, helping us identify the Word of God with Jesus Christ:

A Who bore testimony
B of the word of God,
A’ and of the testimony
B’ of Jesus Christ,

4. The World English Bible (WEB) is an update of the American Standard Version (ASV) Bible.
of John as Jesus taught Nicodemus. Jesus taught that being *born again* is
to be “born of the Spirit” (John 3:8, KJV). Alma, the son of Alma, added
that to be *born again* is to be “born of God, changed from [our]
carnal and fallen state, to a state of righteousness, being redeemed of God,
becoming his sons and daughters” (Mosiah 27:25). Combining Peter’s
and Alma’s words we learn that those who are born again accomplish
this “through the living and enduring Word of God” [words of Peter],
even Jesus Christ, “becoming his sons and daughters” [words of Alma].

How did John and Peter come to identify Jesus Christ with the Word
of God? Was this a novel concept that developed during 1st
century Christianity, or does it have its roots in ancient Israelite theology? In this
paper I discuss the origin, uses, and potential meaning of this phrase in
the Hebrew Bible, the New Testament, and the Book of Mormon.

### Abraham’s Vision of the Word

The initial appearance in the Bible of the English phrase “the Word of
[God]” occurs in the story of Abraham in Genesis 15:1:

> After these things [הדברים האלה, ha’devarim ha’ele, literally “these words”] *the word of the Lord* [דבר־יהוה, devar-Yahweh]
came [היה, hayah, literally “was”] unto Abram *in a vision* [במחזה, bammachazeh], saying, "Fear not, Abram: I am thy
shield, and thy exceeding great reward.” (KJV, emphasis added)

We find closely associated wording three verses later: “And, behold,
*the word of the Lord* [דבר־יהוה, devar-Yahweh] *came* [the verb is only inferred here] unto him, saying, …” (Genesis 15:4 KJV, emphasis added). Regarding these initial verses from Genesis 15, Charles Gieschen wrote:

> There is a very early precedent for *YHWH’s visible form* in a *theophany* being identified as “the Word of YHWH”:

> [Genesis 15.1] After these things the Word of YHWH came to Abram in a vision, “Fear not, Abram, I am your shield; your reward shall be very great.” [2] But Abram said, “O Lord

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5. Including the various names and titles of God: יהוה (Yahweh), אלהים (Elohim), יהוה אלהים (Yahweh Elohim), etc.

6. Even though his name has not yet been changed from Abram לאברם to Abraham אברהם in Genesis 15, unless I am citing scripture or another author’s work, I consistently refer to the patriarch as Abraham in this paper.

7. Charles Gieschen is the academic dean and professor of Exegetical Theology at Concordia Theological Seminary.
Elohim, what will you give me, for I continue childless, and the heir of my house is Eliezer of Damascus?” [3] And Abram said, “Behold, you have given me no offspring; and a slave born in my house will be my heir.” [4] And behold, the Word of YHWH came to him, “This man shall not be your heir; your own son will be your heir.”

The phenomenon described seems to begin with a vision (15.1), then progresses to a manifestation that comes to Abram in order to speak and lead him outside to see the stars … There is good reason to compare this theophany to those involving the Angel of YHWH in subsequent portions of the OT. Thus, the Word of YHWH could be considered to be an angelomorphic figure, especially by later interpreters in the first century CE.

Gieschen described the phrase “the word of the Lord came” (היה דבר־יהוה, hayah devar-Yahweh) as the appearance of an “angelomorphic figure” to Abraham, which he also identified as “YHWH’s visible form.” Adding support to Gieschen’s interpretation, Richard Lammert wrote:

Gieschen notes that the word of YHWH not only speaks to Abram but also takes him outside. The word of YHWH here is obviously more than a title for a verbal event; it is a title for a personal appearance of YHWH. Abram accepts the statement made by the word of YHWH as if it were YHWH’s own word: Abram believed YHWH. Then the word of YHWH identifies himself as YHWH. At the conclusion of the pericope, YHWH makes a covenant with Abram that same day. Since the only figure — other than Abram — who has been introduced

8. Bogdan Bucur wrote: “As for angelomorphic, this term, coined by Jean Daniélou, is now widely used by scholars writing on the emergence of christology. I follow Crispin Fletcher-Louis’s definition and use it ‘wherever there are signs that an individual or community possesses specifically angelic characteristics [emphasis in original] or status [emphasis added], though for whom identity cannot be reduced to that of an angel.’ The virtue of this definition is that it signals the use of angelic characteristics [emphasis in original] in descriptions of God or humans [emphasis added], while not necessarily implying that the latter are angels stricsto sensu [emphasis in original].” Bogdan G. Bucur, “Hierarchy, Prophecy, and the Angelomorphic Spirit: A Contribution to the Study of the Book of Revelation’s Wirkungsgeschichte,” Journal of Biblical Literature 127, no. 1 (2008): 175.

in the text so far is the word of YHWH, *it is reasonable to conclude that the word of YHWH is the same YHWH who made a covenant with Abram.*

It is interesting to note that during this theophanic experience, Yahweh, as the word of Yahweh, covenanted with Abraham that he would multiply his seed, and Abraham assented to this covenantal promise by verbally expressing his *amen.*

Moshe Anbar wrote that rather than merely describing an auditory experience, these verses in Genesis 15 most likely depict a visual theophany to Abraham:

*hāyā dēbar YHWH ‘el ʿabrām … lēʾmōr* “the word of the Lord came unto Abraham … saying.” This opening formula is typical of the delivery of the word of God to the prophets. We possess an example which may indicate that this prophetic formula could refer to a revelation which was originally visual.

Terence Fretheim wrote that personal encounters with the Word of God, as in Genesis 15, describe more than just a spoken revelation; they reveal the embodied and visible Word of God:

In view of the importance of the theophany in any understanding of the word of God, one can say that the word of God so given is an embodied word. God assumes human form in order to speak a word in personal encounter. The word spoken is the focus for the appearance, but the fact that

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12. Moshe Anbar is Professor Emeritus in Bible at Tel Aviv University.

13. Theophanies may involve the appearance of God in physical, human form, but they are not limited to this mode of revelation. In the Bible, God is often depicted as revealing himself by way of natural phenomena: “The most common natural form of divine appearance in Israelite literature is the thunderstorm, with its dark storm cloud representing the divine chariot or throne (Habakkuk 3:8; Ezekiel 1), its thunder representing God’s voice (Exodus 19:16, 19; Psalm 18:13), and its fiery lightning bolts God’s weapons (Habakkuk 3:11; Psalm 18:14).” *The Anchor Bible Dictionary*, vol. 6 (New York: Doubleday, 1992), s.v. “Theophany in the OT.”


15. Terence Fretheim was a Professor of Old Testament at Luther Seminary.
the word is commonly conveyed in personal encounter is of considerable significance. “Visible words” have a kind of import that merely spoken words do not.\textsuperscript{16}

**Samuel and the Word of the Lord**

As with Abraham, Gieschen believes that the revelation to the young Samuel, who “ministered before the LORD under Eli” (1 Samuel 3:1 NIV), was also a visible theophany:

The visual aspect of the Word of YHWH as a theophany is also prominent in the Samuel call narrative. Consider these select portions:

[1 Samuel 3.1] Now the boy Samuel was ministering to YHWH under Eli. And the Word of YHWH was rare in those days; there was not frequent vision. [3.6] And YHWH called again, “Samuel!” And Samuel arose and went to Eli, and said, “Here I am, for you called me.” But he said, “I did not call, my son; lie down again.” [3.7] Now Samuel did not yet know YHWH, and the Word of YHWH had not yet been revealed to him. [3.10] YHWH came and stood forth, calling as at other times, “Samuel! Samuel!” [3.21] And YHWH appeared again at Shiloh, for YHWH revealed himself to Samuel at Shiloh by the Word of YHWH.

Although the angelomorphic appearance of God to a prophet, such as those to Moses in Exodus 3 and 33, is less prominent in prophetic literature, this earlier theophanic model appears to be the basis of the expression “the Word of YHWH came to the prophet.”\textsuperscript{17}

Given Gieschen’s observations of 1 Samuel 3, specific passages from that chapter deserve further emphasis:

- The Word of Yahweh \[ דבר־יהוה \] was rare \[ יקר \], literally, was precious \[ יקר \] in those days (verse 1).
- There was not frequent vision \[ אין חזון נפרץ \], there was no vision breaking forth \[ יפרץ \] (verse 1).
- Yahweh called \[ יקרא יהוה \] (verse 4).
- Samuel did not yet know Yahweh \[ ושמואל תמר 드ת אהיהוה \] (verse 7).

\textsuperscript{16} Anchor Bible Dictionary, vol. 6, s.v. “Word of God.”
\textsuperscript{17} Gieschen, Angelomorphic Christology, 104, underline original.
• The Word of Yahweh had not yet been revealed to him [טוהר/תים אליהם דבריהו/יו] (verse 7).

• Yahweh came and stood forth [ויבא יהוה ויתיצב, literally, and came Yahweh and stood] (verse 10).

• Yahweh appeared again at Shiloh [ויבא יהוה והרא את שילה] (verse 21).

• Yahweh revealed himself to Samuel at Shiloh by the Word of Yahweh [כי נגלה יהוה אל שמעון דבר יוהו] (verse 21).

Taken together, these passages seem to confirm that Yahweh not only spoke to but also physically showed himself to Samuel. As such, it was reasonable for Gieschen to arrive at the conclusion that Yahweh, as the Word of Yahweh, showed himself to the prophet Samuel. Lammert agrees with this assessment:

A theophany of God as the word of YHWH is primarily associated with the prophets of Israel. 1 Samuel 3:1 supports this conclusion: “The boy Samuel ministered before YHWH under Eli. In those days the word of YHWH was rare [ודבריהו/יו קיר/ך היה], there were not many visions [אין חזון נפרץ].” Because the author of the text probably wrote in a later period when there were more frequent theophanies of God, he could say that in “those days” (as compared to the writer’s day) the word of YHWH “was rare.” The explicit connection between the word of YHWH and “visions” appears to underscore that the word of YHWH is not simply a spoken or written word of God but a manifestation of God that appears in a vision.

… If one understands the word of YHWH as a theophany, one would more readily say that the word of YHWH himself appears in the vision, announcing the word of prophecy. This can be demonstrated from the text. The following text of Samuel makes no sharp distinction between the word of YHWH and YHWH (to use Grether’s terminology, the two

<table>
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<th>Hebrew</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>בְּשַׁלְוִי</td>
<td>And Samuel not yet knew</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>אֲלִיו</td>
<td>Yahweh</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>וַיַּגְלֵא</td>
<td>And not yet was revealed to him</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>תְמוּנָה</td>
<td>the Word of Yahweh.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

18. Verse 7 is likely structured as a parallelism, helping us identify Yahweh with the Word of Yahweh:
terms are used “promiscuously”). Thus, the impression is underscored that the two are the same.\textsuperscript{19}

Lammert, quoting Gieschen, added that “if there is no distinction between the word of YHWH and YHWH, then the two are metonymous, and the word of YHWH is a theophany.”\textsuperscript{20} If we accept these conclusions, then it would be more appropriate to express the phrase the Word of Yahweh in English with a capital W, since it represents a proper name. Lammert is also careful to clarify that although the Word of Yahweh can be identified as being metonymous with Yahweh, not all occurrences of the phrase in the Bible can carry that meaning:

This analysis of selected passages regarding the word of YHWH shows that they readily support the understanding of the Word as a theophany, a visible manifestation of YHWH. YHWH himself appears to the patriarchs and prophets, making known his revelatory word to them. \textit{This does not mean that all passages with the word of YHWH can be so understood}. Some indisputably relate to the covenantal word of God in the commandments, or to other words. But this analysis allows us to conclude that several occurrences of the word of YHWH in biblical texts should be considered theophanies \textit{if the text indicates that the word of YHWH came and spoke with an individual or group}.\textsuperscript{21}

In the above passage Lammert makes a distinction between the Word of Yahweh as the “visible manifestation of YHWH,” and the word of Yahweh as “the covenantal word of God in the commandments.” In 1 Samuel 3:7, we are told that “Samuel did not yet \textit{know} [יָדָּה, yada] the Lord [יהוה, Yahweh], neither was \textit{the word of the Lord} [דבר יהוה, devar-Yahweh] yet \textit{revealed} [גָּלוֹת, yiggaleh] unto him” (KJV, emphasis added). Later, in verse 21 we read, “And \textit{the Lord} [יהוה, Yahweh] appeared [לָהֵרֹא, leheraoh]\textsuperscript{22} again in Shiloh: for \textit{the word of the Lord} [דבר יהוה, devar-Yahweh] \textit{revealed} [נגלה, niglah] himself to Samuel in Shiloh by \textit{the word of the Lord} [דבר יהוה, devar-Yahweh]” (KJV, emphasis added). The verbs גָּלוֹת (yiggaleh) in verse 7 and נָגָלה (niglah) in verse 21, both translated as \textit{revealed} in the KJV, are derived from the root ה-ל-ג (g-l-h), and carry the meaning of “let[ting]

\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{19} Lammert, “The Word of YHWH,” 203–204, emphasis in original.
\item \textsuperscript{20} Ibid., 201.
\item \textsuperscript{21} Ibid., 204, emphasis added.
\item \textsuperscript{22} The root of לָהֵרֹא (leheraoh) is ה-ר-ו (r-a-h), meaning to see.
\end{itemize}
oneself be seen, to become visible, to reveal oneself.” In verse 7, we are told that prior to Samuel’s nighttime experience, the Word of the Lord had not yet been revealed to him. Another way of phrasing this could be that the Word of the Lord had not yet let himself be seen by Samuel. However, in verse 21 we find that things have changed; the Lord did reveal himself, or let himself be seen, by Samuel “by the Word of the Lord.” These two verses help establish that the Word of Yahweh is metonymous with Yahweh, at least in these passages.

In addition, it is possible that the author of 1 Samuel inserted wordplay into the story of Samuel to visually and audibly demonstrate that things were about to change with his call as a prophet. No longer would the word of the Lord be rare; Yahweh was about to turn the current state of affairs on its head. In 1 Samuel 3:1, we are told that the word of the Lord “was rare.” In Hebrew, this phrase is expressed as הוהי יקר (hayah yaqar). Signaling a change in the status quo, in verse four, we read that “the Lord called Samuel.” The Hebrew for “the Lord called” is יהוה יקר (yiqra yahweh) and יהוה יקר (yiqra yahweh) are closely related visual and auditory matches, but with inverted word order. It has long been held that the name Yahweh (יהוה YHWH) is derived from the verb “to be,” of which הוהי (hayah, “was”) represents the third person, masculine, singular, perfect tense. So in this passage, הוהי (hayah) could be seen as metonymous with יהוה (YHWH). And although divergent in meaning, יקר (yaqar) and יקר (yiqra) are nearly identical to each other, both visually and audibly. So, when the author of 1 Samuel inverted the word order of the two phrases, it could have been a visual and audible representation of the reversal that was about to occur with Samuel’s call. Visions of the Word of the Lord would no longer be rare; rather, they would become frequent after Yahweh called Samuel!


24. Saul Leeman wrote, “The Rashbam identifies the name ‘Ehyeh’ [I will be] with the Tetragrammaton (henceforth ‘Hashem’). To do so, he must explain how the initial ‘aleph’ changes to the ‘yod’ and how the third letter, yod, changes to a ‘vav.’ The aleph-yod exchange he explains quite simply; that when God refers to Himself he would say Ehyeh, while we speaking in third person would say ‘Yihyeh [He will be].’ Likewise, the yod-vav exchange is equally understandable, as the two letters are frequently exchangeable. For example, in Ecclesiastes 2:22 we find the word ‘hoveh’ where we would expect ‘hayah [to happen].’” Saul Leeman, “The Names of God,” Jewish Bible Quarterly 32, no. 2 (2004): 1 emphasis original, https://jbqnew.jewishbible.org/assets/Uploads/322/322_Namesgo2.pdf.
The Word of the Lord Came to Jonah

As with the story of Abraham in Genesis 15, the book of Jonah begins with a possible theophany: “The word of the Lord [דבר-יהוה, devar-Yahweh] came [יה, hayah] to Jonah the son of Amittai” (Jonah 1:1 NASB, emphasis added). Regarding this passage, Phillip Cary25 wrote:

Jonah, like father Abraham and all Israel, is chosen by God for the blessing of all the families of the earth (Genesis 12:3; 22:18; 28:14; cf. Acts 3:25), but he is a chosen one who flees his election and the mission that comes with it, as chosen ones are wont to do in the Bible. The only absolute exception is the chosen one whose mission, it turns out, is to identify with Jonah. Jesus Christ, the chosen one who never for a moment turns in the opposite direction from where God sends him, has the mission of identifying with Jonah, the chosen one who flees his mission, and thereby redeeming all those who flee and exile themselves from the presence of God. To be the uniquely obedient chosen one, Jesus must stand in the place of the prophet Jonah, the disobedient fool, the elect one who tries his best to refuse the task of the elect but ultimately fails. One must suspect that Jonah ultimately fails to escape his election because the word of the LORD that comes to him is none other than the word that ultimately takes his place, taking upon himself the sin of Jonah, his flight and disobedience, and his three days in the abyss.26

Following Jonah’s initial disobedience, which led to the “three days and three nights in the whale’s belly,” we are told that “the word of the Lord [דבר-יהוה, devar-Yahweh] came to Jonah the second time” (Jonah 3:1 NASB, emphasis added) after he was “vomited … onto the dry land (Jonah 2:10 NASB). The ever-patient Word of the Lord instructed him again to “Arise, go unto Nineveh, that great city, and preach unto it the preaching that I bid thee” (Jonah 3:2, KJV). This time Jonah was obedient and he “arose, and went unto Nineveh, according to the word of the Lord [דבר-יהוה, devar-Yahweh]” (Jonah 3:3 KJV, emphasis added). Twice in this short story we are told that the Word of the Lord came and instructed Jonah.

25. Phillip Cary is a professor of Philosophy at Eastern University.
The Word of the Lord Came to Jeremiah

The book of Jeremiah opens with these words: “The words of Jeremiah [ דברי ירמיהו, divrei Yermiyahu] the son of Hilkiah, of the priests that were in Anathoth in the land of Benjamin: To whom the word of the Lord [ דברי-יהוה, devar-Yahweh] came” (Jeremiah 1:1–2 KJV, emphasis added). As with Abraham, Samuel, and Jonah, this opening line most likely represents both an audible and visual encounter with Yahweh. Referencing these opening verses from Jeremiah 1, Gieschen observed:

Here “the Word of YHWH” came to Jeremiah and spoke in the first person as YHWH (1.4, 11, 13; cf. 2.1). After Jeremiah’s objection (1.6) and YHWH’s verbal reassurance (1.7–8), Jeremiah relates that “then YHWH put forth his hand and touched my mouth” (1.9). What was the appearance of this “Word of YHWH” who was “YHWH” (1.7, 9a, 9b, 12; cf. 1.8, 15, 19) if he could be described as putting forth his hand to touch Jeremiah’s mouth (1.9)? Is this not more than anthropomorphism? Here “word of YHWH” is most likely a figure in continuity with angelomorphic traditions that depict God appearing in the form of a man to a human.27

Again, Lammert agrees with Gieschen’s conclusion: “We can conclude that Jeremiah has recorded a theophany; the word of YHWH that came to him was a visible manifestation of YHWH that he could see and still live.”28 It is interesting to note that the Word of the Lord spoke to Jeremiah personally, in the first person: “Before I formed thee in the belly I knew thee; and before thou camest forth out of the womb I sanctified thee, and I ordained thee a prophet unto the nations” (Jeremiah 1:5, KJV). Throughout the entire first chapter of Jeremiah, the author alternates between using the word of the Lord (דבר-יהוה, devar-Yahweh) and the Lord (יהוה, Yahweh) as if the two terms were altogether interchangeable (see Table 1).

Table 1. Verses and phrases from Jeremiah 1.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Verse</th>
<th>Phrase</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>The word of the Lord (דברי-יהוה, devar-Yahweh)</td>
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<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>The word of the Lord (דברי-יהוה, devar-Yahweh)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>Lord God (אדני יהוה, adonai Yahweh)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7</td>
<td>The Lord (יהוה, Yahweh)</td>
</tr>
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27. Gieschen, Angelomorphic Christology, 105.
Fretheim adds a valuable contribution to the idea of the embodied Word of God that appeared to Jeremiah. Prophets, like Jeremiah and Ezekiel, experienced a physical encounter with the Word of God (Christ) where he placed the word of God in them. The prophets, in turn, became the embodied word of God who preached the word (prophecy) and the Word (Messiah) to God’s people:

The idea of the embodied word becomes particularly apparent in Jeremiah and Ezekiel. In Jeremiah 1:9 (cf. 15:16; Deuteronomy 18:18) the word of God is placed by God’s hand directly into Jeremiah’s mouth; the word is conveyed into his very being without having been spoken. This is graphically portrayed in Ezekiel 3:1–3; the prophet ingests the word of God. The word of God is thereby enfleshed in the very person of the prophet. It is not only what the prophet speaks but who he is that now constitute the word of God. The prophet conveys the word in a way that no simple speaking or writing can. The people now not only hear the word of God from the prophet, they see the word enfleshed in their midst. *The word of God is not a disembodied word; it is a personal word spoken in personal encounter.*

As Fretheim explained, whether the word of God is delivered by the Word of God himself to his prophet, or by the prophet to the people, the word that is delivered is almost always embodied. An exception to this general rule can be found in 3 Nephi 9 where it appears that a disembodied voice was “heard among all the inhabitants of the earth, upon all the face of this land” (3 Nephi 9:1).

30. An exception to this general rule can be found in 3 Nephi 9 where it appears that a disembodied voice was “heard among all the inhabitants of the earth, upon all the face of this land” (3 Nephi 9:1).
31. John McKenzie was a Catholic biblical scholar and theologian.
The most frequent phrase to describe the prophetic experience is “the word of Yahweh came to X.” This is somewhat nuanced from what appears to be the synonymous expression, “Yahweh said to X.” When the word of Yahweh comes, the background of the word as a dynamic entity with its own distinct reality comes into view [emphasis added]. The word is a something [italics in original] which the prophet receives. As a something it is an expansion of a living personality, who in this case is Yahweh Himself [emphasis added]; and it has the power which only that uniquely powerful personality can give it. Its first effect is upon the prophet himself. When Yahweh puts His hand to the mouth of Jeremiah, He puts His word in the mouth of the prophet (Jeremiah 1:9). It is the conscious possession of the word which distinguishes the true prophet from the false, and revelation from human invention.\textsuperscript{32}

McKenzie connected the phrase “the word of Yahweh came to X” with “something which the prophet receives. As a something it is an expansion of a living personality, who in this case is Yahweh Himself.” This something that comes to the prophets, as McKenzie describes it, in the form of “the Word of the Lord” often engages many or all of the prophets’ physical senses, as we learn from Jeremiah’s theophany.

**The Word of the Lord came to Ezekiel**

Ezekiel also had a sensory encounter with the Word of Yahweh similar to Jeremiah’s. As in the story of the prophet Samuel, the book of Ezekiel begins with the account of a priest, Ezekiel, who saw visions (אמרה מצאתי, ere marot) of God. As with Samuel, Jonah, and Jeremiah, the Word of the Lord [דבר־יהוה, devar-Yahweh] came [יהי, hayah] to Ezekiel and delivered words to him that he was instructed to pass along to the people:

In my thirtieth year, in the fourth month on the fifth day, while I was among the exiles by the Kebar River, the heavens were opened and I saw visions of God [אמרה מצאתי אלים, va’ere marot elohim]. On the fifth of the month,\textsuperscript{33} … the word

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\textsuperscript{33} The repetition used in these verses seems to reinforce that Ezekiel’s “visions of God” were metonymic with “the Word of Yahweh” that came to him:

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<th>Hebrew</th>
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<tr>
<td>בַּמֶּשֶׁת הַמַּדָּשׁ</td>
<td>on the fifth of the month (verse 1)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>אָמַרְתָּ אֶלְּהִים</td>
<td>And I saw visions of Elohim (verse 1)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
of the LORD [ דבר יهوֹה, devar-Yahweh] came [ יהוה, hayah] to Ezekiel the priest, the son of Buzi, by the Kebar River in the land of the Babylonians. There the hand of the LORD [ יד יוהוֹה, yad-Yahweh] was on him. … Then he said to me, “Son of man, eat this scroll I am giving you and fill your stomach with it.” So I ate it, and it tasted as sweet as honey in my mouth. He then said to me: “Son of man, go now to the people of Israel and speak my words to them.” (Ezekiel 1:1, 3; 3:3–4 NIV, emphasis added)

Ezekiel, having been visited in vision by the Word of God (Yahweh), was given the word of God (the word of prophecy) in the form of a scroll to eat until his stomach was full. Having eaten, Ezekiel became the embodied word of God, a personal messenger of the Lord ( מלאך יוהוֹה, mal’akh Yahweh,34 cf. Genesis 16:7) who was then charged to preach the word to the people of Israel.

**Summary**

In the opening paragraphs of this paper I asked how John and Peter had come to understand and teach that Jesus was metonymous with the

| A’ | הבכשת התרש | on the fifth of the month (verse 2) |
| B’ | היה דבריוהוֹה אליחזקאל | was [came] the word of Yahweh to Ezekiel (verse 3) |

34. Gieschen wrote, “It is a well documented and ancient tradition of the OT that in several of the narratives where God communicates with humans, the form from which God speaks is identified as מלאך [mal’akh]. The Hebrew term מלאך [mal’akh] is the nominal construct form from לאך [lakh], which means ‘to send’ or possibly ‘to send on a commission’ [sic]. The basic meaning of the nominal, ‘one who is sent’, has led to the common definition: ‘messenger’. Well-defined messenger activity was prominent in the ancient Near East. The OT uses מלאך [mal’akh] for both human messengers (e.g., 1 Sam 11.4) and supernatural messengers (e.g., Psalms 103.20). The Greek term ἄγγελος [angelos] also signifies ‘a messenger’. The use of מלאך [mal’akh] or ἄγγελος [angelos] as a designation for supernatural messengers caused these terms to carry more ontological significance and to become associated with more functions than message delivery, especially in the Second Temple Period. Therefore, by the first century CE, among Jews and Christians, both מלאך [mal’akh] and ἄγγελος [angelos] usually signified the broader technical meaning of ‘a spirit who mediates in various ways between the human and divine realms’. This description retains the basic idea of ‘one sent (with a commission)’, but the role of messenger becomes less dominant. Furthermore, this technical meaning has led to the frequent English translation of both מלאך [mal’akh] and ἄγγελος [angelos] in biblical and related literature as ‘angel’ when the referent is supernatural, and ‘messenger’ when the referent is human.” Gieschen, Angelomorphic Christology, 51.
Word of God. I questioned whether this was a newly-minted first-century Christian concept or if it had its roots in ancient Israelite theology. Following our study of the theophanies experienced by Abraham, Samuel, Jonah, Jeremiah, and Ezekiel, Lammert provides an excellent answer to these introductory questions:

When one grasps the word of YHWH as a theophanic expression, it is not surprising to find the Word as an hypostasis or theophany in the literature of the Second Temple period (such as the Wisdom of Solomon 18:15) or in the New Testament (passages in which the Word is a reference to Jesus Christ such as John 1:1,14). When one views the word of YHWH as a theophany in the Old Testament, its explicit use as such in the Second Temple period and in the New Testament is understood not as a development of its use in the Hebrew Scriptures, but as a continuation. There is no lack of continuity of theology and language between the Old Testament and the New Testament.35

The Word of the Lord in the Book of Mormon

There are several recorded theophanies in the Book of Mormon, among which are visions experienced by Lehi, Nephi, Alma the son of Alma, the sons of Mosiah, and the brother of Jared, to name only a few. In addition to these theophanic experiences there other less obvious occurrences of divine appearances in the Book of Mormon that follow the pattern that we have identified in the Bible involving the metonymous phrases36 the Word of the Lord or the Word of God.

The Word of God Came to Jacob

After the death of Nephi, Jacob felt constrained to preach repentance to the Nephite people. Following the pattern outlined with the biblical prophets, the Word of God [דבר האלהים, devar ha’Elohim37] came to Jacob and delivered a message that he was instructed to declare to the people:

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37. “But the word of God [דבר האלהים, devar ha’Elohim] came unto Shemaiah the man of God, saying” (1 Kings 12:22 KJV, emphasis added). Since we do not possess an original Hebrew text of the Book of Mormon, all back translations into
Wherefore, I must tell you the truth according to the plainness of the word of God. For behold, as I inquired of the Lord, thus came the word unto me, saying: Jacob, get thou up into the temple on the morrow, and declare the word which I shall give thee unto this people. (Jacob 2:11, emphasis added)

Several factors in this passage mediate in favor of interpreting the word of God in this passage as a metonym for Christ. First, Jacob’s “plainness of the word of God” parallels Nephi’s earlier teaching about “the plainness which is in the Lamb of God” (1 Nephi 13:29, emphasis added). If we connect these two ideas, then Jacob’s word of God can be considered metonymous with Nephi’s Lamb of God. Second, after Jacob’s mention of “the word of God [דבר אלהים, devar ha’Elohim]” he tells us that he “inquired of the Lord [יהוה, Yahweh]” and that “the word [הדבר, ha’davar]” came to him. By context it seems apparent that “the word” in this passage is shorthand for “the word of God.” As demonstrated earlier, the phrase “the word of the Lord/the word of God came to X” can be understood as metonymous with an embodied manifestation of God. Jacob continued:

But the word of God [דבר אלהים, devar ha’Elohim] burdens me because of your grosser crimes. For behold, thus saith the Lord [יהוה, Yahweh]: “This people begin to wax in iniquity; they understand not the scriptures, for they seek to excuse themselves in committing whoredoms, because of the things which were written concerning David, and Solomon his son. Behold, David and Solomon truly had many wives and concubines, which thing was abominable before me, saith the Lord [יהוה, Yahweh]. Wherefore, thus saith the Lord [יהוה, Yahweh], I have led this people forth out of the land of Jerusalem, by the power of mine arm [זרועי, zeroi] that I might raise up unto me a righteous branch from the fruit of the loins of Joseph. Wherefore, I the Lord God [יהוה אלהים, Yahweh Elohim] will not suffer that this people shall do like unto them of old. Wherefore, my brethren, hear me, and hearken to the word of the Lord [דבר-יהוה, devar-Yahweh]: For

Hebrew are speculative but well-supported by comparable phrases in the Hebrew Bible.

38. Deuteronomy 30:14: “But the word [הדבר, ha’davar] is very nigh unto thee, in thy mouth, and in thy heart, that thou mayest do it” (KJV).

there shall not any man among you have save it be one wife; and concubines he shall have none; For I, the Lord God [יהוה אלהים, Yahweh Elohim], delight in the chastity of women. And whoredoms are an abomination before me; thus saith the Lord of Hosts [יהוה צבאות, Yahweh tsevaot].” (Jacob 2:23–28, emphasis added)

Taken together with the earlier passage from Jacob, several elements in this section also argue in favor of “the word of the Lord” as a metonym for Christ. First, the above passage begins with a simple alternate parallelism that appears to equate the word of God with the Lord:

A  But the word of God [האלהים דבר, devar ha’Elohim] burdens me
B  because of your grosser crimes.
A’ For behold, thus saith the Lord [יהוה, Yahweh]:
B’ “This people begin to wax in iniquity;”

Second, Jacob employs multiple biblical appellations for God in this passage: the Lord (4x), the Lord God (2x), mine arm (1x), the word of God (1x), the word of the Lord (1x), and the Lord of Hosts (1x). Each appellation can be replaced with the word Christ without changing the meaning of the passage. This repetition of the various names of God helps establish Jacob’s authority when speaking to the people and shows that the words that Jacob is speaking did not originate with him; they are a commandment from the Lord. By contrast, in an earlier verse from the same chapter, Jacob used the phrase “the word of the Lord” as a clear reference to the words of the Lord: “For behold, as yet, ye have been obedient unto the word of the Lord, which I have given unto you” (Jacob 2:4, emphasis added).

The Word of the Lord Came to Alma

In Alma 43 we are told that the Nephites met the armies of the Lamanites in the borders of Jershon. However, the Nephites were better prepared for the battle, so the Lamanites disengaged and fled into the wilderness. Not knowing where the Lamanites were headed, Moroni sent spies to

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40. “These are the generations of the heavens and of the earth when they were created, in the day that the LORD God [יהוה אלהים, Yahweh Elohim] made the earth and the heavens” (Genesis 2:4 KJV, emphasis added).

41. “And Elijah said, As the LORD of hosts [יהוה צבאות, Yahweh tsevaot] liveth, before whom I stand, I will surely shew myself unto him to day” (1 Kings 18:15 KJV, emphasis added).
follow them, and he “knowing of the prophecies of Alma, sent certain men unto him, desiring him that he should inquire of the Lord [יהוה, Yahweh] whither the armies of the Nephites should go to defend themselves against the Lamanites” (Alma 43: 23, emphasis added). Following the pattern that we have already observed, “the word of the Lord [דבר־יהוה, devar-Yahweh] came unto Alma, and Alma informed the messengers of Moroni, … and those messengers went and delivered the message unto Moroni” (Alma 43:24, emphasis added). As we have seen with the examples in the Bible, “the Word of the Lord” first came to Alma and delivered the information that he desired. As the embodied mortal “word of the Lord,” Alma then “informed the messengers,” and they “delivered the message unto Moroni.”

The Word of the Lord Came to Ether

The following passage from the Book of Ether also conforms to the pattern outlined in the Bible. The Word of the Lord came to Ether, and Ether was told to prophesy to Coriantumr that the Lord would spare his people if they would repent:

And in the second year the word of the Lord [דבר־יהוה, devar-Yahweh] came to Ether, that he should go and prophesy unto Coriantumr that, if he would repent, and all his household, the Lord [יהוה, Yahweh] would give unto him his kingdom and spare the people. (Ether 13:20, emphasis added)

As with the other examples from the Bible and the Book of Mormon, “the word of the Lord came to Ether” possibly represents a visible appearance of the Lord to the prophet.

The Word of the Lord Came to Mormon

Upon learning that there were disputations among the members of the church concerning the baptism of children, Mormon wrote a letter to Moroni to settle this doctrinal matter:

For immediately after I had learned these things of you I inquired of the Lord [יהוה, Yahweh] concerning the matter. And the word of the Lord [דבר־יהוה, devar-Yahweh] came to me by the power of the Holy Ghost, saying: Listen to the words of Christ [חיה מешיח, divre ha’mashiach],42 your Redeemer

42. The Hebrew word מֶשׁיחַ (mashiach, messiah) and the Greek word Χριστός (christos, Christ) both mean anointed.
Spendlove, The Word of the Lord as a Metonym • 155

גאלכם, goalechem,43 your Lord [אדוניכם, adonechem]44, and your God [אלוהיכם, Elohechem].45 Behold, I came into the world not to call the righteous but sinners to repentance; the whole need no physician, but they that are sick; wherefore, little children are whole, for they are not capable of committing sin; wherefore the curse of Adam is taken from them in me, that it hath no power over them; and the law of circumcision is done away in me. And after this manner did the Holy Ghost manifest the word of God [דבר האלהים, devar ha’Elohim] unto me; wherefore, my beloved son, I know that it is solemn mockery before God [אלהים, Elohim], that ye should baptize little children. (Moroni 8:7–9, emphasis added)

Similar to the passage in Jacob, Mormon used multiple biblical names for God to help establish his authority: the Lord (1x), the word of the Lord (1x), Christ (1x), your Redeemer (1x), your Lord (1x), your God (1x), the word of God (1x), and God (1x). Two other factors also merit mention in these verses. First, Mormon told us that after he had “inquired of the Lord” that “the word of the Lord came to me by the power of the Holy Ghost,” and that “after this manner did the Holy Ghost manifest the word of God unto me.” In both cases, Mormon is clear to point out that the revelatory experience was facilitated by the Holy Ghost, whose work is to bare record of Christ (cf. 1 Nephi 12:18, 3 Nephi 28:11). In addition, the phrases “came to me” and “did … manifest … unto me” both seem to indicate a visual appearance of the Word to Mormon.

Second, the Word of the Lord spoke to Mormon, and said: “Listen to the words of Christ.” It is important to point out that the “Word [singular] of the Lord” spoke to Mormon and instructed him to “listen to the words [plural] of Christ.” The same “Word of the Lord” continued by saying: “I came into the world not to call the righteous but sinners to repentance;

43. Isaiah 43:14: “Thus saith the Lord [יהוה, Yahweh], your redeemer [גאלכם, goalechem], the Holy One of Israel [קדוש ישראל, qedosh Israel]” (KJV, emphasis added).
44. See 1 Kings 1:33.
46. “To reveal; to make to appear; to show plainly; to make public; to disclose to the eye or to the understanding.” Noah Webster’s First Edition of An American Dictionary of the English Language, (San Francisco: Foundation for American Christian Education, 2010), s.v. “manifest.” “In a far-off land the Lord [יהוה, Yahweh] will manifest [ראה, nirah] himself to them” (Jeremiah 31:3 NET, emphasis added). The verb ראה (nirah) in this verse is derived from the root נ-ר-ה meaning to see.
… wherefore the curse of Adam is taken from them in me, that it hath no power over them; and the law of circumcision is done away in me.”

The Word of the Lord spoke the words of Christ to Mormon in the first person, as if he were Christ. Taken together, these points can lead us to understand that Mormon’s experience was much like those of Abraham, Samuel, Jonah, Jeremiah and Ezekiel — the Lord, the embodied Word of the Lord, appeared to Mormon and spoke the words of Christ to him.

Lehi was Obedient to the Word of the Lord

In addition to the phrase “the word of the Lord came to X,” there are other ways in which the expressions the word of the Lord and the word of God can be understood as being metonymous with Christ. In the opening chapters of the Book of Mormon we learn that Lehi had been instructed to take his family and depart out of the land of Jerusalem:

For behold, it came to pass that the Lord spake unto my father, yea, even in a dream, and said unto him: Blessed art thou Lehi, because of the things which thou hast done; and because thou hast been faithful and declared unto this people the things which I commanded thee, behold, they seek to take away thy life. And it came to pass that the Lord commanded my father, even in a dream, that he should take his family and depart into the wilderness. And it came to pass that he was obedient unto the word of the Lord, wherefore he did as the Lord commanded him. (1 Nephi 2:1–3, emphasis added)

Nephi tells us that the Lord (יְהוָה, Yahweh) spoke to Lehi and commanded him in a dream that his family was to “depart into the wilderness.” The final line of this passage is presented as a simple alternate parallelism, allowing us to observe that the Word of the Lord is most likely metonymous with the Lord in these verses:

A And it came to pass that he was obedient
B unto the word of the Lord,
A’ wherefore he did
B’ as the Lord commanded him.

Lammert commented:

47. “And I commanded you at that time all the things [הדברים, ha’davarim] which ye should do” (Deuteronomy 1:18 KJV, emphasis added).
Since “the Word … plays a much more independent role in ancient times than we can feel,” then we should be open — as faithful interpreters — to the possibility that word of YHWH [the word of the Lord] is a title for YHWH’s visible appearance or form. We must take into account that it is more difficult for us moderns than for the ancient Israelites to see a given account as a theophany.\textsuperscript{48}

**The Word of God and the Rod of Iron**

Following Nephi’s vision of the tree of life, he attempted to explain the meaning of the symbols that he saw in vision to his brothers. One of those symbols was the rod of iron:

And I said unto them that it [the rod of iron] was the word of God [devar ha’Elohim]; and whoso would hearken [from sh-m-a\textsuperscript{49}] unto the word of God [devar ha’Elohim], and would hold fast [from ch-z-q\textsuperscript{50}] unto it, they would never perish; neither could the temptations and the fiery darts of the adversary overpower them unto blindness, to lead them away to destruction. Wherefore, I, Nephi, did exhort them to give heed [from q-sh-v\textsuperscript{51}] unto the word of the Lord [devar-Yahweh]; yea, I did exhort them with all the energies of my soul, and with all the faculty which I possessed, that they would give heed to the word of God [devar ha’Elohim] and remember to keep his commandments always in all things. (1 Nephi 15:24–25, emphasis added)

Although the phrase “the word of God” in this passage is traditionally interpreted as the written or spoken word which emanates from God, it

\textsuperscript{48} Lammert, “The Word of YHWH,” 197, emphasis added.

\textsuperscript{49} The biblical Hebrew word for hearken is derived from the root sh-m-a. This root principally means to hear, but also carries the connotation of obedience. 2 Samuel 22:45 reads, “Foreigners pretend obedience to me; as soon as they hear [lishmoa ozen, literally hear (by the) ear], they obey [yishshamu me]” (NASB, emphasis added). The verbs hear and obey are both derived the root sh-m-a). So, in this passage from 2 Samuel, to hearken means both to hear and obey.

\textsuperscript{50} Hold fast in biblical Hebrew is from the root ch-z-q (ch-z-q) meaning to strengthen or be strong (see Job 27:6).

\textsuperscript{51} To give heed is represented by the root q-sh-v (q-sh-v) in biblical Hebrew, meaning to listen or to pay attention (see Jeremiah 18:19).
is also possible that Nephi intended this as a reference to Christ himself. Understood this way, we are to hearken unto Christ (hear and obey him), hold fast to him (be strong in him), give heed to him (listen and pay attention to him), and “remember to keep his commandments always in all things.”

The Word of God and the Words of the Book
Isaiah prophesied of the blindness and spiritual illiteracy of Jerusalem, or “Ariel, the city where David dwelt”:

For the LORD has poured over you a spirit of deep sleep, he has shut your eyes, the prophets; and He has covered your heads, the seers. The entire vision will be to you like the words of a sealed book, which when they give it to the one who is literate, saying, “Please read this,” he will say, “I cannot, for it is sealed.” (Isaiah 29:10–11 NASB)

Nephi specifically chose to base his own prophecy on this chapter of Isaiah (see 2 Nephi 25:4). In his prophecy that encompasses 2 Nephi 25–27, Nephi expertly incorporated his own ideas into the prophecy of Isaiah to create a midrashic interpretation of the prophet’s words.52 A portion of Nephi’s prophecy included the following:

Wherefore, the Lord God יְהוָה אלהים, Yahweh Elohim will proceed to bring forth the words of the book הַסֵפֶר, divrei ha’sefer; and in the mouth of as many witnesses as seemeth him good will he establish his word דברו, devaro; and wo be unto him that rejecteth the word of God דבר האלוהים, devar ha’Elohim! (2 Nephi 27:14, emphasis added)

Below I have displayed this passage as a simple chiasm, outlining only the key elements of the verse:

A the Lord God
B bring forth the words of the book
B’ establish his word
A’ the word of God

As shown in the chiasm, the Lord God can be seen as parallel with the word of God. Based on this, it is possible that Nephi was prophesying that the Lord God, or the Word of God, would “bring forth” and

“establish” his word, the words of the book, in the last days. Nephi also added a caution: “Wo be unto him that rejecteth the word of God.” Nephi used the word reject on multiple occasions (see Table 2). From the table, it is clear that rejection of “the word of God” could be a reference to the rejection of the spoken or written word of God, or to Christ himself:

Table 2. Nephi’s usage of “reject.”

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Verse</th>
<th>Who or What is Rejected?</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1 Nephi 3:18</td>
<td>the words of the prophets</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1 Nephi 7:14</td>
<td>the prophets</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1 Nephi 15:17</td>
<td>the Lord</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1 Nephi 15:36</td>
<td>the wicked</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1 Nephi 17:35</td>
<td>every word of God</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1 Nephi 19:13</td>
<td>signs and wonders, and the power and glory of the God of Israel</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2 Nephi 25:12</td>
<td>the Only Begotten of the Father, yea, even the Father of heaven and of earth</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2 Nephi 25:18</td>
<td>the true Messiah</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2 Nephi 27:5</td>
<td>the prophets</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2 Nephi 27:14</td>
<td>the word of God</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2 Nephi 27:20</td>
<td>the words of the book</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The Sons of Mosiah and the Word of God

The section heading that introduces chapters 17 to 26 of the Book of Alma explains why the sons of Mosiah were willing to reject their rights to the governance of the Nephite kingdom:

An account of the sons of Mosiah, who rejected their rights to the kingdom for the word of God \([\text{דבר האלהים}, devar ha’Elohim]\), and went up to the land of Nephi to preach to the Lamanites; their sufferings and deliverance — according to the record of Alma.

I find it much easier to believe that the sons of Mosiah had rejected their rights to the kingdom if we interpret the word of God in this heading as a metonym for Christ rather than as the decrees of God or His divine pronouncements. Rejecting power, wealth, and the trappings of the world for Christ is a powerfully compelling reason to abandon their rights to govern the people. Like Lamoni’s father, what motivated the sons of Mosiah to forsake their rights to the kingdom must have been something truly significant:
And it came to pass that after Aaron had expounded these things unto him, the king said: What shall I do that I may have this eternal life of which thou hast spoken? Yea, what shall I do that I may be born of God, having this wicked spirit rooted out of my breast, and receive his Spirit, that I may be filled with joy, that I may not be cast off at the last day? Behold, said he, I will give up all that I possess, yea, I will forsake my kingdom, that I may receive this great joy. (Alma 22:15)

Following these words, Lamoni’s father, the king of all the Lamanites, “did prostrate himself upon the earth” before the Lord, “and cried mightily,” saying:

O God, Aaron hath told me that there is a God; and if there is a God, and if thou art God, wilt thou make thyself known unto me, and I will give away all my sins to know thee, and that I may be raised from the dead, and be saved at the last day. (Alma 22:18)

The old king’s desire to know God is an overwhelmingly powerful reason to be willing to forsake his kingdom. Likewise, I find it much more believable that the sons of Mosiah gave up their kingdom for Christ — *the Word of God* — than for an abstract belief in religious doctrines, principles, or prophecies — *the word of God* — no matter how important this word might have been to them. Nephi explained that the principle reason for preaching, prophesying, and writing *the word of God* was to lead souls to Christ, *the Word of God*:

And we talk of Christ, we rejoice in Christ, we preach of Christ, we prophesy of Christ, and we write according to our prophecies, that our children may know to what source they may look for a remission of their sins. (2 Nephi 25:26)

In other words, a primary role of the written and spoken *word of God* is to lead us to Christ, the living *Word of God*. Correspondingly, Mormon wrote that the sons of Mosiah “had searched the scriptures diligently, *that they might know the word of God*” (Alma 17:2). While this could be a reference to the doctrines and principles of the gospel, it is more compelling to believe that the reason why the sons of Mosiah “had searched the scriptures diligently” was to know Christ, *the Word of God*. Alma taught his son Shiblon that *the word of God* helps teach us “that there is no other way or means whereby man can be saved, only in and
through Christ” who is “the word of truth [דֶּבָּר־אָמְתָּם, devar-emet⁵³] and righteousness [זֶדֶקָה, utsedaqah]” (Alma 38:9, emphasis added).

**We Will Compare the Word unto a Seed**

In his preaching to the Zoramites, Alma delivered a powerful allegorical sermon that involved the word of God, a seed, and the tree of life:

Therefore, blessed are they who humble themselves without being compelled to be humble; or rather, in other words, blessed is he that believeth in the word of God, and is baptized without stubbornness of heart, yea, without being brought to know the word, or even compelled to know, before they will believe. … And now, behold, I say unto you, and I would that ye should remember, that God is merciful unto all who believe on his name; therefore he desireth, in the first place, that ye should believe, yea, even on his word. … Now, as I said concerning faith — that it was not a perfect knowledge — even so it is with my words. Ye cannot know of their surety at first, unto perfection, any more than faith is a perfect knowledge. But behold, if ye will awake and arouse your faculties, even to an experiment upon my words, and exercise a particle of faith, yea, even if ye can no more than desire to believe, let this desire work in you, even until ye believe in a manner that ye can give place for a portion of my words. Now, we will compare the word unto a seed. … And now, behold, is your knowledge perfect? Yea, your knowledge is perfect in that thing, and your faith is dormant; and this because you know, for ye know that the word hath swelled your souls, and ye also know that it hath sprouted up, that your understanding doth begin to be enlightened, and your mind doth begin to expand. … And thus, if ye will not nourish the word, looking forward with an eye of faith to the fruit thereof, ye can never pluck of the fruit of the tree of life. But if ye will nourish the word, yea, nourish the tree as it beginneth to grow, by your faith with great diligence, and with patience, looking forward to the fruit thereof, it shall take root; and behold it shall be a tree springing up unto everlasting life. And because of your diligence and your faith and your patience with the word in nourishing it, that it may take root in you, behold, by and by

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⁵³. See Psalm 119:43.
ye shall pluck the fruit thereof, which is most precious, which is sweet above all that is sweet, and which is white above all that is white, yea, and pure above all that is pure; and ye shall feast upon this fruit even until ye are filled, that ye hunger not, neither shall ye thirst. ... Now after Alma had spoken these words, they sent forth unto him desiring to know whether they should believe in one God, that they might obtain this fruit of which he had spoken, or how they should plant the seed, or the word of which he had spoken, which he said must be planted in their hearts; or in what manner they should begin to exercise their faith. (Alma 32:16, 22, 26–28, 34, 40–42, 33:1, emphasis added)

In this allegory, Alma taught that we must believe in the word of God, believe on his name, and believe on his word, all references or possible references to Christ. In addition, Alma compared the word of God to a seed that we are instructed to plant in our hearts. If we nourish the seed, or the word, we are told that it will take root and grow to become “a tree springing up unto everlasting life” from which we may “pluck the fruit thereof, which is most precious, which is sweet above all that is sweet, and which is white above all that is white, yea, and pure above all that is pure,” a clear allusion to Lehi’s vision of the tree of life. Alma added that those who plant this seed and nourish it “shall feast upon this fruit even until ye are filled, that ye hunger not, neither shall ye thirst.”

In a parallel teaching, Jesus instructed, “He that eateth this bread eateth of my body to his soul; and he that drinketh of this wine drinketh of my blood to his soul; and his soul shall never hunger nor thirst, but shall be filled” (3 Nephi 20:8, emphasis added). In other words, eating the fruit of the tree of life is analogous to partaking of the sacramental emblems of Christ’s body and blood. This fruit, including the tree that bears it — which grows from the seed, or word, that we plant in our hearts — can be understood as allegorical representations of Christ.54 Throughout Christian history theologians have connected Christ not only with the fruit but with the tree of life itself.55 So, in Alma’s allegory, the seed can be understood as representing the spoken or written word of God, but it

54. John Bunyan wrote that “the tree of Life” is “the Christ and Saviour.” George Offor, Esq., The Whole Works of John Bunyan, Accurately Reprinted from the Author’s Own Editions. With Editorial Prefaces, Notes, and Life of Bunyan (Glasgow: Blackie and Son, 1862), 456.

perhaps more properly represents the living *Word of God* that we must plant in our hearts.

**The Power of the Word of God**

Mormon informs us that nearly two hundred years following the visitation of Christ to the Nephites, after apostasy had firmly set in among them, false churches persecuted the disciples of Jesus:

> Therefore they did exercise power and authority over the disciples of Jesus who did tarry with them, and they did cast them into prison; but by the power of the word of God [דבר אלהים, *devar ha'Elohim*], which was in them, the prisons were rent in twain, and they went forth doing mighty miracles among them. (4 Nephi 1:30, emphasis added)

Mormon recounted a similar story about Nephi, the son of Helaman:

> “But behold, the power of God was with him, and they could not take him to cast him into prison, for he was taken by the Spirit and conveyed away out of the midst of them” (Helaman 10:16, emphasis added). The disciples of Jesus were freed from their prisons “by the power of the word of God, which was in them,” while Nephi’s enemies were unable to cast him into prison because “the power of God was with him.” These two stories appear to equate the *Word of God* with God himself. Just as the power of the word of God was in the disciples, that same power — the power of God — was with Nephi.

Similarly, after their escape from the “the hands of king Noah and his people,” Alma wanted his flock of believers to know that it was God who had delivered them: “And now as ye have been delivered by the power of God out of these bonds” (Mosiah 23:13, emphasis added). Later, preaching to the Nephites in the land of Zarahemla, Alma the son of Alma taught that after they “were delivered out of the hands of the people of king Noah,” Alma’s flock again came into bondage:

> And behold, after that, they were brought into bondage by the hands of the Lamanites in the wilderness; yea, I say unto you, they were in captivity, and again the Lord [יְהוָה, Yahweh] did deliver them out of bondage by the power of his word [דברו, *devaro*]; and we were brought into this land, and here we began to establish the church of God throughout this land also. (Alma 5:5, emphasis added)

This second period of captivity ended when “the Lord did deliver them out of bondage by the power of his word.” Again, as with the account
of the disciples of Christ and Nephi, this dual usage of “the power of God” and “the power of his word” lend credence to the idea that the Word of God is none other than Christ.

Conclusion

The Word of the Lord (דבר יהוה, devar-Yahweh) and the Word of God (דבר האלהים, devar ha’Elohim) are two biblical Hebrew phrases that have been shown to be stand-ins for God himself, and specifically as metonymic substitutions for Christ.56 These phrases are often used when the Bible recounts theophanic experiences of prophets. Lammert wrote:

Most interpreters of the New Testament affirm that there are at least a few texts where “the Word” (ὁ λόγος) is a personal being, the Son of God (John 1:1, 14; Hebrews 4:12; Revelation 19:13). The most widely recognized of these texts, the prologue of John, identifies the eternal Son as “the Word” who created all things (1:1–3) and “became flesh” (1:14) as Jesus, the incarnate Son. Many interpreters of the Old Testament, however, understand a very similar expression in the Old Testament, “the word of YHWH” (דבר יהוה), as signifying merely a verbal word, spoken by God and heard by the prophet to whom “the word of YHWH came.” The evident linguistic connection between the two terms is not readily extended to a theological connection. A close exegetical consideration shows, however, that the connection between the two is also theological: the word of YHWH is a theophany in several Old Testament texts.57

Likewise, in the Book of Mormon we encounter several events and stories in which the Word of the Lord or the Word of God can be profitably interpreted as direct references to Christ. Understanding these phrases as metonyms for the Son of God — the word of truth and righteousness

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56. “In Genesis 15:4, consider the phrase ‘the word of the Lord.’ God spoke to Abram. This phrase in context resonates with all the earlier speeches of God to man in Genesis. Ever since the fall, God’s speech needs to be mediated to avoid death of the recipient. The mediator is the Son, the Word. Because of the necessity of mediation, we can confidently infer the presence of Christ and his work when God speaks to Abram. Christ’s role in Genesis 15:4 anticipates his incarnation and verbal ministry on earth.” Vern S. Poythress, “Christocentric Preaching,” The Southern Baptist Journal of Theology 22, no. 3 (2018): 61.

— helps us more fully comprehend and accept that the Book of Mormon is truly Another Testament of Christ.

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Demythicizing the Lamanites’
“Skin of Blackness”

Gerrit M. Steenblik

Abstract: Racial bias is antithetical to the Book of Mormon’s cardinal purpose: to proclaim the infinite grandeur of the atonement of Jesus Christ. The book teaches that the Lord welcomes and redeems the entire human family, “black and white, bond and free” — people of all hues from ebony to ivory. Critical thinkers have struggled to reconcile this leitmotif with the book’s mention of a “skin of blackness” that was “set upon” some of Lehi’s descendants. Earlier apologetics for that “mark” have been rooted in Old World texts and traditions. However, within the last twenty years, Mesoamerican archaeologists, anthropologists, and ethnohistorians have curated and interpreted artifacts that reveal an ancient Maya body paint tradition, chiefly for warfare, hunting, and nocturnal raiding. This discovery shifts possible explanations from the Old World to the New and suggests that any “mark” upon Book of Mormon people may have been self-applied. It also challenges arguments that the book demonstrates racism in either 600 BCE or the early nineteenth-century.

In approximately 600 BCE, a Jewish patriarch named Lehi and his wife Sariah led their four sons away from Jerusalem to escape the impending Babylonian conquest. After gathering a few others, the caravan traveled “in a south-southeast direction” in the wilderness “near the Red Sea” (1 Nephi 16:13–14). Before leaving the land of Jerusalem, Nephi, who was the youngest son, obtained a set of priceless brass plates from the treasury of a Jewish nobleman through an inspired and bold ruse. Those plates preserved the writings of Hebrew prophets, including the Pentateuch and prophecies of Joseph, who was sold into Egypt. Eventually these Lehites constructed and provisioned a ship and sailed to the New World. Shortly after they arrived, Lehi and his wife died and
their two oldest sons, Laman and Lemuel, plotted to kill their younger brothers so that they could rule the clan.

Being forewarned, Nephi fled into the wilderness with his own family and other followers who became known as Nephites. Faced with the task of starting over from scratch, Nephi took with them “whatever things were possible” (2 Nephi 5:7). This included seeds, animals, tools, and religious relics, including the irreplaceable brass plates.¹

Long before this family schism, the two eldest sons had rejected their father’s Messianic faith, believing him to be a fanatic who had turned against the political and religious leaders in Jerusalem and improvidently sacrificed their legacy of land and possessions. Their conflict may have been related to theology,² but seems to have been fueled primarily by suspicion and jealousy. They were convinced that Nephi had used “cunning arts” to deceive them and that he coveted leadership (1 Nephi 16:38). Therefore, when Nephi and his followers fled from their settlement, Laman and Lemuel were furious, to the point that Nephi feared that they would attempt to destroy him and his people (2 Nephi 5:14). From then on, Laman and Lemuel taught their followers, the Lamanites, that Nephi had robbed them and had wronged them in other ways (Mosiah 10:12–17; cf. Alma 20:13). Their hatred of the Nephites soon led to wars and conflict that lasted for generations.

Lehi had believed in and taught his children repentance, mercy, and forgiveness as well as inclusivity. Before leaving Jerusalem, his first heavenly vision led him to exclaim that God’s “power, and goodness, and mercy are over all the inhabitants of the earth” (1 Nephi 1:14).³ This universalistic point of view resounds throughout Lehi’s teachings and, indeed, the entire Book of Mormon.⁴

Nephi prepared a history of his people, including an account of two specific events at the time of the split that may have negatively influenced Latter-day Saint presuppositions about people of color. First, he said that the Lamanites fell under what Hebrews traditionally viewed as a “cursing” — that is to say, they were “cut off” from the presence of the Lord (2 Nephi 5:20). Second, according to Nephi, “the Lord did cause a skin of blackness to come upon them” (2 Nephi 5:21).

These words, in a book that The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints accepts as having been translated “by the gift and power of God,” may shock readers who come to the Book of Mormon to learn the gospel of Jesus Christ. Drawing upon his own personal missionary experience, Patrick Mason poignantly reminds us how these words can offend and altogether discourage readers, particularly people of color.⁵ Those who
are willing to read further sometimes do so under the ominous spell of the “skin of blackness” and the “curse.” Without a rational explanation, and the text itself does not offer one, these words become barriers to entry. The issue is not merely academic, especially for Indigenous Americans, African Americans, and Africans.

In 2001, while I was serving as the mission president for Côte d’Ivoire, Togo, Benin, Cameroun, and the Central African Republic (Centrafrique), my wife Judy and I confronted this issue personally. We recall our first zone leader conference in Abidjan. I had just opened the floor to questions when a sincere African elder asked me what color of skin he would have in the resurrection. He worried that his blackness limited his opportunities in the Church and in eternity, and that he and his African companions needed to become “whiter” in order to be “delightsome.”

We sought to reassure our missionaries that our diverse complexions were beautiful, that they proved God’s love for individuality, that they were not determined by the righteousness of ancestors, and that they had no bearing on mortal or eternal potential.

A few months later our African and North American office elders brought us five pages of shameful, racist statements by early Church leaders that someone had discovered on the internet and used to confront our missionaries. Copies were beginning to be circulated. We empathized with our faithful sisters and elders and collectively felt the sting of 19th and 20th century bigotry. We spoke to them candidly about past prejudice, reassured them of God’s respect for diversity, inclusion, and equality, and prayed that they would forgive former Church leaders. Their magnanimous grace allowed our missionary efforts to progress.

To date, there are no reliable facts from which to conclude that the words “skin of blackness” and “mark” are euphemisms for the creation of a “race,” as we use that term today — a group of humans with distinguishing phenotypic features, including complexion. We do not know why Nephi chose these words, how Joseph Smith understood them, or whether, in the process of translation, they came to Joseph as merely the best words to use under the circumstances, even though they might be misunderstood. It may well be that any racial inference results from inherited social biases of readers — those same biases that led colonial America to tolerate slavery. Nonetheless, because today the words seem offensive, some Church members have relied upon these words as racial generalizations, even though some disciple scholars contend that they are mere tropes with a metaphorical meaning. This article offers new
insights based on recent interpretations of Mesoamerican artifacts that shed light on these words and how they may have been misunderstood.

Beginning in the 1850s, The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints denied Black women and men of African descent the right to participate in its temple ordinances and ceased ordaining these men to its priesthood. At that time, American protestants were predisposed to read racism into the Hebrew scriptures. Southerners especially elevated slavery to “the status of the literal word of God.” This undoubtedly influenced the early Utah Saints, who fell “in line with predominant American attitudes and practices concerning race.”

The Utah Saints also found support for their priesthood and temple ban in their so-called scriptural proof texts, chiefly Joseph Smith’s prophetic translation of ancient papyri known as the Book of Abraham. Terryl Givens says: “Catastrophically for the development of church policy, the Book of Abraham was interpreted to convey [cursedness as the fruit of past conduct] in the case of the black race. Antebellum Americans had for some time been reading the curse of Ham, Canaan’s father, as a divine warrant for slavery. … Passages in the Book of Abraham were read into this preformed context.”

During his lifetime, however, Joseph Smith demonstrated a remarkable respect for diversity, inclusiveness, and equality. Joseph “never commented on the Abraham text or implied it denied priesthood to blacks.” The Book of Abraham was not elevated to the status of scripture until 1880, when the Saints were in the West. Furthermore, the Utah Church never officially relied on the Book of Mormon to explain its priesthood and temple restrictions. But in the mid-1800s, race relations with both African Americans and Indigenous Americans was a contemporary issue of both local and national import. Therefore, it is no surprise that early Utah Saints came to view the Book of Mormon as the tale of two races and blamed the non-Christian culture of America’s Indigenous people for their somewhat darker complexion.

In June of 1978 the Church made its priesthood and temple ordinances available to all worthy members “without regard for race or color.” Since then it officially has denounced any causal link between the curse upon the Lamanites and the mark or skin of blackness. It has condemned “all racism, past or present, in any form,” and it has disavowed “any theory that black or dark skin is a sign of a curse.” According to Elder Jeffrey R. Holland of the Church’s Quorum of Twelve Apostles, any theories that Latter-day Saints conjured up previously “to explain the [prior racial] restrictions are ‘folklore’ that must never be perpetuated.”
Other influential Christian denominations that once tolerated racial bias also have issued forceful expressions of regret.¹⁹

Nevertheless, some analytical thinkers continue to question whether Book of Mormon references to the mark and skin of blackness reveal an inherent color code in the Church’s keystone canon. They may ask how the Church in good faith can repudiate all past racism while at the same time revere prophets who, from 600 BCE to 421 CE, occasionally wrote words that now sound pejorative and that for generations have triggered assumptions about race and skin color.

Some critics go further and argue that the text is a byproduct of the early 1800s with a racial subplot that supports the “historicist explanation” for the Book of Mormon. They claim that Joseph Smith absorbed theories, images, and biases from upstate New York’s rural culture, wrote them into the Book of Mormon, and that the entire text has an early 19th century racial agenda.²⁰ For them, the book is not ancient scripture, it is modern, man-made, and white privileged.²¹

In defense, Latter-day Saint scholars have argued that the Book of Mormon, at its core, is an unrelenting attack on elitism of every kind.²² Recently, David Belnap has shown that its prophets repeatedly denounced pride and discrimination, whether based on lineage, gender, education, social class, economic status, religious orthodoxy, or otherwise. With encyclopedic precision he has demonstrated the consistency of Lehi’s universalistic and inclusive declaration in the book’s first chapter that God’s mercy is for “all the inhabitants of the earth.” He has collated hundreds of egalitarian messages in thousands of the book’s verses,²³ confirming that Lehi’s preamble was not a pretext.

The specific accusation of racism in the Book of Mormon deserves an explicit response — one that is buttressed with facts, ideally from the New World. When analyzing such a vexing question, contemporary American philosopher John Searle urges a search for reliable, hard evidence. Searle says, “forget about the … history of a problem,” start with “what you know for a fact,” and remember that “any theory has to be consistent with the facts.”²⁴ Joseph Smith would not have shied away from that challenge. On one occasion, for example, he referred to the discovery of ruins in Central America by Stephens and Catherwood as evidence of a mighty Nephite and Lamanite civilization in the Americas. Joseph then said, “Facts are stubborn things” and “the world will prove Joseph Smith a true prophet by circumstantial evidence.”²⁵

Unfortunately, some Latter-day Saints have encouraged a bi-racial interpretation of the Book of Mormon by selectively using “archaeological
myths” in proselytizing and teaching. For example, Latter-day Saints have pointed to Maya murals at Bonampak (circa 800 CE) and Chichen Itza (circa 1100 CE) as evidence of white Nephites and darker Lamanites. However, relying on these murals to support a bi-racial Book of Mormon is risky. “Playing the long shots” is how anthropologist John Sorenson describes this — attempting to prove the truthfulness of the Book of Mormon with limited field work, a few dates and places, and a lot of speculation. Demythicizing the skin of blackness requires more than that. It depends on “spade and trowel” archaeology and expert knowledge of Mesoamerican circumstances that correlate with Book of Mormon events — cultural insights about the “mark” in an original New World setting.

Until recently, however, New World facts regarding the “skin of blackness” have been in short supply. The burgeoning knowledge of ancient Mesoamerica is changing that. It allows us to consider whether a now proven Mesoamerican cultural tradition harmonizes with the Book of Mormon.

Relatively recent findings support a novel, promising, and fact-based explanation for the skin of blackness — the ancient Maya tradition of darkening the skin with charcoal-based body paint and stains. The hard evidence includes codices, murals, and polychrome earthenware vases and plates. This is illustrated in the detail of a Bonampak mural displayed in Sorenson’s Images of Ancient America where it appears that there is dark paint on the faces of two men in a ceremonial procession. Scholars Brant Gardner and Mark Wright already have suggested that the pigmentation variances shown in Maya murals might be the result of the practice of painting the skin. To date, however, Latter-day Saint disciple-scholars have not methodically addressed the Mesoamerican body paint artifacts and the opinions of America’s leading Mayanists who see them as evidence of a mark upon the skin that was utilitarian, episodic, artificial, and removable.

According to its title page, the Book of Mormon’s raison d’être is to testify of the atonement of Jesus Christ. To that end, it offers unique theological insights beyond the Hebrew Scriptures and the New Testament. It emphasizes the universality of Christ’s mercy and power of deliverance with words like these: “all men are privileged, the one like unto the other,” the Lord invites “all to come unto him and partake of his goodness; “all are alike unto God;” and He “denieth none that come unto him, black and white, bond and free, male and female” (2 Nephi 26:28–33).
The “Mark” or “Skin of Blackness”

Nephi, the Book of Mormon’s first scribe, engraved religious teachings and history on two sets of metal plates — his so-called large plates and small plates. Each tome had a particular purpose, and each introduced a unique descriptor of the Lamanites’ physical appearance. It is worth considering which came first and how they differ.

Nephi first worked on his large plates and began by abridging Lehi’s engravings in order to provide a “full account” of the history of his people, including their kings, wars, and contentions (1 Nephi 9:2–4). After several years he felt inspired, even commanded, to create a separate set of plates, the small plates, to persuade men to come unto God and to record the ministry of his people (1 Nephi 6:4 and 9:3). Centuries later, Mormon abridged the large plates in order to create his own volume — the plates of Mormon — that became the principal source for the Book of Mormon. Joseph Smith began his translation with Mormon’s abridgment of Nephi’s more comprehensive large plates and referred to the earliest chapters of his translation as the record or Book of Lehi.30

Book of Mormon scholars Reynolds and Sjodahl concluded that the Book of Lehi contained the original account of events related to the family schism after Lehi’s death, including the most complete version of the prophecy related to the Lamanites’ appearance, perhaps a word-for-word quotation.31 Taking the Book of Lehi as the source for Mormon’s summary of early Nephite history, the Book of Lehi thus may have spoken of a “mark” that was “set upon” about a dozen adults: Laman, Lemuel, the sons of Ishmael (a Jerusalem Jew who had joined Lehi’s pilgrimage, but who died in the Arabian wilderness before the voyage to the Americas), and these men’s wives, whom Mormon referred to as “Ishmaelitish women” (Alma 3:6–7). Mormon’s redaction of the information on Nephi’s large plates may have preserved the most authentic version of the prophecy and the original use of the term “mark.”

Reynolds and Sjodahl also concluded that it was 10 to 15 years later before Nephi created his small plates in which he introduced the term “skin of blackness.” The Book of Mormon includes those words today because Mormon appended Nephi’s small plates to his own abridged record. In 1828, through the misadventure of Martin Harris, Joseph Smith’s scribe, 116 pages of the translation were lost, including the Book of Lehi. However, after Joseph had finished translating the remainder of Mormon’s plates, he learned that Nephi’s small plates that were attached behind them reported significant events and prophetic teachings from the same period. Therefore, to recover the essence of the
missing text, Joseph translated the small plates and inserted them where they fit chronologically.

Text that was originally in the Book of Lehi is now part of Alma 3:14–17. There Mormon repeated the prophecy that a “mark” would be “set on” both Lamanites and their allies and cited an example of the prophecy’s fulfillment. Describing a battle in 87 BCE, he explained that Lamanite allies had “marked themselves,” and that they had done this “after the manner of the Lamanites” but with “red in their foreheads” (Alma 3:4). Mormon repeatedly used the term “mark” in his abridgement of Nephi’s large plates, so “mark” also may have been Nephi’s preferred term.

Because Joseph inserted his translation of the small plates at the beginning of the Book of Mormon, readers are not introduced first to the term “mark;” instead their earliest impression of the Lamanites’ appearance after the family rift comes from the text’s mention of a “skin of blackness.” This term’s position of primacy can influence how readers, in their mind’s eye, see the Lamanites, and may lead to the assumption that Lamanites were punished with a black skin that covered their bodies, male and female, young and old, and from head to toe. For people of color and many others, this is a stumbling block.

However, it does not appear that Mormon, as the editor-in-chief, ever engraved the phrase “skin of blackness.” Because 116 pages of text taken from Nephi’s large plates were lost, we cannot be sure. But the distinctive phrase “skin of blackness” occurs only once in the published text in 2 Nephi 5:21, and it appears to be an alternative that Nephi employed just once for the word “mark” when he paraphrased and incorporated the prophecy from the Book of Lehi that was on his large plates. One must wonder whether common perceptions about the Lamanites would be different if readers first were introduced to the original account of the prophecy and to the Amlicites who intentionally “marked themselves … after the manner of the Lamanites” rather than to Nephi’s abbreviated account of Laman and Lemuel having a “skin of blackness” set upon them.

This article considers previous scholarly research and introduces a “mark” and “skin of blackness” that are based on Mesoamerican artifacts and opinions of Mayanists. It details the ancient cultural roles of temporary body paint as part of a young man’s right-of-passage, a woman’s body décor, and a man’s ceremonial accoutrement and camouflage for warfare, hunting and plunder. It then tests the common assumption that the Lamanites’ complexion was in fact darkened after the schism, miraculously or naturally. In its search for an objective,
neutral and fact-based explanation for the skin of blackness, it invites readers to consider how the Mesoamerican tradition harmonizes reason, science, and the theology of the Book of Mormon.

**Perceptions and Misperceptions**

The source of racist accusations against the Book of Mormon is the assumption that God caused a *skin of blackness* to *come upon* the Lamanites as a *mark* of divine disfavor. The problem is compounded by the proximity of the text’s references to the Lamanites’ physical appearance and its descriptions of a *curse*. All of these italicized words are enigmatic, however. None of them has a plain meaning. They should be only the beginning of the inquiry. They challenge readers to question the text, to reconsider their own biases, and to search for verifiable facts.

To begin with, the phrase “skin of blackness” is unusual. The word “skin” does not *a priori* refer to human flesh. It can also be used to describe various thin external coatings that are put upon a surface or could refer to animal skins. The word “blackness” also is obscure and unconventional in this context, especially since in the 1830s Indigenous Americans were generally portrayed as “red men.” Therefore, the term “skin of blackness” could describe a dark paint or other thin covering of the body or a stain that affects only the epidermis, regardless of the underlying natural complexion. Nephi was almost certainly acquainted with Ethiopians, since one had risen to prominence in the court of Zedekiah. The term he chose may have been meant to distinguish between an artificial covering or stain and natural black skin.

The text describes the mark as “dark” only twice, and it rarely mentions human skin, whatever the color. In most encounters between Lamanites and Nephites, there is no mention of any discernible difference in complexion. Within just a few years after Lehi’s death and the schism, Nephi’s younger brother referred to the “darkness” of Lamanite skins (Jacob 3:9). But it was almost five centuries later before their appearance again was mentioned, this time linked with the red mark upon the foreheads of the Amlicites. After that, a century of silence passed until 15 CE when Mormon, without implicating divine intervention, reported that the Lamanites’ skins became white when they “united with the Nephites” (3 Nephi 2:15). Although Mormon’s book continues for another four centuries, this is his final reference to complexion. Therefore, it is hardly necessary to assume the existence of darkened flesh or a dark mark in all Nephite/Lamanite interactions.
Quite possibly the phrase “skin of blackness” describes the Lamanites’ stunning change in appearance only when Lehi’s family fractured. An omission such as this can be eloquent. At the very least, it furthers the argument that the Lamanites, like the Maya, may have blackened themselves episodically. Given the book’s many cross-cultural encounters between Lehi’s descendants, the silence crescendos if in fact there had been a dramatic, genetic darkening of the Lamanites’ skin.

Furthermore, the word “mark” is vague. Linguistically, it does not suggest a genetic makeover or phenotypical change. It is commonly thought of as an external effect, like the red mark in the foreheads of Lamanite allies. Indeed Mormon repeatedly refers to it as being “set upon” someone. Nevertheless, as Brant Gardner notes, “it is much easier to compile a list of writers who take the phrase [skin of blackness] literally than of those who suggest an alternate reading.” Thus, reinforced by nearly two centuries of tradition, most readers still visualize the Lamanites as having a darkened natural complexion.

John Sorenson does not agree that Lamanites had different phenotypical features than the Nephites. With nuanced words he concedes that “the text implies … that [the Nephites’] rivals (at least as seen by Nephite eyes) … exhibited a skin of ‘darkness’ or even ‘blackness.’” However, based upon his research, Sorenson says that “both factions of Lehi’s descendants may have shown but relatively minor variations from the bodily norms of their Mediterranean-type ancestors, who not uncommonly featured copper-olive skins.” He concludes that “it is unlikely that the mark or curse had anything to do with pigmentation.”

Kerry Hull, a respected Latter-day Saint Mayanist, finds “absolutely no justification in the text for thinking that actual skin pigmentation plays any role in Book of Mormon society — none.”

For some devout Latter-day Saints the words “the Lord did cause” are a test of faith — they seem to demand that God miraculously altered the Lamanites’ complexion. That point of view relies on conflating the skin of blackness with the curse of being “cut off from the presence of the Lord” that Nephi, shortly after departing from Jerusalem, prophesied would come upon his two eldest brothers “in that day” when they rebelled against him (1 Nephi 2:16–23). The question of whether skin color and a curse are linked resurfaces six centuries later when Lamanites united with Nephites for their safety and, according to Mormon, the Lamanites’ skin “became white like unto the Nephites” (3 Nephi 2:15). Some skeptics question whether the Book of Mormon necessarily requires
these suspected metamorphoses to be supernatural events that seem to contradict reason, science, and the doctrine of free agency.

Concerns about all of these elusive words are compounded by descriptions of how the mark was applied. Mormon said that the words of Nephi’s original prophecy, apparently taken from Nephi’s large plates, used the term “set on” or “set upon” to describe the process (Alma 3:14–16). On his small plates Nephi says that the skin of blackness did “come upon” them. Sorenson, again with carefully chosen words, notes that the text “says nothing about the mechanism that might have produced” a change. Nephi’s words could refer to a variety of processes. They do not imply a genetic mutation.

**Apologists and Critics**

It would be disingenuous and shameful to minimize or to attempt to hide racial bias in the Book of Mormon, *if it were there*. Consequently, in a tribute to transparency, a few Latter-day Saint scholars have begun to concede that the Book of Mormon exhibits what would be considered racism today. Some of them contend that Book of Mormon prophets may have *described* racism, but that they should be forgiven because it was part of their culture and they never *prescribed* it. So, with the best of intentions some scholars seek to appease critical thinkers by pointing out that the most inspirational events in the Book of Mormon occurred when two previously hostile cultures united in their faith and lived together in peace for almost two centuries. This, they say, emphasizes the book’s ultimate moral lesson — its redeeming social value — that prejudice, including racial bias, “can be overcome, and that religion can lead believers toward a higher, more just and compassionate perspective.”

Going further, Jared Hickman sees the Book of Mormon as a voice of warning because it ends as a racial apocalypse and “exposes the tragic consequence of racism — the annihilation of the racist culture.” This reflects our growing sense of social justice and desire to learn whatever good we can from an allegedly intolerant text. But it also tends to “normalize” racism in what Latter-day Saints revere as the word of God.

Transparency also demands that racial bias of the book’s translator be disclosed, *if it existed*. Joseph Smith was not perfect, nor did he claim to be. Could he have “absorbed and echoed the racism that was prevalent in his day,” as one historian recently wrote? The evidence is thin.

One Book of Mormon critic portrays the text as an ongoing *racial* conflict. Max Perry Mueller’s historical research has raised legitimate
questions about the tense and often hurtful relationship between Latter-day Saints and people of color based on pronouncements by Church leaders that first gained “official” traction in the 1850s after the death of Joseph Smith. But Mueller’s scholarship falters when he theorizes that the root cause is a racial subplot in the Book of Mormon. His hypothesis is that Joseph, even in his early twenties, had a racial agenda, conceived of whiteness as “an aspirational identity, which even those cursed with blackness can achieve,” and preached white universalism through the voices of Nephite prophets within a story that is dominated by cultural divisions that were often “manifested as racial divisions.” He contends that the book treats race as “mutable” based on faith and righteousness, and that it shows that “both racial progress [toward whiteness] and declension [are] possible.” The thought that relevant New World evidence might exist seems never to have crossed Mueller’s mind. For him, “there is no archaeological evidence that matches the pre-Columbian civilization that the Book of Mormon describes.”

Mueller’s recent reiteration of the old race-based attack on the Book of Mormon confirms that faith-based scholarly apologetics have not yet satisfied detractors. Nor have they eradicated the persistent assumption that the darker skin of Sub-Saharan Africans and Indigenous Americans somehow reflects the unrighteousness of their progenitors. As noted earlier, that perception with respect to Africans was part of Western culture for centuries. As for Indigenous Americans, some early Latter-day Saints were biased by references to a curse and skin of blackness in 2 Nephi 5:21, even though Joseph never explained that verse. It is a fact that in the 1830s “wholesale genocide of American Indians was preached and practiced.” Therefore, bias against Indigenous Americans and Africans influenced many of Joseph Smith’s contemporaries. But not Joseph. He saw things differently and acted differently.

One theory for the skin of blackness argues that it was an authoritative garment made of animal skin, a “self-administered, removable, and inherited” vestment that is reminiscent of religiously significant clothing in the Hebrew scriptures. This theory is premised on the fact that nothing in the Book of Mormon “positively or unambiguously” indicates that colored “skins” refer to “human flesh pigmentation.” That premise is true, so the skins-as-garments theory confronts the alleged racist inferences. But this theory does so only with Old World facts. It fails to consider the New World facts (discussed shortly) and is difficult to reconcile with the actual text.
Professor Hugh Nibley was intrigued by possible natural, environmental explanations for a rapid and reversible catalyst. He considered adaptation and segregation, which he believed, under unique circumstances, could cause darkening to occur very fast. However, he recognized that when Mormon said that the Amlicites intentionally had “marked themselves with red in their foreheads after the manner of the Lamanites” (Alma 3:4), Mormon was describing a process, and that “the Lamanites put the marks on themselves … not knowing that they were fulfilling the promise of the Lord that he would mark them.”

Per Nibley, “When [the Amlicites] did it themselves, then they fulfilled the prophecy.” Nibley’s bottom line was this: “It is a reversible process. It’s their choice; they control it.” Thus he directly challenged exclusively metaphorical explanations for a skin of blackness, whether in the Book of Mormon or the Hebrew scriptures. Unlike Nephi, whose small plates portrayed the skin of blackness as an act of divine providence, Nibley surmised that the mark was a process so “natural and human” that it suggested nothing miraculous to the ordinary observer.

Nibley’s focus on “choice” invites consideration of a Mesoamerican tradition now confirmed by archaeologists, anthropologists, and ethnohistorians. During his lifetime, Nibley did not know of this custom, or at least he never mentioned it. However, he was constantly searching for new facts. Nibley frequently lamented how perfectly obvious something should have been to him and to others, but that nobody took notice. He also anticipated a time when the findings of the people who study Central America could bring about a shift in thinking. “At any moment,” he said, “something might turn up (and often does) to require a complete reversal of established views.”

The Mesoamerican Facts

Officially, the Church takes no position on the specific geographic location of Book of Mormon events in ancient America. There are various theories. Recently, so-called “Heartlanders” have made this a lively debate. However, many scholars believe that Lehi’s descendants inhabited Mesoamerica. Kirk Magelby maintained that Joseph Smith advocated a Mesoamerican setting after he read about the exploratory work of Stephens and Catherwood in *Incidents of Travel in Central America, Chiapas, and Yucatan.* In 1957, Hugh Nibley stated: “It is our conviction that proof of the Book of Mormon does lie in Central America.” Recently, Terryl Givens described John Sorenson’s *Mormon’s*
Codex as “comprehensive and compelling” evidence for a Mesoamerican locus.\textsuperscript{72}

The Maya preceded Lehi’s arrival in 590 BCE, and their cultural supremacy in Mesoamerica bookends all recorded Nephite and Lamanite history. The Maya flourished from as early as the second or third millennium BCE until the Spanish Conquest. After 1000 BCE their culture gradually expanded in the region, especially from approximately 300 BCE until 250 BCE when the Late Preclassic period ended. Their apex or Classic period lasted until 900 CE.\textsuperscript{73}

Lehi and his refugees disembarked upon a continent that already was densely populated. Mesoamerica was a melting pot with not only the Maya, but “a wide variety of ethnic or racial types,” some of them with natural complexions that were darker than the Lehites. Sorenson cites the work of González Calderón who, on the basis of his direct observation of thousands of figurines from Olmec sites in the Isthmus of Tehuantepec, San Lorenzo Tenochtitlán, and nearby La Venta, “has identified faces that show three distinct racial/ethnic groups: (1) a bearded white race with aquiline noses, probably Mediterranean in origin; (2) an oriental race, probably Han Chinese; and (3) a black race.”\textsuperscript{74} Hugh Nibley stated that there “is not a word in the Book of Mormon to prevent the coming to [the Western Hemisphere] of any number of people from any part of the world at any time.”\textsuperscript{75} According to Richard D. Hansen, one of the leading field archaeologists currently working in Mesoamerica, when Lehi arrived in the New World, and even after many generations, his descendants may have been inconsequential in number among the “millions of people” already there.\textsuperscript{76} Anywhere in the Americas, Lehi’s colony would have been surrounded by competing cultures, with the Maya the most dominant.

Warfare was endemic in Mesoamerica.\textsuperscript{77} Hansen has used LiDAR technology in the Mirador Basin of Guatemala to locate ancient Maya watch towers, ramparts, and moat-like trenches.\textsuperscript{78} His findings agree with those of other archaeologists that warfare in the Maya civilization “was large-scale and systematic, and it endured over many years.”\textsuperscript{79} In the late 1820s, Joseph Smith had no reason to think that America’s Indigenous people engaged in nearly continual combat on such a scale. Yet the Book of Mormon mentions similar defensive infrastructure and conflict that is almost perpetual.\textsuperscript{80} It also colorizes the drama on the battlefields with a skin of blackness, a red mark on foreheads, and loin cloths dyed in blood.
Analyzing the mark referred to in the Book of Mormon should start with the fact that Lehi’s descendants inhabited “a greatly restricted geographical area” and always were surrounded by a vast, influential, militarized population. In Mesoamerica, the Maya would have exerted a powerful external effect upon immigrants. Admittedly, neighboring tribes and ethnic groups do not automatically adopt each other’s customs. However, hegemony often leads to cultural diffusion of successful traditions. Mormon, for example, reported that Lamanites copied superior Nephite military tactics.

John Sorenson is the pre-eminent discoverer of cultural markers that Book of Mormon people shared with ancient Mesoamericans, for which he coined the term Mesoamericanisms. Independent evidence now suggests that body paint can be added to the list. Leading Mayanists now have curated, vetted, examined, and interpreted an impressive collection of proofs of the ancient Maya skin blackening tradition. Black body paint would not have been ideal for farming or other outdoor labor in a sun-drenched climate, but the experts unanimously agree that the Maya darkened their skins with paints, stains, and pigments for ceremonial purposes and as camouflage for warfare, hunting, and plunder. The artifacts shown later in this paper persuasively demonstrate that male torsos were blackened, while men’s faces, hands, and feet often were not. Images of women, though rare, exhibit the decorative use of stains.

After the Spanish conquest of Central America, Franciscan friars were the first to mention body paint. Sylvanus Morley’s classic, The Ancient Maya, states that Bishop Diego de Landa, who arrived in the Yucatan in 1549, observed that following a puberty ceremony “unmarried men began to live in a house set apart for them” and “painted themselves black until they were married.” Warriors, Landa said, painted themselves black and red and painted their prisoners in black and white stripes, reminiscent of some prison uniforms today. Michael Coe, one of America’s foremost Mayanists, confirmed these ancient rituals, stating that young men “stayed apart from their families in special communal houses where they presumably learned the arts of war,” and until marriage they “painted themselves black.” Coe concluded that Maya warriors artificially and intentionally painted themselves black “at all times.” They also applied paint around the eyes and nose to give a “fierce expression.”

Maya art flowered during the first millennia of the Christian era (Mesoamerica’s Late Preclassic and Classic period) as Maya artisans
began to produce murals and polychrome earthenware of lasting quality. Thus, surviving artifacts that display body paint postdate Lehi’s arrival, and therefore, chronologically speaking, Book of Mormon references to marks of black and red upon skins may be the earliest record of this practice. However, no one disputes that the Maya tradition originated much earlier. Effective strategies of dominant ancient societies have a long lifespan, absent abrupt environmental changes or a conquest. Artifacts confirm the enduring multi-generational body paint custom throughout the Maya realm.

The Maya also employed “scarification, cicatrization [the process of wound healing], branding, piercing, stretching, and tattooing.” Their body painting, however, was unique. It was “impermanent.” They could use it when needed and remove it at will. They could alter their appearance relatively quickly for hunting or for a military campaign, and “touch up” their black formal wear for a ceremonial occasion.

Skin-color rites of passage are not unique to the Maya. Ethnographers Carol Beckwith and Angela Fisher document similar ceremonies in Africa but with the color selection reversed. During the Masai coming-of-age ritual, young men go to a sacred chalk bank. There they paint their bodies with white designs that convey a significant social message about their manhood. The initiated warriors then return to their village “where they believe that their mothers will not recognize them since they have metaphorically moved into the next stage of life.”

Stephen Houston, who is renowned for his research into pre-Columbian Maya civilization, has catalogued Mayan words for the body paint custom. These include nabán meaning to paint oneself in the Colonial Tzotzil dialect, nabi in Ch’olti for “stain, nab in Yucatec for “anoint, smear, spot,” and in Tzental, nabel for “makeup” and nabantezon meaning to “makeup, beautify with colors and daub with ochre.” In Colonial Yukatec, hots ich meant to work on oneself “as the Indians did anciently.” Maya body paint may have involved a common term for pigment, bon in Yukatec.

In battle, the common Maya soldier fought with little clothing other than a loincloth and body paint, which he applied before going to war. The paint allowed warriors, from a distance and up close, instantly to recognize friends and foes — a significant tactical advantage prior to the widespread development of textiles, thick clothing, and body armor. In the fog of war, and especially in hand-to-hand combat, paint was a protective mark. Lamanite warriors, who were “naked, save it were skin which was girded about their loins” (Alma 3:5), may have darkened
their flesh for the same tactical purposes and to appear fierce and intimidating.

Fascinating details about this tradition are revealed in a mural at Uaxactun in northern Guatemala (inhabited between 300 BCE and 900 CE). According to Mayanists Coe and Houston, Figure 1 depicts a Maya personage who is painted in black (except for his hands and feet) and is greeting a visitor who is costumed as a Teotihuacan warrior. Both are wearing loincloths. According to these scholars, the three “noble ladies” seated nearby are displaying their body paint. They suggest that face painting on females may have been seen as “alluring.” Initially Nephi perceived that the skin of blackness, which may have been soot and charcoal at that time, would prevent his people from being enticed by Lamanites, who were “exceedingly fair and delightsome” (2 Nephi 5:21). However, the flattering cosmetic decor upon the women in this mural illustrates how later, an artistic application of stains may have enhanced their natural beauty. Figure 2 shows additional detail from the same mural. It depicts two men wearing elaborate ceremonial garments about their loins. The upper torso of one is blackened.

Figure 1. Detail of Uaxactun mural (circa 300 BCE–900 CE). Museum Collections, 1950. Courtesy of the Peabody Museum of Archaeology and Ethnology, Harvard University, 50–1–20/22982.

Figure 3 is a ceramic Maya funerary plate from Mesoamerica’s Early–Late Classic Period (593–731 CE). It confirms that Maya military leaders, perhaps Lamanite captains as well, may have been “resplendent on the battlefield.” This leader’s ceremonial attire distinguishes him, but in solidarity with his warriors, his body is blackened, except for his hands, feet, and face.
Blackening is depicted on numerous cylindrical vases in Justin Kerr’s impressive collection of photographs of Maya artifacts. Mayanists associate the scene in Figure 4 with the ruler Sak Muwaan who reigned
sometime between 700 and 726 CE as the divine lord in the lowlands of Guatemala. The vase shows a ruler whose skin is darkened except for his face, shoulders, and hands. It is believed to have been a drinking vessel of the son of Sak Muwaan (whose name, paradoxically, translates as “White Bird”), ruler of Motul de San Jose. Justin Kerr’s roll-out view in Figure 5 shows four figures whose body paint is similar: the ruler and his three court attendants on the left. The person on the right, who appears to be making an offering, is not blackened.

![Figure 4. Maya ceramic cylinder vase (circa 650–750 CE) courtesy of Justin Kerr, K2784, Dumbarton Oaks, Trustees for Harvard University, Washington, DC.](image)

Experts still find it nearly impossible to understand semantically Maya body paint patterns. It is unknown how often various colors or designs were used to distinguish different roles or to “define special moments.” However, in ceremonial situations men’s faces, hands, and feet usually were left *au naturel*. 
Figure 5. Enthroned Maya Lord and attendants courtesy of Justin Kerr, K2784, Dumbarton Oaks, Trustees for Harvard University, Washington, DC.

Hunting involved more variety, as shown in the following roll-out view of a deer hunting scene on a Maya vase. The hunters’ designs, however, all had one obvious purpose. Each of them used black paint as a “form of camouflage for … stealth” so that “the human body could thereby not be easily distinguished from the mottled light and color under the jungle canopy.”

Black handprints, a primitive art form, were “set upon” hunters as well as warriors to conceal them in the shadows and forest greenery. It seems logical that Lamanites, as well as Nephites (see Enos 1:3, 20), would have relied on similar disguise when hunting, as do hunters today. By the way, it was no coincidence that the markings evident in figures 6 and 7 mimicked the jaguar, the largest of the world’s spotted cats and the most feared predator in Mesoamerica.

Figure 6. Maya hunting scene courtesy of Justin Kerr, K1373, Dumbarton Oaks, Trustees for Harvard University, Washington, DC.

Body paint and stains facilitated thievery and plunder, a common practice among the Maya. The Book of Mormon reports that some Lamanites sought riches by plundering (Alma 17:14) and that they “were a very cunning people, delighting in plunder” (Mosiah 24:7). Nephites likewise engaged in plundering and stealing (Helaman 4:12). Body paint and stains would have concealed any of Lehi’s descendants when pillaging from the Maya or their own extended family.
Bishop de Landa observed that black and red were the primary colors of the ancient Maya body paint palette. This corroborates the Book of Mormon’s lexicon of colors associated with conflict. Indeed, these are the only colors that Nephite prophets mentioned, except for white and one reference to gray hair. They employed color with “great restraint.” Among the Maya, the first “quantum leap” in color complexity did not come until after about 300 BCE.

The diffusion and longevity of the blackening tradition are proven by the fact that the Aztec observed the custom after the Maya culture declined and long after Book of Mormon times. Young Aztec men received extensive training in martial arts at a school known as the telpochcalli, which literally translates as “youth house,” where, at sunset, they bathed and “painted their bodies black.” Courageous warriors (tiyahacauhtin) “painted their bodies black and painted their face with black stripes on which they sprinkled iron pyrite (apetztlī).” “Undistinguished warriors wore only body paint and a loincloth.”

The Mixtec culture flourished alongside the Aztec. A colorful Mixtec manuscript known as Codex Vindobonensis Mexicanus I corroborates the duration and widespread acceptance of Mesoamerican body painting while also illustrating its artistic evolution. Figure 8, a leaf from that codex, shows a painted soldier carrying a weapon on each side of the Tree of Apoala. Both warriors wear a skin of blackness.
that mimics the Maya. They are surrounded by men engaged in various activities, painted in diverse colors and patterns.

Figure 8. The Tree of Apoala, Vindobonensis Codex (post 900 CE). © The Trustees of the British Museum. Used with permission.

The enlarged detail in Figure 9 is particularly striking. It reveals that the Tree of Apoala is womb-shaped and is in fact a light-skinned female with her head to the ground. From her birth canal, a young warrior emerges whose body already is painted, except for his face, feet, and hands. For the Mixtec, childbirth was “a female brand of war,” so as this woman experienced labor she earned the respect due a combatant. “For females and males alike, the reward was the same if they died in the process; they gained entrance to the celestial paradise of the sun.”

The composition of ancient Mesoamerican paints has not been fully verified. For black, the Maya mainly used carbon, produced by burning resinous wood or insects and scorpions. Residues of these organic materials could be removed with water. However, when mixed with resins they became a coating that stayed put on a sweaty body.
In contrast, skin staining relied on plant-based pigments and extracts. For example, the huito plant, *Genipa americana*, grows naturally in the region’s tropical forests and has been used for skin blackening by many Indigenous tribes. When the juice of its unripe fruit reacts with the human skin and oxidizes, it stains the skin black but darkens only the top layers, so it is temporary. Without additional applications, it fades within a few weeks. The juice of *Genipa* also has been used in native tropical medicine. Due to its insect repellent properties, it may be helpful in malaria prophylaxis. It could have been “one of the plants” that according to Mormon removed the “cause” of the “fevers, which at some seasons of the year were very frequent” (Alma 46:40). Thus, charcoal-based body paint may have been used episodically for a battle,
for stalking game, and for looting, while pigment stains would have facilitated a prolonged military campaign as well as intricate and eye-catching body décor for women.

The Maya also applied paints and stains for social messaging. Colors and patterns became communiqués that could be erased and replaced. This allowed individuals and groups to express social values and to use their skin “as a painting surface like any other, to be wiped clean for other future displays.” This purpose also would have been well suited to the Lamanites’ lifestyle. Their women may have used paint and stains to beautify themselves for special occasions or for courtship and marriage rituals. For men, the custom could have emphasized their social roles, demonstrated their rejection of Hebrew traditions, or signaled to the Maya that they were allies, just as the Amlicites marked their foreheads to denote their allegiance.

In short, the Lamanites’ mark or skin of blackness may have been nothing more than body paint and stains with practical, tactical, and ritual significance. Testing the cogency of this explanation, however, requires further consideration of the following:

- the timing and circumstances of the mark’s origin;
- the ancient cursing tradition and the curses pronounced by Lehi;
- the meaning of the words “the Lord did cause;”
- the Lamanite marriage taboo and Nephite concerns about exogamy;
- the nature of miracles;
- the fundamentals of human genetics; and
- the Latter-day Saint doctrine of moral agency.

It will then be time to consider how the Mesoamerican evidence and these topics resonate with previous metaphorical arguments for the skin of blackness and with the text of the Book of Mormon.

**The Origin of the Mark**

Depending on a reader’s assumptions about the mark, it can be easy to miss clues in the text regarding its timing. Some see the mark as a sudden change that fulfilled the inspired prophecy that Nephi first received when his eldest brothers began murmuring when Lehi offered sacrifices in the wilderness. In response to their complaints, Lehi rebuked them “with power, being filled with the Spirit, until their frames did shake before him” (1 Nephi 2:5–14). But Nephi seems to have foreseen that
their grumbling would lead to worse. In response, the Lord comforted Nephi with the words of a prophecy. The prophecy did not mention skin, blackness, or a mark, but rather warned that Laman and Lemuel would be cursed “in that day that they shall rebel against [Nephi].” It also consoled Nephi by foretelling the results: Laman and Lemuel would be “cut off from the presence of the Lord,” Nephi would be made “a ruler and a teacher” over them, and Laman and Lemuel would have “no power” over Nephi and his people unless they also rebelled against God (1 Nephi 2:16–23). Nephi observed these consequences time and again, even before Lehi’s family arrived in the Americas.127

Other readers theorize that the Lamanites experienced a gradual pigmentation change over a period of time. However, according to the text, darkened skin did not show up first in Lamanite offspring decades after the schism. When Nephi said on his small plates that “the Lord did cause a skin of blackness to come upon them” he was referring to his eldest “brethren,” Laman and Lemuel (2 Nephi 5:19–21). Mormon’s more expansive account, presumably taken from the earlier Book of Lehi, added that the “mark” was set upon Laman and Lemuel, the sons of Ishmael, and also the Ishmaelitish women (Alma 3:7). When the mark is first mentioned, these pioneer Lamanites had children, including teenagers and young adults; curiously, however, as far as we can tell, the blackening affected only the Lamanites’ founding mothers and fathers. In short, it did not take generations or even years for the mark to appear. The words of Nephi and Mormon do not leave readers that choice.

The external appearance of Nephi’s two eldest brothers changed within at most a few years after Lehi’s death. The blackening might have been part of their plot to kill Nephi and his righteous brothers Sam, Jacob, and Joseph (Alma 3:6–7). It seems likely that it happened shortly after the rift, when Nephi was not present to observe it personally because he had fled into the wilderness “for the space of many days” (2 Nephi 5:7). This may be inferred from the fact that several years later, when Nephi engraved his condensed chronology of post-Lehi events on his small plates, he reported the blackening before mentioning any wars or contentions with the Lamanites. Nephi, who was focused on founding a new settlement and preparing to defend it, might not have learned of the blackening for some period of time. Nothing pin-points when the change occurred; however, based on the fact that the blackening apparently involved only a dozen adults, it seems reasonable to surmise that it occurred when or shortly after Nephi fled.
A change of phenotypical features at the time of the schism would be, in effect, a genetic mutation. If that notion does not square with logic, science, and theology, then the observed shift in their outward appearance must have been their own doing. The mark upon the murderous band, the darkness that Nephi’s younger brother Jacob later would refer to as “filthiness,” could have been charcoal, soot, paint, or stains that they applied, perhaps in diverse patterns.128

The Lehite Curse: To Be Cut Off from the Presence of the Lord

All references to a curse in the Book of Mormon must be understood within the Hebrew cursing tradition. References to making a covenant in the Hebrew scriptures are often a translation of kārat berît, which literally means to “cut [kārat] a covenant [berît].” This refers to the ancient practice of making a contract or covenant that is ratified or made binding by slaughtering and cutting an animal, which can suggest a serious penalty for failing to keep the covenant. The concept of cutting has echoes in other covenant-related customs and events, such as circumcision (Genesis 17:14), the Nephite military commander who rent his coat to create a banner of liberty (Alma 46:12–13), and the crucifixion of Jesus Christ. So too does the curse of being “cut off” if one violates covenants.129 The Apostle Paul’s chastisement of early Christian converts who continued to “preach circumcision” is a clever example. He used this play-on-words: “I would they were even cut off” (Galatians 5:11–12). Often the effect of a biblical curse was to be cut off from the Lord’s presence or a sacred environment, as were Adam and Eve, or to be expelled from one’s family or community, as was Cain after he murdered Abel.130 “The Lamanites are a case study of dissenters who severed themselves from covenants and religious observances and were “cut off” from the presence of the Lord. Throughout the Book of Mormon, the curse and its removal are correlated consistently to estrangement from and reunification with the Lord and his people.

The threat of being “cut off” is not unique to the Lamanites. Speaking to his entire family, Nephi quoted Isaiah’s words to all of the house of Jacob: “for my name’s sake I will defer mine anger, and … refrain from thee, that I cut thee not off” (1 Nephi 20:9). The risk of being cut off applied to all of Lehi’s descendants — actually, to anyone who turned away from God.131 Moreover, readers often forget the harsher curse pronounced upon the Nephites. Because of their wickedness, the Lord damned them with “utter destruction” (Alma 9:18) — with “wars and
pestilences” and with “famines and bloodshed, even until the people of Nephi shall become extinct” (Alma 45:11).

The first of Nephi’s personal revelations that he recorded on his small plates prophesied that Laman and Lemuel would suffer a “sore curse” and be “cut off from the presence of the Lord” (1 Nephi 2:16–23). Separation was the essence of that curse. Nephi repeated that in 2 Nephi 5:20. In this same revelation Nephi learned that he would rule and teach his brethren and that Laman and Lemuel would have “no power” over him. But this original prophecy of a curse did not mention either a mark or skin of blackness. It warned of a spiritual estrangement that could occur in a day, indeed less than a day. Each time Laman and Lemuel rebelled they temporarily cut themselves off from the Lord, and each time they repented, they restored their relationship.

With Lehi’s dying words he bestowed upon Laman and Lemuel his “first blessing:” that they would prosper in the land (2 Nephi 1:20, 28). However, it was conditional, as was the curse. Laman and Lemuel simply could not allow Nephi to replace Lehi, so upon Lehi’s death they plotted to destroy their younger brothers, causing Nephi and his followers to flee far into the wilderness. More than ever before, the curse foretold in Nephi’s prophecy was fulfilled. The Lamanites were severed from intercessory prayers and sacrifices, from the holy scriptures, and from inspirational teachings. They were cut off from “the presence of the Lord.” This was a curse that without straining faith or reason could be and was fulfilled “in that day.”

In the next verse, 2 Nephi 5:21, the first sentence is followed by another that contains two independent clauses that cause confusion. This may be due, in part, to the biases of readers and the general absence of punctuation, paragraphs, and verses in the printer’s manuscript of the Book of Mormon. The separation of those two independent clauses by only a semicolon muddles two distinct concepts (the curse and skin color). Dividing them might create a more effective and sensitive distinction and leave less room for a biased interpretation. One verse could deal with the curse and its internal cause, which was the hardening of hearts. The other could describe the outward mark that Nephi observed. The two verses could be re-punctuated and paragraphed as follows:

20 Wherefore, the word of the Lord was fulfilled which he spake unto me, saying that: Inasmuch as they will not hearken unto thy words they shall be cut off from the presence of the Lord. And behold, they were cut off from his presence. And he had caused the cursing to come upon them, yea, even
a sore cursing, because of their iniquity. For behold, they had hardened their hearts against him, that they had become like unto a flint.

21 Wherefore, as they were white, and exceedingly fair and delightsome, that they might not be enticing unto my people the Lord God did cause a skin of blackness to come upon them.

The nuanced word “wherefore” at the beginning of the clause about the Lamanites’ fair appearance and the skin of blackness leaves room to speculate how soon it came upon the small group of adults. Notably, Royal Skousen, after studying Oliver Cowdery’s handwritten manuscript, agrees that the semicolon in the current printed version of verse 21 should be replaced with a period and that the word “wherefore” should be capitalized and begin a new sentence that mentions the “skin of blackness.”

Nephi’s Theology of Causation

The blackening process cannot be understood without deconstructing Nephi’s words “the Lord did cause.” Their theological import is not intuitive. Must they mean that by temporal intervention God immediately set a dark skin upon a dozen or so adults? Or could the Lamanites, like the Maya, have darkened themselves? Could the words “the Lord did cause” be merely a figure of speech? The solution may lie in the theology behind those words. Their purpose differs from what most Latter-day Saints expect.

Nephi venerated earlier Hebrew prophets. When he preached that Moses, “according to the power of God which was in him,” divided the waters of the Red Sea and caused water to come forth from the rock (1 Nephi 17:26–31), he was quoting Isaiah who also had written that the Lord caused the waters to flow out of the rock” (1 Nephi 20:21). Many of Jeremiah’s prophecies were engraved on the brass plates (1 Nephi 5:13), and they often said that Jehovah had caused or would cause events. Ezekiel, who began to prophesy in 598 BCE, employed the same rhetorical style. Nephi mirrored this contemporary Hebrew metaphysical perspective on causality. He recognized, as Thomas Aquinas later argued, that Jehovah was the prime mover in the universe. He revered God’s omniscience and omnipotence and expressed his reverence through a traditional, formal Hebraism — “the Lord did cause.”
Hebrew scholar Michael Fishbane points out that in prophetic appeals to the seed of Abraham, God’s power and providence repeatedly are “emphasized in order to assuage the nation’s fears that their ‘way’ is hidden from God.” Nephi imitated his role models. Like them, he may have used the words “the Lord did cause” to reassure his followers of God’s superior dominion and perpetual watchful care. He and other Book of Mormon prophets articulated this often, sometimes characterizing it as the “goodness of God.”

According to Reynolds and Sjodahl, Nephi may have taken several years to prepare his small plates, as though he were creating not only sacred but epic literature for the Nephites, reminiscent of Genesis, Exodus, and other ancient heroic ventures such as the Epic of Gilgamesh, the Iliad, and the Odyssey. Perhaps to inspire his people with respect for his prophetic role in the founding of the Nephite nation, Nephi’s abbreviated historical account was personal and hero-centric. Nephi wrote that Laman and Lemuel conspired to slay him because under Lehi’s patronage he had become their ruler and teacher, that he fled with his family and all who would go with him, that he feared reprisals, that “I, Nephi” made “many swords,” that he “built a temple,” and that he “caused [his] people to be industrious” (2 Nephi 5:1–17). Nephi wrote with the artistry and deliberative style of 7th-century BCE Jewish poets and prophets. His narrative emphasized divine approbation, heavenly intervention, noble heritage, and the ability, if righteous, to triumph against all odds. Nephi wanted to leave his posterity an undeniable witness that God was the ultimate source of prosperity (2 Nephi 5:11) and that disasters are the judgments of God — for the Lord “is mightier than all the earth” (1 Nephi 4:1) and “hath all power” (1 Nephi 9:6). The omnipotent God that Nephi hoped his descendants would remember and worship is summed up in his statement: “And the Lord spake, and it was done” (2 Nephi 5:23). So of course, drawing on Hebrew precedents, Nephi wrote that “the Lord did cause” the Lamanites’ “skin of blackness,” thereby recognizing God’s supremacy and legitimizing the Nephites’ cultural and religious exceptionalism.

Significantly, every Book of Mormon reference to the “mark” omits God from the calculus. For example, Mormon did not assert that it was in fact God who set the mark upon Laman, Lemuel, the sons of Ishmael and the Ishmaelitish women, only that the mark “was set upon” the Lamanites’ fathers (Alma 3:6–7). Divine intervention is implied only in Nephi’s small-plates account of the prophecy, when Nephi used the phrase “the Lord did cause” to describe the appearance of the “skin of
blackness.” His use of a traditional prophetic voice and a Hebraism do not justify making God the cause-in-fact.

The Nephite/Lamanite Marriage Taboo

When Nephi wrote about the skin of blackness, he had a growing tribe. He wanted to ensure that his sons, daughters, nieces, and nephews did not marry their vengeful cousins. He engraved his small plates specifically for his own clan.

So long as Nephi’s nieces and nephews were under the sway of Laman and Lemuel, they posed an existential threat. To make matters worse, Nephi recognized that the young Lamanites were “fair and delightsome” and could become “enticing” (2 Nephi 5:21). He feared that “kissing cousins” would lead young Nephites into iniquity. Thus, Nephi foresaw that the skin-blackening tradition would discourage exogamy, and he viewed that as providential. Centuries later, Mormon echoed Nephi. During another crisis Mormon wrote that the “mark” then worn by the Lamanites in battle discouraged mixing that could lead Nephites to “believe in incorrect traditions which would prove their destruction” (Alma 3:7–8).

It is understandable for a parent to worry about a child marrying someone who is seeking revenge upon the parents themselves or their family members and friends. Notably, however, the Lord had told Nephi at the outset that Lamanite cousins would not be loathsome if they would repent of their iniquities (2 Nephi 5:22). When Nephites and Lamanites shared the same values they intermarried. There is no reason to infer racism in the fatherly concerns of Nephi and Mormon. The issue was always the Lamanites’ sins, not their skins.

Undoubtedly, Laman, Lemuel, the sons of Ishmael, and their wives had their own motives for marking themselves, and the record suggests that it had nothing to do with marriage. Nowhere in the Book of Mormon did Lamanites discourage their children from courting and marrying Nephites. On one occasion, apostate Nephite priests abducted 24 Lamanite maidens and forced them into marriage, yet when the brides had a chance to extricate themselves, instead they begged for compassion on their Nephite husbands. (Mosiah 20:1–5 and 23:33–34). A Lamanite King eagerly offered one of his daughters in marriage to a Nephite missionary (Alma 17:24). Later, a widowed Lamanite queen had no reservations about marrying a shrewd and ambitious Nephite and even allowing him to succeed to her husband’s throne (Alma 47). Unfortunately, the Lamanites have not yet had a chance to explain their
motives. In their place, the artifacts of ancient Indigenous Americans now speak from the dust.

**Miracles**

The Book of Mormon soberly affirms that God is “a God of miracles” (2 Nephi 27:23). But what is a miracle? John A. Widtsoe, a noted scientist and academic who was the President of the University of Utah before becoming a member of the Quorum of Twelve Apostles, wrote: “a miracle simply means a phenomenon not understood, in its cause and effect relations.” He cautioned: “There can be no chance in the operations of nature. This is a universe of law and order.”

James E. Talmage, a chemist and geologist who also was the President of the University of Utah before being called to the Quorum of the Twelve, observed: “The human sense of the miraculous wanes as comprehension of the operative process increases.”

Body paint is an operative process that is natural, swift, and reversible. A child can understand and explain it. It requires no divine disruption of the natural order. It produces a skin of blackness on-demand and without making sibling rivalry the cause of celestial gene-splicing. Some miracles may forever remain mysterious, but the “mark” that some Nephite authors considered to be a blessing was the result of innovation and agency.

Without the Mesoamerican evidence, a relatively sudden skin color mutation that selectively applied only to Lehi’s two eldest sons and a few companions would seem like the act of an angry, impulsive, and capricious God. After all, Laman and Lemuel terrorized Nephi repeatedly during Lehi’s odyssey to the Americas. There were several earlier occasions to punish them: for example, when they beat Nephi with a wooden rod outside of Jerusalem (1 Nephi 3:28), bound him with cords, intending to leave him in the wilderness to be devoured by wild beasts (1 Nephi 7:16), conspired to slay both Lehi and Nephi when Ishmael died (1 Nephi 16:34–39), attempted to throw Nephi from a cliff into the depths of the sea (1 Nephi 17:48–55), and, during the transoceanic voyage, bound him with cords, nearly causing the entire family to be drowned during a fierce storm (1 Nephi 18:11). However, despite repeated attempted fratricide (and even patricide), Lehi did not leave his eldest sons behind or cut them off, and the Lord did not blacken their skins. Why would God wait to set a mark upon them until they conspired against Nephi for the sixth time and he again had escaped?
The patriarch Jacob’s blended family is instructive. His ten oldest sons abused their younger brother Joseph no less, and traumatized their parents even more. They threw Joseph into a pit to starve, trafficked him into bondage, divided the secret profits, destroyed their father’s property, fabricated evidence of Joseph’s violent death, and perpetrated a blood-stained cover-up. Yet Jehovah refrained from corporal punishment; indeed, eventually He rewarded them with fertile land in Goshen (Genesis 37–47). Similarly, the Lamanites ultimately inherited what the Nephites originally had hoped would be their own promised land.

It bears remembering that at times the Nephites became equally or even more wicked and depraved than the Lamanites. Yet there was no impact on their complexion. Indeed, in 87 BCE the turncoat Nephites who were known as Amlicites personally marked their own bodies with red (Alma 3:4). God did not do it for them.

**The Laws of Genetics**

Variety in skin color is a function of melanin, the natural sunscreen pigment that is produced within melanocytes in the lowest layer of the epidermis. Those cells are not instantly genetically modified to produce far more melanin and browner skin. There is no known on/off switch. Except in the case of a “selective gene sweep,” changes in the pigmentation of a significant population require far longer than the entire recorded history of Lehi’s descendants. In a small group, variations could occur rapidly, but the phenotypical features that are referred to as “race” developed over millennia. Innumerable minor genetic tweaks through natural selection and evolutionary adaptation allowed humans to achieve the “optimal level of pigmentation [and other features] for the regions they ended up in.” These are laws of nature. They deserve respect. Indeed, the First Presidency of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints has stated that it leaves to science questions regarding natural selection and adaptation of the species. The agency of man and of nature itself is reflected in the diversity of humankind.

In an effort to accommodate science, a few Book of Mormon apologists have considered two potential ordinary biological processes for darkening the skin. Some have proposed intermarriage with darker Indigenous peoples. But that only could have accelerated changes. It would not account for the sudden skin of blackness. Moreover, as both John Sorenson and Brant Gardner point out, if the Lamanites intermarried with natives, the Nephites likely did the same. Nibley once hinted at the possibility that a darker complexion may have
It is true that UV rays can increase the production of melanin and, over time, produce a “near-doubling of the skin’s melanin content.” But that falls short of what Nephi seems to have referred to as a “skin of blackness.” And a so-called “farmer’s tan” is not genetically transferable. Besides, there is no evidence that Nephi farmers and laborers were more fully clothed than their Lamanite kin, except during battles when Lamanite warriors were nearly naked. Furthermore, neither of these theories leads logically to the blackening of a select group of adults within at most a few years. Thus both contradict the text.

**Moral Agency**

A direct causal relationship between religious orthopraxy and natural skin color is not only unscientific and counter-intuitive, it controverts the revealed doctrine of moral agency and accountability. Moral agency requires freedom to choose and to act, without divine meddling (Doctrine and Covenants 101:78). Father Lehi himself, in a farewell speech, made this doctrine a fact of life and a pre-eminent doctrine for Latter-day Saints. It is a revealed and reliable truth — what Elder Holland has referred to as “divine data.”

Shortly before Lehi died, he taught that all men are free “to act for themselves and not to be acted upon, save it be by the punishment of the law at the great and last day” (2 Nephi 2:26). It would mock Lehi’s doctrine of eternal justice to assert that God blackened the skins of the very adults to whom he spoke. As Fiona and Terryl Givens have said, it is axiomatic that “if consequences followed immediately and directly from actions, agency would be compromised.” To be sure, poor choices lead to consequences, but not to a genetic mutation.

**Metaphorical Arguments for the Skin of Blackness**

Often disciple scholars have urged a metaphorical interpretation of the skin of blackness. Some have focused on the fact that the words “dark” and “blackness” are archaic Middle Eastern literary devices. For example, the ancient Zoroastrians conceived of a cosmic conflict between good, represented by light, and evil, represented by darkness.” Therefore, these scholars argue that the “skin of blackness” was merely a metaphor. Applying this literary pastiche to the book’s few-and-far-between references to skin, they contend that as an ancient idiom the phrase “skin of blackness” should not be read as racially charged.
As for the word “white,” the 1828 Webster’s Dictionary of the American Language said that it referred to purity. True to that definition, the Book of Mormon often uses the word “white” when it refers to people who are cleansed through the “blood of the Lamb” (1 Nephi 12:11; Alma 13:11, 34:36; Mormon 9:6). In fact, almost half of the 28 or so Book of Mormon references to the words “white,” “whiter,” and “whiteness,” are figures of speech for spotlessness.\(^{159}\)

However, although light vs. dark juxtapositions in the Book of Mormon are consistent with ancient Middle Eastern culture,\(^{160}\) this argument has its limitations. The counterpoint is that the “metaphoric contrast of white and black, so common today in Western culture, was not prevalent in the Bible.”\(^{161}\) Its authors used the imagery of light and darkness with great complexity.\(^{162}\) Moreover, when Book of Mormon authors intended a metaphorical meaning for white or for darkness, often their intent is obvious.\(^{163}\)

Nibley first called attention to the ancient coincidentia oppositorum of dark vs. light and argued that the “mark was not a racial thing.”\(^{164}\) Nibley noted that this ancient dichotomy sometimes influenced not only perceptions about the human condition generally, but about individual circumstances, including one’s countenance or complexion.\(^{165}\) Although he hypothesized, Nibley did not embrace an entirely metaphorical explanation for the mark. Nor did he see the conflict between the two Book of Mormon cultures as an allegory. Indeed, it would be a stretch to argue that when Nephite prophets reported real-time and sometimes eye-witness accounts of the Lamanites with terms like skin of blackness, darkness of skins, mark, or filthiness, they intended those words to be read centuries later not factually, but only metaphorically.

Often apologists start with the assumption that racism was part of Nephi’s cultural baggage — that he brought it with him. However, scholars today consider race and racism to be relatively recent social constructs. There is “no consensus among scholars of what racism is,” in fact, no consensus “whether races exist at all.”\(^{166}\) Before the Common Era, religious beliefs, ethnicity, and geographic origin were often seen as relevant distinctions, but not race as we think of it today. In fact, according to available historical records, when Nephi left Jerusalem phenotypic features were not used to discriminate among humans. Pigmentation and other attributes that now are associated with “race” may have been observed, but skin color was not the basis for distinctions.

Joseph Smith’s revelations known as Selections from the Book of Moses tell of complexion-based prejudice before the time of the great flood.\(^{167}\)
However, in the post-diluvian world of Noah’s descendants through the lineages of Japheth, Shem, and Ham there was great tolerance of racial diversity in the Middle East, especially in Egypt. There, “the long history of population intermingling along the Nile had made contacts between people of different skin colors routine.” Egyptians had been acquainted with and fought alongside black mercenaries at least as early as 2000 BCE and, “as a result of longstanding familiarity, saw nothing unusual in the Kushites’ color or other physical characteristics.” Egyptians were “mostly tolerant of diversity in physical appearance.” So were their Middle Eastern neighbors.

From the time of Moses forward, the Hebrews saw themselves as a chosen people who were called to respect the Torah’s command not to vex a stranger, to treat him as “one born among you,” and to “love him as thyself” (Leviticus 19:34). Scholars tell us that the earliest Jews distinguished themselves not by race, but by their monotheism, cultural practices, diet, and language. The Torah legitimized slavery, but without making a value judgment about physical appearance. Holy writ allowed Hebrews to make servants of both fellow Hebrews and the children of strangers, whether among them or in adjoining lands (Leviticus 25:39–45). It appears that Jewish racism may not have surfaced until they themselves were enslaved during their Babylonian exile, after Jerusalem was sacked in 586 BCE. Only after that date do scattered Talmudic and Midrashic sources evidence Jewish reliance on the so-called “Hamitic curse” to deem Canaanites, and perhaps also the Blacks of Africa, suitable for perpetual bondage.

Because Lehi foresaw the destruction of Jerusalem, he and his followers escaped in time to avoid the Babylonian conquest. Thus, the perspectives of Lehi and Nephi on strangers and foreigners, including Africans, were not tainted by the biases that emerged during the exilic period. The brass plates that they carried with them contained the words of the “holy prophets even down to the reign of Zedekiah” (1 Nephi 5:11–13), including prophecies of Isaiah that expressed a universalistic theology. Isaiah’s influence upon Nephite beliefs is undeniable. So that his people would “lift up their hearts and rejoice for all men,” Nephi engraved many of Isaiah’s words upon his small plates, including one of Isaiah’s earliest visions — that “the Lord’s house shall be established in the top of the mountains … and all nations shall flow unto it” (2 Nephi 12:2). It is noteworthy that the first verse of prophecy that Nephi engraved on the small plates was his own father’s visionary and inclusive declaration that
the “power, and goodness, and mercy” of the Lord, God Almighty “are over all the inhabitants of the earth” (1 Nephi 1:14).

The brass plates also included many of the prophecies of Jeremiah (1 Nephi 5:13), and Lehi’s departure occurred just as a conspiracy of Jewish princes who rejected dooms-day prophecies had cast Jeremiah into prison (1 Nephi 7:14). Often forgotten is the fact that it was Ebed-melech, a black Kushite from Ethiopia and confidant of King Zedekiah (the name can mean “servant [or slave] of the king”), who intervened on Jeremiah’s behalf. With Zedekiah’s approval, he made a rope of worn-out clothes and rotten rags and secretly rescued Jeremiah from the miry dungeon where the princes had left him to die (Jeremiah 37:15 to 38:28). For Lehi and Nephi, Ebed-melech, who had risen to prominence in Zedekiah’s court, would have been a hero.

Antiquity’s historical archives are admittedly incomplete, but the apparent absence of skin color-based xenophobia in the pre-exilic Middle East suggests that Nephi was not expressing an inherited cultural bias when he wrote that “the Lord did cause a skin of blackness to come upon” Laman and Lemuel (2 Nephi 5:21). There is scant evidence for branding Nephi as a bigot or inferring systemic racial bias in the Book of Mormon, despite its internecine rivalry. From a historian’s point of view, to impute racism as we know it to that period would be anachronistic — it emerged later and elsewhere. Nephi seems to have authentically reflected his own era and upbringing when he declared that the Lord “inviteth all to come unto him and partake of his goodness,” including “black and white,” and that “all are alike unto God” (2 Nephi 26:33).

It might be tempting to tilt toward a metaphorical explanation for the “skin of blackness” because the same verse in which these words appear mentions the curse and then figuratively likens the hearts of Laman and Lemuel “unto a flint” (2 Nephi 5:21), a possible reference to the black obsidian that was widely used in Mesoamerica. Both hearts and skins are anatomical, so inferring another analogy for the mark upon the Lamanites’ skins may not seem unreasonable. However, the hearts/flint simile has limited probative value regarding what Nephi observed. The Book of Mormon almost always describes it only as a “mark” and never expressly uses it symbolically for anything.

Occasionally the Book of Mormon uses “white” to describe the incomparable radiance, brightness, and glory of God’s presence, which rabbinic literature refers to as the Shekinah. For example, Jehovah touched 16 transparent stones causing them to shine (Ether 3:1–6), the tree of life in Lehi’s vision bore fruit that “was white, to exceed all the whiteness
that [he] had ever seen” (1 Nephi 8:11), and in Nephi’s Messianic vision, the virgin Mary appeared “exceedingly fair and white” when she was under the influence of the Holy Spirit before giving birth to the Lamb of God (1 Nephi 11:13–21). Nephi foresaw in vision that the disciples of the Lord would be “made white in the blood of the Lamb because of their faith” (1 Nephi 12:8–11). And indeed, the book’s account of the visit of Jesus to the Americas after His resurrection says that He blessed His disciples and they were transfigured in His presence and made white. At that moment, “there was nothing upon earth so white” as the whiteness of the countenance and garments of the glorified Lord and His disciples as He smiled upon them (3 Nephi 19:25, 30).

Despite these superlatives, however, the common Middle Eastern ancestry of Mary, the Nephites, and the Lamanites, suggests that all these individuals had dark hair, dark eyes, and a Mediterranean complexion. None had what we refer to today as white skin. They were not Northern Europeans. The Shekinah illuminated Mary and the Nephite Twelve, and it enlightened the tree of life, its fruit, and the transparent stones.

The Book of Mormon appears to refer to a white natural human complexion only three times. Twice it is in Nephi’s words. In neither of these cases, however, is “white” a trope for purity.

First in Nephi’s futuristic vision of America he foresaw Gentiles who lived across the “many waters,” who would be led by the spirit to flee from captivity, battle their “mother” Gentiles, and be delivered, although, as foreseen by Nephi, chiefly by the “power of God” and because the “wrath of God was upon all those who were gathered together against them” (1 Nephi 13:11–19). These Gentile colonists he described as “white, and exceedingly fair, and beautiful like unto the Nephites” before their eventual destruction (1 Nephi 13:15). However, Nephi’s reference to white Gentiles merely contrasted the less melanated skin of both the Nephites and the Western European immigrants to the darker natural complexions or artificially darkened bodies that he had observed either in the Old World or the New. Nephi’s vision foresaw that the colonists “humbled themselves before the Lord” and that “the power of the Lord was with them” (1 Nephi 13:16), but he did not describe the colonists as pure. Likewise, the Nephites often were not pure. Indeed, beginning 200 years before their destruction they began to tolerate “all manner of wickedness” (4 Nephi 1:27); and near the end of their civilization, Mormon, in his final letter to his son Moroni, said that he could not even describe in words the extent of their “depravity” (Moroni 9:18–19).
Nephi’s second mention was his nostalgic reference to the Lamanites as white before the family schism (2 Nephi 5:21). This reminiscence refers to their comparatively lighter appearance, like that of Lehi’s entire colony, among other peoples. Although the daughters and sons of Lehi and Sariah had Mediterranean complexions, they had less melanin than some ethnic groups in the Old World who were familiar to Nephi, for example, the dark-skinned inhabitants of Palestine before the arrival of the Semitic people, Ethiopians in the court of Zedekiah, or the descendants of Cush in southern Arabia where Lehi’s pilgrimage likely travelled. Anciently, similar diversity existed in the New World. The “skin shades of surviving native peoples in Mesoamerica … range from dark brown to virtual white.” Thus, after arriving in the Americas, Nephi also may have observed inhabitants with darker complexions.

The third time, it was Mormon as editor who used “white” to describe all of the Lamanites who had become converted to the Lord in 15 CE and who merged with the Nephites when robbers were spreading “death and carnage throughout the land.” All who resisted the robbers’ threats, including previously converted Lamanites, “were compelled for the safety of their lives” to unite. Mormon, without hyperbole or relying on divine intervention, says that the skin of those who were Lamanites “became white like unto the Nephites” (3 Nephi 2:11–15). Notably, at that time the spiritual paradigm was inverted. These Nephites were far from pure. They “did still remain in wickedness, notwithstanding the much preaching and prophesying which was sent among them” (3 Nephi 2:10, 19). The coalition, therefore, was a military necessity rather than the result of a religious epiphany. Mormon’s observation about the Lamanites’ complexion had nothing to do with their conversion. They were already righteous, indeed, more righteous than the Nephites. There is no reason to assume that a supposed change in the Lamanites’ complexion six centuries earlier was genetically reversed in 15 CE. It is more practical to infer that for various reasons they renounced the use of soot, body paint, and stains and exposed their natural complexion.

One might be tempted to ask whether the Lamanites used white body paint or bleaching agents to become “white like unto the Nephites.” The text offers no hint of that. Besides, it would have served no practical or tactical purpose, as did darkening. Although a few instances of white body paint in Mesoamerica have been documented, so far Mesoamerican artifacts do not link white with religiosity. In Maya art, blue, which is never mentioned in the Book of Mormon, eventually became the color associated with priests and gods.
Nephi knew how to use the word “black” to describe skin color. When he stated that the Lord welcomes all, “black and white, bond and free, male and female,” he was describing biological and cultural conditions. He did not use “black” as a synonym for evil, nor “white” as a substitute for pure. He did not use “black and white” to proclaim sinner and saint “alike unto God.” Rather, for Nephi, despite any differences in the human family, all are “privileged the one like unto the other” (2 Nephi 26:28–33). Nephi testified of a God who welcomes all, whatever their complexion, sex, or social standing; whose “power, and goodness, and mercy are over all the inhabitants of the earth” (1 Nephi 1:14); and whose Holy Messiah will “make intercession for all the children of men” (2 Nephi 2:9).

Today the obscure and unconventional phrase “skin of blackness” seems to have come out of nowhere, but it is not intrinsically racist, nor would it have been in Nephi’s day. Arguably it is a Mesoamericanism — a unique expression that is “fully understandable only in terms of the civilization that prevailed in that part of the ancient world before AD 1500.” It might have been a Mayan term of art, an ancient Middle Eastern idiom, or both. It may have been meant to distinguish between a naturally black complexion and one that was artificial. These linguistic questions are for Mayanists and scholars of Hebrew, Assyrian, and other influences on Jewish culture before the Babylonian exile. For reasons that are not yet known, Nephi chose a phrase that was cryptic. But it was not a slip of Nephi’s stylus, of Joseph Smith’s tongue, or of Oliver Cowdery’s pen. Moreover, the terms “skin of blackness” and “mark” were racially neutral; they had no racist connotation whatsoever.

It is a slippery slope to rationalize or to impute a chronologically distant metaphorical sense to words or to a religious/cultural conflict between two peoples whose phenotypic features are merely assumed to be different. It is offensive to people of color to suggest that the Book of Mormon is color coded, even in a nonliteral way based on a Middle Eastern tradition. The book’s authors, including Nephi who created both the large and small plates as well as Mormon who abridged Nephi’s large plates and created his own eponymous volume, never hinted that they were compiling an extended allegory about a bi-racial society. Mormon’s son Moroni finished his father’s work not by praising him for writing inspirational literature, but by declaring that the record was “true” (Moroni 10:4, 29). For Nibley as well, the Book of Mormon was not a racial jeremiad. His conviction of its “divine provenance” was based on faith, not tangible proof.
the book, “indisputably” and “on the world’s terms,” was an authentic ancient record of actual events.\textsuperscript{189}

Reconciling the Book of Mormon with the Body Paint Tradition

Nothing in the Book of Mormon explicitly or implicitly contradicts the body paint rationale. Readers who are willing to interact with the text in a racially-neutral way will find that all of its text, including sermons and cross-cultural stories, can be squared with the custom. Reviewing these social interactions in fresh, thought-provoking ways requires both \textit{exegesis} — taking an interpretation out of the plain words on the page — as well as \textit{eisegesis}, which according to James Faulconer, means “this is what I thought [what I brought into the text] when I read that particular scripture.”\textsuperscript{190} Faulconer urges us to question the text, but at the same time question all of our presuppositions.

The many Lamanite/Nephite encounters are fertile ground for applying this approach to the long periods of silence in the text about skin color. Often, when a reference to physical appearance might be expected there is not a word. My personal musings about several cross-cultural events that might have triggered color commentary, if there had been an actual skin color difference, are in the Appendix.

One event shortly after Nephi’s death deserves singular scrutiny. Nephi’s younger brother Jacob first took the occasion to rebuke Nephite men for their pride (Jacob 2:13–16). He testified that God “created all flesh” and that “one being is as precious in his sight as another” (Jacob 2:21). He then emphasized that point saying: “revile no more against [the Lamanites] because of the darkness of their skins” (Jacob 3:9). He condemned Nephite prejudice based on that one aspect of the Lamanites’ appearance. He also censured the Nephite men for their moral filthiness while extolling the chastity of the Lamanite husbands and fathers. Jacob said that unless the arrogant, adulterous, lecherous Nephites repented, the Lamanites would be, figuratively, “whiter” in the eyes of God (Jacob 3:3–8).

Viewed through a racially neutral lens and with a Mesoamerican filter, Jacob’s reference to the “darkness” of his nephews’ skins certainly could have referred to their use of charcoal, soot, or body paint — a “filthiness” they had taken upon themselves “because of their fathers” (Jacob 3:9). His words parallel and were the precursor for those of Mormon who later said that “the skins of the Lamanites were dark according to the mark which was set upon their fathers” (Alma 3:6). When Jacob preached
this sermon, the Lamanites vividly remembered and resented Nephi’s escape. Perhaps more than ever they were forced to survive by stalking wild beasts and plundering. Jacob sharply contrasted the Lamanite men who, notwithstanding their more primitive living conditions, loved their wives and their children (Jacob 3:7) to the Nephite men who, instead, loved their riches, grieved the hearts of their wives and children, and were guilty of “fornication and lasciviousness, and every kind of sin” (Jacob 2:7–10, 12–13; 3:10, 12).

A hasty reading of Jacob’s speech might infer a confusing link between the curse of being cut off and the Lamanites’ dark appearance. The Nephites, he said, despised their “brethren” because of “the cursings which hath come upon their skins” (Jacob 3:5). This curious plural noun, which appears in the original printer’s manuscript, deserves a word search.

In the Book of Mormon, the curses of captivity, destruction, and being cut off from the Lord are often referred to as cursings. These oaths were a common ancient warfare practice and Hebrew military tradition. Joshua, the leader of Israel’s armies, recited cursings to his people. After vanquishing the city of Ai, he assembled the elders, officers, judges, and priests on each side of the ark, erected an altar, wrote the law of Moses upon stones, and then read “the blessings and cursings” (Joshua 8:32–35). The Torah refers to an oath of cursing (Numbers 5:21) and to words of cursing (Deuteronomy 30:19); the Psalms, to a wicked mouth that is full of cursing (Psalms 10:7; 59:12).

The Book of Mormon recognizes the rhetorical value and military role of cursings, not only upon enemies, but upon comrades and even oneself. Before going to war, Lamanites “swore in their wrath” to destroy the Nephites and their records and traditions” (Enos 1:14). One bloodthirsty Lamanite leader publicly cursed himself and his warriors with the words “we will perish or conquer” (Alma 44:8). Another cursed God and swore “with an oath” to drink Nephite blood (Alma 49:27). The Nephites had a similar custom that also included self-malediction. In a dramatic pre-war ceremony, Nephites warriors symbolically rent their garments and cast them at the feet of their captain. They then covenanted that if they fell into transgression, they likewise should be cast at the feet of their enemies, imprisoned, sold as slaves, or slain (Alma 46:22–23). The self-cursing tradition reappeared in South America centuries later in the motto embroidered on Simon Bolivar’s black banner “Muerte o Libertad!” In North America, it became Patrick Henry’s vow: “Give me liberty, or give me death!”
Maya warfare was entwined with religion and was a “deeply rooted ritualized institution.” As part of pre-war dedication or consecration rituals, ancient Mesoamericans “were proficient in imbuing or ensouling places with supernatural powers.” In times of war, cursings likely were common. When Lamanites applied body paint, they may have simultaneously cursed their enemies, and probably even themselves, swearing “we will perish,” if they failed to exact revenge. This could clarify Jacob’s nexus between “cursings” and the skins of enemy Lamanites.

The War of Words

The Book of Mormon is the account of siblings and cousins who sometimes fought with weapons and occasionally, with words. The Lamanites’ stereotypical anti-Nephitisms were *liars, deceivers, and robbers*. They had their reasons for these clichés. Laman and Lemuel could hardly forget Nephi’s subtlety when, as payback for Laban’s extortion in Jerusalem, Nephi killed Laban, disguised himself in his garments, absconded with Laban’s armor, breastplate, and sword, impersonated Laban in order to deceive his servant and convince him to remove the brass plates from Laban’s treasury, and then seized Laban’s servant outside Jerusalem’s walls and held him captive until he agreed to join Lehi’s secretive exodus (1 Nephi 3–4). For Laman and Lemuel, Nephi cemented his reputation for being cagey when, just in the nick of time, he stole away from Lehi’s New World settlement with all of the family’s heirlooms and “whatsoever things were possible.”

At times, Nephites reciprocated with ethnocentric anti-Lamanitisms that today sound pejorative. Their reductive stereotypes included *loathsome, lazy, idle, bloodthirsty, wild, hardened, stiffnecked, and ferocious*. However, demeaning words occur relatively rarely in 500-plus pages spanning 1,000 years of history. More frequently, Nephite prophets praised the Lamanites. Moreover, they reserved some of their most biting criticism for the Nephites themselves.

Critical thinking about the text’s behavioral-based stereotypes led Kerry Hull to conclude that they were often demonstrably incorrect. For example, given Nephi’s legacy, it was ironic for Nephites to demean the Lamanites as those who resorted to *mischief and subtlety* (2 Nephi 5:24). One Nephite leader recognized the Lamanites as “a strong people” (Mosiah 10:11). Others conceded that Lamanites prospered through trade and wisdom (Mosiah 24:7), that it was only the “more idle part” who “lived in the wilderness” (Alma 22:28), and that Nephites also indulged in idleness, thieving, and robbery (Alma 1:32).
Finally, no epithets for the Lamanites evidenced racism. Not one of them is the equivalent of a modern day racial or ethnic slur. Offense taken by contemporary readers seems to be influenced by current cultural prejudices. Even after many generations, the Lehites were one extended family and, despite some intermarriage with other peoples in the land, likely had similar physical features with relatively minor variations from the bodily norms of their Mediterranean-type ancestors. As far as we know, they never considered themselves to be two races or distinct ethnic groups. Although Lehi and Sariah parented two competitive clans, colonies, cultures, societies, and quasi-nation-states, the Nephites continually referred to the Lamanites as their brethren — a term of endearment that affirms their homogeneity as an extended family. Remarkably, Moroni who watched Lamanites savagely destroy his father, family, and friends, still considered his bloodthirsty enemies to be close relatives — charitably referring to them in his closing chapter as his “beloved brethren” (Moroni 10:18–19). Nephite authors used similar terms for Lamanites more than 50 times, sometimes even calling them “dearly beloved.” As John Tvedtnes pointed out, these are not “terms that one would expect to find in a society that holds racist views toward a neighboring people.”

Reading racial intolerance in the words of Nephite authors would be anachronistic to the Book of Mormon era. Moreover, Joseph Smith never referred to the Lamanite–Nephite division in racial terms. From the tense opening scenes of the book he translated until its apocalyptic finale, Lehi’s posterity were one people in the eyes of the Almighty, who, according to the text, did not play favorites based on lineage or appearance.

**Conclusion**

To date, Latter-day Saint scholars have depended upon traditions and textual analysis rooted in the Old World to defend the Book of Mormon. This approach anchors the text within the Semitic tradition and adds gravitas to the Church’s rejection of any theory that black or dark skin is a sign of a curse. However, prior explanations regarding the “skin of blackness” fail to consider the data now available from the ancient New World.

Relevant Mesoamerican data in the form of murals, vases, plates, and codices have been a long time in coming, and surely other artifacts are yet to be unearthed. But expert opinions about the evidence curated
from what seems to be the most likely mise-en-scène finally yields a fact-based theory that:

- reveals the practical and tactical motives for a self-administered, removable skin of blackness;
- honors the doctrine of moral agency;
- respects the principles of human genetics; and
- removes any racial inference that might be implied in the words “blackness,” “dark,” and “mark.”

A forté of this thesis is that it is based on authentic artifacts that have been interpreted by Mayanists who are not Latter-day Saints, and whose opinions about the use of body paint appear to be objective and neutral.

Whether the Lamanites lived within the Maya realm or elsewhere, the use of black paints and stains was congruent with their hunter-gatherer-warrior lifestyle, especially during their early years. Simply put, it meant less insect bites by day, fewer casualties on the battlefield, and better camouflage by night and in the forests. It would have been a common-sense response to their environment. It may well be another example of Ockham’s razor, the so-called law of parsimony. Among the competing theories for the skin of blackness, the simpler one — removable body paint — should be preferred.

Elder James E. Talmage taught that Genesis was “never intended as a textbook on geology, archaeology, earth-science, or man-science.” Nor is the Book of Mormon. But it does describe a setting in which the Lamanites could have applied soot, paint, and stains to their skins for any number of reasons: to spite Nephi, to spurn his religious traditions, to seek revenge when he ransacked their camp, to show allegiance with the Maya, to camouflage themselves when hunting, to facilitate stealth and plunder, to appear intimidating on the battlefield, to distinguish themselves in close-quarters combat, to allow their women to adorn their skins with designs, and to send social messages. Cultural archaeology now allows readers to picture the Lamanites setting that skin of the blackness upon themselves and to recognize, as Nibley presciently predicted, that it was a “reversible process,” that it was “their choice,” and that they controlled it.

The Oxford English Dictionary defines a myth as a “traditional story, especially one concerning the early history of a people or explaining a natural or social phenomenon, and typically involving supernatural beings or events. A widely held but false belief or idea.” New World facts now challenge all prior assumptions about the skin of blackness. Demythicizing that distinctive phrase consigns the notion that the
Lord darkened the Lamanites’ natural complexion to where it belongs: the folklore shelf of the “Gospel Library.” With newfound curiosity, reluctant readers and especially people of color can read the book for its precepts and for its witness of a God who invites all to come unto Him without wondering when an unwelcome inference about the mark or skin of blackness will appear.

President Russell M. Nelson’s ministry has refocused The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints on removing divisive attitudes and practices and gathering God’s entire family. He has emphasized that the Lord’s blessings are for every person who chooses to “let God prevail in his or her life.” To that end he has called upon Church members to abandon their prejudices, to “work tirelessly to build bridges of understanding rather than creating walls of segregation,” and to minister “to those who are excluded, marginalized, judged, overlooked, abused, and discounted.” He has urged Latter-day Saints not to merely passively accept, but to pro-actively champion diversity, inclusion, and equality in order rightfully to claim the title “the Restored Church.”

Latter-day Saints often associate that title with the restoration of priesthood authority, doctrines, ordinances, spiritual gifts, temples, and church officers — all of which are vital links to Christ’s New Testament church. However, President Nelson seems to envision these as means, not ends. He sees God’s purpose as uniting the entire human family and restoring all of God’s children “to wholeness,” with special care for those who “suffer on the margins of society.”

Faith in the Book of Mormon may be grounded in the book’s compelling witness of the Savior’s atonement; it may stem from a conviction that the book not only teaches spiritual truths but is an authentic ancient record of historical facts; or it may spring from the goodness of the lifestyle and sense of divine presence to which the book’s precepts lead. Readers have different perspectives on what is truth and how they discern it. As Terryl and Fiona Givens write, “different ways of knowing exist,” and “the body of Christ needs its full complement of members.” Regardless of the source of their faith, Latter-day Saints consecrate their time, talents, and resources to the kingdom of God. This includes Church members who have sincere questions about the Book of Mormon translation process, DNA evidence, 19th century material that appears in the text, references to horses and steel, the skin of blackness, etc.

All these believers seek assurance of God’s universal love. As Joseph Smith recognized, “for any rational being” to center her or his life
in God, it is “essentially necessary” to believe that God “is no respecter of persons; but in every nation” those who fear God and work righteousness are “accepted of him.” Thus, particularly in an era of racial and ethnic strife, many readers yearn to know that the Book of Mormon has no hidden racial agenda or subplot that demeans people of color and that its prophets and translator exemplified God’s love for the entire human family. Whatever the nature of one’s conviction, Moroni, the book’s final author, promises that a sure witness comes through faith, prayer, a sincere heart, real intent, and the power of the Holy Ghost (Moroni 10:4–5).

Evidence of the Mesoamerican body paint custom is not proof of that sort. But it is an objective evidence-based rebuttal to the charge of racism in the Book of Mormon. It reinforces the book’s message that God embraces people whose skin tones cover the entire sepia spectrum, from ebony to ivory; that He desires that every creature experience joy and fulfill the measure of its creation; and that He loves all women, men, young adults, youth, and children because of our unique personalities and differences rather than in spite of them. It allows the book to take its rightful place as prime proof that peace and harmony abound only within a social framework of equality. It removes what Joseph Smith referred to as “shackles” of “superstition” and “bigotry” and helps to heal racial wounds. It is a factual imprimatur upon the Book of Mormon’s prophetic promise that “God is mindful of every people, whatsoever land they may be in … and his bowels of mercy are over all the earth” (Alma 26:37).

[Author’s Note: I gratefully acknowledge the insights, inspiration, and encouragement of Richard D. Hansen, James Faulconer, Richard Bushman, Paul Reeve, Margaret Blair Young, Darius Gray, Brant Gardner, Kerry Hull, Steven G. Nelson, Jeff Lindsay, and, especially, with great affection, Judy, who loves people of color as I do and believed in me from the beginning.]

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Coast, Togo, Benin, Cameroun, and the Central African Republic. France appointed him to be its Honorary Consul in Arizona, a position he held for 19 years and for which he was decorated as Chevalier de l’Ordre national du Mérite. For his years of service to young men, the Boy Scouts of America awarded him the Silver Beaver. In 2015, when the Arizona Ecumenical Council became an interreligious organization (Arizona Faith Network), Gerrit was called to represent the Church on its Board of Directors. He continues in that role, and with his wife, Judy, serves on the Church’s Phoenix Metro Communications Council. They have three children, five grandchildren, and are actively engaged in interfaith outreach, especially to the African American Christian clergy and community leaders.

Appendix:

Textual Consistency with the Body Paint Tradition

For many Latter-day Saints playing a word association game, “dark skin” would likely be one of the common responses to the word “Lamanite.” This stigmatizing generalization ignores the fact that in the Book of Mormon there are long periods of silence about skin and skin color. In most Lamanite/Nephite interactions there is not a word about complexion, even in settings when a reference to skin color might be expected if in fact there had been a significant difference.

In approximately 200 BCE a small band of daring Nephites left their own territory and sought to reclaim the land where Lehi’s colony first lived — long since occupied by Lamanites. The explorers sent Zeniff as a “spy among the Lamanites,” and he spent enough time to see that there was “good among them” (Mosiah 9:1). He remained undetected. Apparently, his skin was no different. Zeniff became convinced that the two cultures could jointly occupy the lands, so he established a Nephite enclave. About twenty years later, the Lamanites launched a surprise attack on these Nephite settlers. The Lamanite warriors had shaved their heads and were naked except for a leather girdle about their loins, but the record is mute about their skin color (Mosiah 10:8). Zeniff’s disciplined soldiers prevailed, and the Nephites continued to cohabit the land.

In 90 BCE, Nephites went as missionaries to Lamanites who many Nephites then despised as “a wild and a hardened and a ferocious people” (Alma 17:14). Mormon reports that the “curse of God” had fallen upon these Lamanites “because of the traditions of their fathers” but he did not define the curse. He said, however, that the Lord’s promises would be extended to them upon repentance, suggesting that the curse meant
being cut off (Alma 17:15). Within a few years, many Lamanites were converted and became “friendly with the Nephites,” so that curse “did no more follow them” (Alma 23:17–18). Their complexion was never mentioned.

Figures 1 and 2 are Classic-period Maya murals, not Nephite art. But if readers will indulge a light-hearted comparison, they can imagine Book of Mormon themed captions for these images. If the Nephites had the “copper-olive complexion” that Sorenson describes, perhaps bronzed further by exposure to the sun, Figure 1 could represent Ammon, one of those missionaries, presenting himself to a Lamanite king who is wearing a ceremonial skin of blackness, with three noble, attractive women seated nearby, perhaps one of them being the daughter that the king urged Ammon to take to wife (see Alma 17:18–24). Figure 2 could represent Ammon’s brother, who before departing as a missionary was the heir to the Nephite throne, encountering a more powerful Lamanite king who is elaborately dressed (see Alma 22).

These missionaries were blessed with remarkable success. A great many Lamanites were not only converted to the Lord but became strict pacifists. They took a solemn oath never again to make war, washed their swords that had been blood stained in battle, and buried them deep in the earth (Alma 24:11–18). That they previously had stained their skins for warfare may be inferred from words of their king who explicitly likened their personal “stains” that had been “taken away” to their swords that had been stained with the blood but “washed bright” before being buried (Alma 24:12–13).

One might argue that the king’s use of the word “stain” referred metaphorically to guilt, but in plain English it suggests an external substance, like the word “mark.” The Hebrew scriptures use “stain” to describe an external effect, rather than as a metaphor for guilt.23 Also, “stain” is used in only one other account in the Book of Mormon. When Alma accused Nephites of being “murderers” (Alma 5:23), he preached that their garments were “stained with blood and all manner of filthiness” and must be purified “from all stain” (Alma 5:21–23). Apparently, some of his listeners had shed blood; perhaps they still had traces of it on their clothing. Although the converted Lamanite king said that it was God who had taken away their stains, it is not a foregone conclusion that he used the word “stain” only symbolically for guilt as a result of all manner of wickedness.

The conversion of so many Lamanites triggered decades of warfare beginning in 87 BCE, during which several events occurred without any
mention of skin color. For Hugh Nibley, Mormon’s report of the first epic battle was a principal source for interpreting the word “mark” as something that is applied to the skin’s surface. When Mormon chronicled that battle, he made no comment on complexion and did not implicate God as the cause of the mark. In a matter-of-fact way he reported that Nephitic dissenters who called themselves Amlicites joined with Lamanites and for their battlefield insignia painted a red mark on their foreheads. During hand-to-hand combat, the Amlicites needed this mark in order to recognize their own platoon. Meanwhile, blackened Lamanites needed to be able to distinguish Amlicite allies who were helping to spring a trap from enemy Nephtes who were falling into it.224 Mormon says that the Amlicites “set the mark upon themselves” (Alma 3:13) and did this “after the manner of the Lamanites” (verse 4). According to Nibley, this suggests that the Lamanites had applied a mark to their skin as well.225 Nephi had prophesied that a mark would be set upon the Lamanites’ allies (Alma 3:15–16), and Mormon opined that even though the Amlicites’ marked only their foreheads with something that was temporary, they were “fulfilling the words of God” (verse 18). Logically, therefore, Lamanites also would have fulfilled the words of God merely by marking themselves with removable war paint. In this same account, Mormon recognized that the Lamanites’ mark and their estrangement from the Lord would end if they would “repent of their wickedness” (Alma 3:14).226 In light of the Mesoamerican body paint tradition, removing the mark by washing away war paint is an objective explanation. A divinely engineered genetic change in melanin content would violate the principle of moral agency as well as the laws of nature, at least as we know them.

Just 15 years after the converted Lamanites had buried their weapons of war, the conflict became so intense that 2,000 young sons of the converted Lamanite pacifists volunteered to become part of the Nephtite infantry. They were needed for brutal close quarters warfare against seasoned Lamanite troops (Alma 53–58). In the fierce fighting, soldiers would have needed to make split-second decisions about the use of lethal force. If both the Lamanites and the boy soldiers had naturally dark skin, the battle would have been more deadly for each side. Therefore, it seems likely that the Lamanites still blackened themselves, but that the striplings, like their parents, had abandoned the staining tradition. A thousand Lamanites died, and many of the boys were wounded, but miraculously, not one of them lost his life (Alma 58:40).
In 63 BCE, Captain Moroni, a Nephite military leader, devised a stratagem to free Nephite hostages taken during the on-going wars. Moroni needed to find someone to gain the confidence of the Lamanites who were guarding the prisoners and, without raising suspicions, get them drunk. Applying similar body paint to that worn by the guards would not be enough. As Brant Gardner points out, the infiltrator would have needed to speak with the Lamanites’ accent, use their salutations and colloquial expressions, know their drinking customs, and be able to persuade them to binge on wine.\(^{227}\) If Lamanites were naturally dark-skinned, a converted Lamanite among the Nephite army would have stood out to Captain Moroni. But the record tells us that he had to “search” his army “that \textit{perhaps he might find}” someone who could pass for a true Lamanite (Alma 55:4–5). It sounds as though he did not expect to find the right man. But he did; he “found \textit{one}” an actual descendant of Laman, whose name was Laman, and who had all the attributes needed to deceive the guards, except perhaps a matching coat of black paint and haircut. Thus, Laman and a few Nephite companions likely disguised themselves with a skin of blackness before approaching the sentries. When the Lamanites hailed them from a distance, Laman called out that he was their comrade, that he had escaped from the Nephites with wine, and that the Nephites were asleep. As he and his companions stepped into view their blackened skin would have reassured the guards; the wine sealed the deal (Alma 55:6–23). The Nephite members of Laman’s squad could have remained inconspicuous as the guards imbibed.

Brant Gardner has thoughtfully interpreted this classic vignette without assuming that the complexion of Nephites and Lamanites were different and without implicating war paint. However, the foregoing colorized version of the ruse also makes sense, especially if the Lamanite soldiers had continued to mark themselves as they did several years earlier when this prolonged warfare began. Both approaches demonstrate Mormon’s ingenuity and Laman’s chutzpah and support the conclusion that skin color was not “the defining difference” between Nephites and Lamanites.\(^{228}\)

Common misperceptions about the relationship of skin color to religious devotion are upended at those times when the Nephites became so hardened in iniquity that the traditional Nephite \textit{spiritual} hierarchy was reversed. For example, the Nephites’ skin color was not darkened in 29 BCE when the Lamanites needed to preach to and convert them (Helaman 6). Also, no worthiness-based color code applied in 23 BCE when the Lamanites were the more righteous (Helaman 7:24). By 6 BCE
Nephite culture had deteriorated to the point that God called Samuel a Lamanite prophet, to preach repentance from the walls of the Nephites’ capital city. Nephites rejected Samuel, but not because of his skin color. They took offense because Samuel dared to decry their gross wickedness (Helaman 13–14). His complexion was not an issue.

Samuel predicted that the Nephites would observe celestial signs when the Messiah was born in the Holy Land. His prophecies were fulfilled, and there was a resurgence of righteousness. But by 15 CE, wickedness reigned, and righteous Lamanites and Nephites were required to unite for their mutual safety. Mormon succinctly describes two results, without suggesting that either was a miracle. He reports that the curse was taken from the Lamanites — they were no longer cut off from the Lord. Moreover, he says that their “skin became white like unto the Nephites” (3 Nephi 2:1–16). Many Latter-day Saints have believed that at this time, six centuries after the text first mentions the skin of blackness, the Lamanites’ phenotypical features suddenly were reversed. However, Mormon does not describe God as the cause. The Lamanites’ ability to abandon the body paint tradition offers a more objective, fact-based explanation.

In 21 CE, the war paint tradition took a gruesome twist when a mafia of both Lamanites and apostate Nephites known as Gadianton robbers attacked the Nephites. Both the Lamanites and the robbers stained themselves with blood (3 Nephi 4:5–7). This showed their solidarity and made their appearance more intimidating. If the Lamanites had been naturally dark, both groups would not have needed to apply dried blood stains for an effective strategy. Bloodstains on their lighter skins would have been revolting.

In 34 CE, after catastrophic earthquakes, fires, storms, and loss of life, Jesus Christ manifest Himself in glory to the more righteous surviving Nephites and Lamanites. As a result, the two cultures became united. There were no Lamanites, “nor any manner of -ites; but they were one” and all the people were “exceedingly fair and delightsome” (4 Nephi 1:1–17). Again, Mormon describes their similar appearance as a matter of fact, not as the result of divinely-directed gene therapy. According to John Sorenson, after this time, there were only sociocultural distinctions. Several generations later, a Lamanite culture reappeared, but until the end of the Book of Mormon era, the differences were in theology and lifestyle (4 Nephi 1:35–39) with “no mention of phenotypical (visible, biological) characteristics as markers.”229
In 322 CE, Lehi’s descendants fractured again along their original patriarchal blood lines into Nephites, Jacobites, Josephites, Zoramites, Lamanites, Lemuelites, and Ishmaelites. All these historical lineages were unrighteous. Wickedness prevailed “upon the face of the whole land” (Mormon 1:13). The people coalesced into two military alliances, but the enemies were indistinguishable in appearance. Mormon, who was an observant contemporary teenage witness, referred to the warring factions simply as “two parties” (Mormon 1:9). They had never become two races or genetically different ethnic groups.

In 384 CE Mormon repeated Nephi’s prophecy about the future remnants of the Lehite civilization becoming “dark” (1 Nephi 12:23). Mormon recognized that because of their unbelief and idolatry the survivors would become “a dark, a filthy, and a loathsome people” (Mormon 5:15). Mormon lived long enough to observe the onset of the moral eclipse. Within Mormon’s own lifetime the Lamanites were eating and forcing their prisoners to eat human flesh (Moroni 9:8). The remnant Nephites were equally degenerate (Moroni 9:9). Mormon’s adjective “dark” described the depravity of all of Lehi’s remnants, not their skin color, evidencing that Nephite authors sometimes used the term dark metaphorically. Mormon echoed Alma’s prophecy that the Nephites would perish because of their “works of darkness” (Alma 45:11–12).

It seems that the Maya, Inca, Mixtec, and Aztec assimilated the Lehite remnants, and it is indisputable that the achievements of these cultures rival those of any ancient civilization. They have only begun to be appreciated and are barely understood. However, viewed from a prophet’s perspective, Mormon’s doomsday vision of Lehi’s descendants after their existential war and after being dispersed found fulfillment in the moral depravity of some of these Mesoamerican cultures. The Aztecs, for example, not only worshipped idols but offered human sacrifice.\textsuperscript{230} Notably, their warriors continued to paint their bodies black.\textsuperscript{231}

Finally, what about the Nephites? Did they also use charcoal, soot or body paint? Surely their use of disguise did not culminate in the shadowy streets of Jerusalem where Nephi donned Laban’s clothing, impersonated him, and cleverly conned his servant into retrieving the brass plates from Laban’s treasury.

Like many bow hunters today, Nephi may well have camouflaged himself, including blackening his arms and face, when he went up into the mountains to slay wild beasts for his starving family, armed only with his sling, stones, wooden bow, and one arrow (1 Nephi 16:18–31). Other Nephite bow hunters may have followed suit (see Enos 1:3).
Nephites also may have blackened themselves when spying on Lamanite armies (Mosiah 10:7, Alma 2:21, 43:23, 28, 30, and 56:22).

Body paint also would have helped conceal Nephites when they attacked Lamanites by night (3 Nephi 4:21). On New Year’s Eve of 65 BCE, Teancum, an audacious Nephite warrior, perhaps wearing dark clothing and with darkened skin, stole into the Lamanite army’s camp without being detected, entered the tent of Amalickiah, their king, and put a javelin into his heart (Alma 51:33–35). When the Lamanites awoke, they “were affrighted” and “abandoned” their battle plan. They hastily retreated to their city where they “sought protection in their fortifications” and appointed Amalickiah’s brother Ammoron to be their king (Alma 52:1–3).

Not long after that Teancum surreptitiously breached another Lamanite stronghold, again by night and likely camouflaged, and killed the new king (Alma 62:36).

Endnotes

1 The treasures also included the garments, armor and breastplate of Laban, a Jewish nobleman, Laban’s sword of “exceedingly fine” workmanship with a hilt of “pure gold” and a blade of “the most precious steel,” and Lehi’s brass compass of curious workmanship that was known as the Liahona that led Lehi and his followers in the wilderness and upon the seas (2 Nephi 5:7–12).


3 Italics are used for emphasis in quotes from canonized scriptures.

4 Following Lehi’s footsteps, Nephi taught that the Holy One of Israel “suffereth the pains of … every living creature, both men, women, and children, who belong to the family of Adam” (2 Nephi 9:21). Jacob preached that “one being is as precious in [God’s] sight as the other” (Jacob 2:21) and condemned prejudice that was based on physical appearance (Jacob 3:9). Benjamin, one of the book’s most
influential kings, refused to permit his people to “make slaves one of another” (Mosiah 2:13). Benjamin’s son, King Mosiah, created a government that would ensure that “every man” was entitled to enjoy his rights and privileges (Mosiah 29:32). Alma, a pivotal prophet in Book of Mormon history, commanded, “Ye shall not esteem one flesh above another” (Mosiah 23:7). Alma’s son preached that angels declare glad tidings of great joy among all people (Alma 13:24), warned his people against “supposing that ye are better one than another” (Alma 5:54), condemned the “inequality of man” (Alma 28:13), and declared that “the Lord doth grant unto all nations, of their own nation and tongue, to preach his word” (Alma 29:8). Ammon, the book’s most memorable missionary, proclaimed that God “is mindful of every people,” and that his “bowels of mercy are over all the earth” (Alma 26:37).

Mormon taught that “all children are alike unto me ... for I know that God is not a partial God” (Moroni 8:17–18). Moroni quotes the Lord as saying to the Brother of Jared, “Yea, even all men were created in the beginning after mine own image” (Ether 3:15).

Patrick Mason recalls teaching a young couple who were enthused about his church and his message until they encountered the skin of blackness in 2 Nephi 5:20–22. Then, Mason says, “the wheels came off.” To their reaction and questions, he had no answer. He could “see it in their eyes — the fire was gone, extinguished by doubts about whether true prophets called by God would really write words or establish policies that discriminated against people based on the color of their skin.” Patrick Q. Mason, Planted: Belief and Belonging in an Age of Doubt (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 2015), 99–101. Mason writes:

I gave them the standard-issue illustrated Book of Mormon Stories, the same one that I had grown up with. They loved it — that is, until they got to the part where Lehi dies and the Lamanites are cursed for refusing to follow Nephi. The book graphically illustrates the Lamanites’ “skin of blackness” (which in the pictures looks more reddish-brownish) and general state of being “loathsome” (2 Nephi 5: 21–22) ....

The matter was laid bare by a series of innocent but perceptive questions .... Does God love white people more than black people? No. Does God want everyone to follow the gospel and receive all the ordinances of the church? Yes.
Does God lead his church through prophets? Yes. Then why did God either inspire prophets to create a policy, or at the very least allow prophets to perpetuate a policy, that barred blacks from full participation in the church? And even if the policy had originated in something other than direct revelation, why didn’t God intervene until 1978 — almost a quarter century after the Montgomery Bus Boycott? Shouldn’t prophets be a step ahead, not a step behind?


10 Early Latter-day Saint converts were influenced by Protestant misconceptions regarding descendants of Ham when they misinterpreted the statement in Joseph Smith’s Book of Abraham that Pharaoh was “a partaker of the blood of the Canaanites by
birth” (Abraham 1:21). The Book of Abraham, which was inspired by Joseph Smith’s study of ancient Egyptian papyri, does not even mention Cain, and according to Egyptian scholar John Gee, a “close reading of the text … does not sustain claims of racism;” the book “does not discuss race and curses no one with slavery;” and racial interpretations “were not originally applied to the Book of Abraham.” John Gee, An Introduction to the Book of Abraham (Provo, UT: Brigham Young University, 2017), 162. Joseph Smith’s Book of Moses arose through his effort to make inspired corrections to the Hebrew scriptures. See Kent P. Jackson, “How We Got the Book of Moses,” in By Study, and by Faith: Selections from the Religious Educator, ed. Richard Neitzel Holzapfel and Kent P. Jackson (Provo, UT: Religious Studies Center, Brigham Young University, 2009), https://rsc.byu.edu/study-faith/how-we-got-book-moses. The Book of Moses rephrases but essentially incorporates the Genesis account of a “mark” set upon Cain but does not state that the mark was a darkening of Cain’s natural complexion. Neither book was canonized until long after Joseph’s death, and no Church leaders who cited them to justify racial bias were claiming new revelation. Almost certainly the early Utah Saints were influenced by a desire to “brand” their Church as a mainstream “white church” and promote its “acceptance and respectability in America.” Reeve, Religion of a Different Color, 205–10.

11 Terryl Givens with Brian M Hauglid, The Pearl of Greatest Price: Mormonism’s Most Controversial Scripture (New York: Oxford University Press, 2019), 135. The dubious Biblical-based “folk doctrine” about the so-called “mark” of Cain as an argument for racial prejudice also found its way into the teachings of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints. Influential Church member Brigham H. Roberts may have been the first to espouse it in print. “Question: How did the ‘curse of Ham or curse of Cain’ become associated with Mormonism?,” Fair Latter-day Saints, https://www.fairlatterdaysaints.org/answers/Question:_How_did_the_%22curse_of_Ham%22_or_%22curse_of_Cain%22_become-associated_with_Mormonism%3F. Racial interpretations of the book did not appear in the Church until 1895, and they were officially discontinued in 1978. Gee, An Introduction to the Book of Abraham, 163.


16 Doctrine and Covenants, Official Declaration–2.

17 “Race and the Priesthood” (italics added). The essay further states that the Church “disavows … that mixed-race marriages are a sin; or that blacks or people of any other race or ethnicity are inferior in any way.”


Max Mueller endorses the historicist theory, referring to the Book of Mormon as a “historical phenomenon.” Mueller, Race and the Making of the Mormon People, 23. But Mueller gives it a racist twist. He reasons that young Joseph Smith was caught up with the race issue, that he felt a “divine mandate to solve humanity’s race problem,” (ibid., 13) and that he used skin color in the Book of Mormon to promote his own “radical new racial hermeneutic,” which Mueller christens restorative racial universalism or white universalism (ibid., 27). Thomas Murphy wrote that the Book of Mormon “incorporated the American biological, physical, political, and religious milieu of the nineteenth-century” and was “posited by the author to have existed for at least 1,000 years … in pre-Columbian America.” Thomas W. Murphy, “Laban’s Ghost: On Writing and Transgression,” Dialogue 30, no. 2 (1997): 114, https://www.dialoguejournal.com/articles/labans-ghost-on-writing-and-transgression/.

Richard L. Bushman describes the historicist theory in “The Book of Mormon and Its Critics,” Believing History: Latter-Day Saint Essays by Richard Lyman Bushman, ed. Reid L. Nielson and Jed Woodworth, (New York: Columbia University, 2004), 117–18. The critics’ list of presumed cultural influences include anti-masonry, republicanism, theories of origin of Indigenous Americans, and romantic nationalism, which Bushman says, “roughly resemble elements in the Book of Mormon.” Contemporary culture may affect any translation of an ancient text, but in Richard Bushman’s opinion, the historicist theories “leave too many other elements unexplained.” For a purported history of the origins of Indigenous Americans, the book contained none of the cultural markers that were familiar to New Englanders such as wigwams, corn, beans, squash, peace pipes, teepees, feathers, blankets, canoes, moccasins, burial mounds, braves, squaws, papooses, wampum, etc. See Bushman, Rough Stone Rolling, 97. Moreover, the Book of Mormon is not merely
sympathetic to America’s native peoples, when it is compared to other contemporary theories, it grants them a favored position in both the history and future of the Americas. Ibid., 99.

22 For example, the book condemns elitism among the Nephites, who generally saw themselves as religiously superior, and more specifically among apostate Zoramites who proclaimed themselves economically and intellectually superior (Alma 31). Mueller argues, however, that it was racist for the Nephites to omit from their records the prophecies of Samuel the Lamanite. He calls this a “significant lacuna” and uses it as a pillar for his racist thesis. Mueller, Race and the Making of the Mormon People, 49.

As I read the text, Mueller misses the point. The Nephites merely failed to include one event that fulfilled Samuel’s prophecies — the fact that many saints arose from the dead, appeared unto many, and actively ministered unto the people at the time of Christ’s resurrection. Compare Helaman 14:25 with 3 Nephi 23:9–11. After the widespread death and destruction in the Americas at the crucifixion of Jesus, the surviving Nephites and Lamanites sorely needed to remember that angelic ministry that demonstrated Christ’s compassion and the role of resurrected beings. Given the respectful treatment that Nephite prophets already had given to Samuel and his chronologically precise prophecies, it is hard to argue that the omission of this event was racially motivated.


25 Joseph Fielding Smith, comp., Teachings of the Prophet Joseph Smith (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 1938), Section Five 1842–1843, loc. 4330 of 6562, Kindle.

26 John L. Sorenson, Images of Ancient America: Visualizing Book of Mormon Life (Provo, UT: Research Press, Foundation for Ancient Research and Mormon Studies, 1998), 17 and 129 (Bonampak); 16 (Chichen Itza). The Bonampak battle scene at page 129 shows the dangerous confusion of hand-to-hand combat. Previously, some observers interpreted the Chichen Itza boating scene on page 16 as showing subjugation of light-skinned people by a darker-skinned ethnic group after a military defeat.

27 See “Question: Did Dee F. Green say that there is no such thing as Book of Mormon archaeology?,” Fair Latter-day Saints (website), https://www.fairlatterdaysaints.org/answers/Question:_Did_Deef._Green_say_that_there_is_no_such_thing_as_Book_of_Mormon_archaeology%3F.

28 Sorenson, Images of Ancient America, 17.


31 George Reynolds and Janne M. Sjodahl, Commentary on the Book of Mormon, vol. 3 (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 1958), 62. Their treatise states: “Our conclusion is that [the words that Mormon quoted] were first written upon the larger plates, and that Mormon copied them direct from the original source. We also conclude that these words were part of the translation of
the Book of Lehi which was lost through the misadventure of Martin Harris.”


33 Jeremiah 38:7–9.

34 Jacob 3:9 (“revile no more against them because of the darkness of their skins” and “filthiness” that “came upon them because of their fathers”); and Alma 3:6 (“and the skins of the Lamanites were dark according to the mark which was set upon their fathers”).

35 Mosiah 17:13 (King Noah’s priests scourged Abinadi’s skin in 147 BCE); Alma 3:6 (the skins of the Lamanites were dark during battle in 87 BCE); Alma 20:29 (the skins of Ammon’s brethren were worn exceedingly because of being bound with strong cords in 90 BCE); Alma 44:18 (Lamanite skins were exposed to the sharp swords of the Nephites during a battle in 74 BCE); 3 Nephi 2:15 (converted Lamanites’ skins became white in 15 CE).

36 See Alma 3:4, 13, 18.

37 See Alma 3:6, 7, 10, 14, 15, 16.

38 Brant Gardner, *Second Witness: Analytical and Contextual Commentary on the Book of Mormon*, vol. 2 Second Nephi through Jacob (Salt Lake City: Greg Kofford Books, 2007), “Commentary on 2 Nephi 5:21,” loc. 2882 of 21265, Kindle. For example, John Tvedtnes assumed that when the curse was first pronounced, “the mark, a change in skin color, was yet to come.” Tvedtnes, “The Charge of ‘Racism’ in the Book of Mormon,” 186. Rodney Turner states: “There can be no question but that their altered skin color was a miraculous act of God.” Rodney Turner, “The Lamanite Mark,” *Second Nephi: The Doctrinal Structure*, ed. Monte S. Nyman, and Charles D. Tate Jr. (Provo, UT: BYU Religious Studies Center, 1989), 138. In note 2, Turner adds: “that the Lamanite mark was only a relatively darker pigmentation, not a literally black skin. By the same token, a ‘white’ skin is only relatively so (Jacob 3:8).”


Gardner, Second Witness, loc. 3135 of 21265, Kindle. Gardner also wrote that references to a skin of blackness “cannot be supported as a pigmentation change.” Brant Gardner, “If Lamanites were black, why didn’t anyone notice?” *FairMormon* (website), May 21, 2012, https://www.fairmormon.org/blog/2012/05/21/if-lamanites-were-black-why-didnt-anyone-notice.

Personal correspondence to author, April 10, 2021.

Reynolds and Sjodahl concluded that these verses were taken from Nephi’s large plates and quoted the prophecy “word-for-word.” Reynolds and Sjodahl, *Commentary on the Book of Mormon*, 62.


Grant Hardy, “What about the Book of Mormon’s focus on skin color? A perspective from Professor Grant Hardy,” *Shoulder to the Wheel*, Dec. 3, 2017, https://web.archive.org/web/20171208123435/http://shouldertothewheel.org/what-about-the-book-of-mormons-skin-color-racism-a-perspective-from-professor-grant-hardy/. Earlier, Hardy had written that the “Nephite racism or ethnocentrism is not really a matter of skin color, which is very rarely mentioned; instead their prejudice is most clearly manifest in their assumption of Lamanite passivity.” Grant Hardy, *Understanding the Book of Mormon: A Reader’s Guide* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2010), 268n14. Jared Hickman refers to 2 Nephi 5:21–24 as “patent racism” and to Nephi as “the narrator of the racial curse of his brothers.” Hickman, “The Book of Mormon as Amerindian Apocalypse,” 436, 447. Later Hickman asked rhetorically how the Book of Mormon can be considered racist when, in the end, the Lamanites are no more wicked than the Nephites, emerge as the victors, and are promised that a remnant of their seed will be entrusted to build a New Jerusalem with the help of white Gentile American converts. Ibid., and Jared Hickman, “The Perverse Core of Mormonism: The Book of Mormon, Genetic Secularity and Messianic Decoloniality” in *To Be Learned is Good: Essays on Faith and Scholarship in Honor of Richard Lyman Bushman*, ed. J. Spencer Fluhman, Kathleen Flake, and Jed Woodworth (Provo, UT: Neal A. Maxwell Institute for Religious Scholarship, 2017),

47 Hardy, “What about the Book of Mormon’s focus on skin color?” According to Hardy, the seemingly racist words at least serve as a “constant reminder that moral progress is possible” and “help us recognize and transcend our narrow cultural biases.” Jessica Nelson expresses hope that we can “learn from life experiences and remain open to new information” and “alter” our positions on race. Jessica M. Nelson, “Imagining a Better Future: The Context and Development of Joseph Smith’s View on Race and Slavery,” in Know Brother Joseph: New Perspectives on Joseph Smith’s Life and Character, ed. R. Eric Smith, Matthew C. Godfrey, and Matthew J. Grow (Salt Lake City: Desert Book, 2021), 112.


49 Bushman, Rough Stone Rolling, xx.


51 It is based on one essay, cast as a letter to Oliver Cowdery, that was published in early 1836 in the Church’s Kirtland newspaper, The Messenger and Advocate, over the name of Joseph Smith. “Letter to Oliver Cowdery, circa 9 April 1836,” 289, The Joseph Smith Papers, https://www.josephsmithpapers.org/paper-summary/letter-to-oliver-cowdery-circa-9-april-1836/1. It is unlikely that Joseph wrote the essay, although it did appear with his knowledge. Richard Bushman is “not aware of anything on any subject that appeared in the papers over his name that Joseph wrote himself. His practice was to let others write for him.” Richard Bushman, personal correspondence to author. Viewed in its historical context and in comparison to the racial slander in the Northern Press at the time (not to mention Southern pro-slavery tracts), the essay is far from an “anti-abolitionist diatribe,” as one naysayer described it. See Max Perry Mueller, “History Lessons: Race and the LDS Church,” Journal of Mormon History 41, no. 1 (January 2015): 153, and Eugene H. Berwanger, “Negrophobia in Northern Proslavery and Antislavery Thought,” Phylon 33, no. 3 (1972): 266–75.

52 See the book review by W. Paul Reeve “Max Perry Mueller, Race and the Making of the Mormon People (Chapel Hill, NC University


54 Ibid., 44.

55 Ibid., 22 (italics added). He does not even mention Sorenson’s work in his bibliography.

56 In 1834, an early critic argued that the book had a racial slant based on the known prejudices of a portion of the community.” Talmage, “Black, White, and Red All Over,” 58.


60 The Book of Mormon’s few references to Lamanite apparel describe loincloths as their quotidian attire. One Nephite prophet says that Lamanites wore a “short skin girdle about their loins” when they were “wandering about in the wilderness” (Enos 1:20). Others describe opposing warriors with “a leathern girdle” (Mosiah 10:8), with “skin girded about them” (Alma 3:5), with “skins girded about their loins” (Alma 43:20), and with “garments of skin” (Alma 49:6–7). Nothing in the text suggests that the Lamanites wore loincloths in priestly, authoritative, or ceremonial roles or that their leather girdles had mystical or religious significance. Furthermore, when the book describes marauding guerilla warriors who wore lambskins, it gives no indication that their loincloths had ritual significance or that it was their loincloths, rather than their skins, that were dyed (3 Nephi 4:7). The printer’s manuscript states clearly that these thieves, known as Gadianton robbers, dyed their bodies in blood: “they were girded about after the manner of robbers & they had a lamb skin about their loins & they were dyed in blood & their heads were shorn.” “Printer’s Manuscript of the Book of Mormon, circa August 1829–circa January 1830,” The Joseph Smith Papers, 369, https://www.josephsmithpapers.org/paper-summary/printers-manuscript-of-the-book-of-mormon-circa-august-1829-circa-january-1830/373. The theory also fails to explain why a dark loincloth would cause the wearers to “not be enticing” to the Nephites (see 2 Nephi 5:21). Moreover, archaeological support is lacking. Mesoamerican artifacts show human skins painted black, not loincloths.

61 Hugh W. Nibley, Teachings of the Book of Mormon: Semester 2 (Provo, UT: Foundation for Ancient Research and Mormon Studies, 1993), 244. (Page numbers differ between the printed
documents cited herein and the electronic versions, see https://
scholarsarchive.byu.edu/do/search/?q=Nibley%20semester%20&start=0&context=12244982.)


63 Ibid., 249 (italics added).

64 In his 1986 Brigham Young University lectures, Nibley said that Cain “cut himself off” from the Lord; that his name means the “wandering blacksmith” in Arabic, Hebrew, and Aramaic; and that anciently the blacksmith blackened his face “professionally” because he worked at the forge. “This is a mark of his profession, the blackened face.” Hugh W. Nibley, Teachings of the Pearl of Great Price (Provo, UT: Foundation for Ancient Research and Mormon Studies, 2002), 248–49 (italics added.) In his 1988–90 Book of Mormon lectures, Nibley extended his thinking to the Lamanites who cut themselves off from the Lord and put the marks on themselves. Gardner points to the research of E. A. Speiser, an archaeologist and Hebrew scripture scholar, who suggests that Cain’s mark was like other “protective marks” that “were signs on the forehead.” Gardner, Second Witness, loc. 3111 of 21265, Kindle.

65 Hugh W. Nibley, Lehi in the Desert and The World of the Jaredites (Salt Lake City: Bookcraft, 1952), 84–85.


70 Kirk Magelby, “Hugh Nibley and Book of Mormon Geography,” Book of Mormon Archaeological Forum, http://www.bmaf.org/articles/hugh_nibley_geography__magleby, (Magelby, Hugh Nibley and Book of Mormon Geography). Joseph, without knowledge of the dominance of the Maya in Mesoamerica or of the difference between their vast influence compared to the almost undetectable Lehite civilization, once commented that it was gratifying that these early explorers had found “the remains and ruins of those mighty people.” Smith, Teachings, loc. 4311–321 of 6562, Kindle.


72 Sorenson, Mormon’s Codex, xvi.


74 Sorenson, Mormon’s Codex, 250. DNA techniques show “that there were at least 11 major lineages [or biological lines in the Americas], possibly more.” Sorenson, Images of Ancient America, 16. According to Sorenson, “only a fraction of the various contemporary peoples in Mesoamerica have been tested and analyzed for mtDNA or Y-chromosome DNA.” Sorenson, Mormon’s Codex, 250. According to Mark Wright, “there were scores of different cultures that inhabited Mesoamerica anciently, co-existing in space and time.” Mark Alan Wright, “Axes Mundi: Ritual Complexes in Mesoamerica and the Book of Mormon,” Interpreter: A Journal of Latter-day Saint Faith and Scholarship 46 (2021), 233–48, https://journal.interpreterfoundation.org/

75 Nibley, Lehi in the Desert, 253.

76 Richard D. Hansen, personal correspondence to author, January 9, 2019.


79 Clynnes, Laser Scans.

80 John Sorenson estimates that more than one-third of the Book of Mormon text involves warfare, including reports of 100 military actions or campaigns. Sorenson, Mormon’s Codex, 381.


Joseph Spencer notes that many now believe that the Book of Mormon narrates the history of only “a relatively

82 In Sub-Saharan Africa neighboring groups that have been in contact for centuries often display very different mannerisms and practices. Email from Spencer L. James, January 30, 2021.

83 Sorenson, Mormon’s Codex, 418. Sorenson cites the example in 74 BCE of Nephite warriors who went to battle wearing “thick clothing” (Alma 43:19), a primitive form of body armor, and how two years later the Lamanites returned having also “prepared themselves” with “very thick garments to cover their nakedness” (Alma 49:6).


86 Morley and Brainerd, The Ancient Maya, 237.


89 Houston, Stuart, and Taube, The Memory of Bones, loc. 490 of 8579, Kindle. A Maya who is applying body paint with a brush or quill is shown in the detail of a carved jar photographed by Justin Kerr and shown as Figure 1.15. Ibid., loc. 702 of 8579, Kindle. Tattooing and decorative scarification began only after wedlock. Morley and Brainerd, The Ancient Maya, 233; Coe and Houston, The Maya, 335.

91 Houston, Stuart, and Taube, *The Memory of Bones*, loc. 465 of 8579, Kindle. The book’s authors acknowledge John Robertson who supplied a version of his exhaustive scanned database of Mayan dictionaries from the Gates Collection at Brigham Young University. Ibid., 317.

92 Sorenson, *Mormon’s Codex*, 381. Morley’s treatise states that the principal garment of the men was the loincloth, called *ex* in Mayan. “It was a band of cotton cloth, five fingers wide and long enough to be wound around the waist several times and passed between the legs.” The men also wore “the *mastil* … between the legs, which was a large strip of woven *manta*, which, tying it on the abdomen and giving it a turn below, covered their private parts.” Morley and Brainerd, *The Ancient Maya*, 235.

93 At a symposium of the 2005 Annual Meeting of the Society for American Archaeology, researchers reported that Maya use of “black body paint makes sense given the association of this color with warfare.” Gabrielle Vail and Christine Hernandez, “Human Sacrifice in the Late Postclassic Maya Iconography and Texts,” in *New Perspectives on Human Sacrifice and Ritual Body Treatments in Ancient Maya Society*, ed. Vera Tiesler and Andrea Cucina (New York: Springer Science+Business Media, 2007), 156, https://www.researchgate.net/publication/226693438_Human_Sacrifice_in_Late_Postclassic_Maya_Iconography_and_Texts. With respect to pre-war ceremonies, see Jonathan B. Pagliaro, James F. Garber, and Travis W. Stanton, “Evaluating the Archaeological Signatures of Maya Ritual and Conflict,” in *Ancient Mesoamerican Warfare*, 75–89. The authors also discuss reverential and desecretory termination rituals after a military conquest.

94 A reproduction of the mural is shown at http://www.latinamericanstudies.org/maya/Uaxactun-mural.jpg.


97 In the Book of Mormon context and as shown in this image the word “fair” correlates with the definition “Pleasing to the eye; handsome

98 The author’s photograph is used with permission of the Denver Museum of Nature & Science.

99 Foster, The Handbook to Life in the Ancient Maya World, 147 (italics added). The Bonampak Maya murals (circa 790 ce) in what is now Chiapas, Mexico, vividly depict close combat by soldiers with different skin colors who are wearing only loincloths.

100 These include the vases in Justin Kerr’s collection of roll out photographs as image K2803 (depicting a Maya ball game), image K1184 (depicting the birth of a supernatural who was nicknamed “Baby Jaguar”), image K791 (depicting two painted dancers), and image K8469 (depicting the keeper of the books kneeling before a ruler on a portable throne). These can be viewed at http://www.mayavase.com/.


102 The vase can be viewed as image K2784 at http://www.mayavase.com/.

103 “Available contexts,” they say, “are too vague to pinpoint meaning.” Houston, Stuart, and Taube, The Memory of Bones, loc. 641–53 of 8579, Kindle.

104 Ibid., 674 of 8579. Murals at Palenque — that are yet to be interpreted — show exposed human skins painted red and the skins of the gods painted blue. Coe and Houston, The Maya, 216.

105 Houston, Stuart, and Taube, The Memory of Bones, loc. 641–51 of 8579, Kindle; and Figure 1.14. The vase can be viewed as image K1373 at http://www.mayavase.com/.

106 Among the Maya, jaguars were associated with the god of the underworld and were a symbol of power. Some jaguars were
all black, and their paws and pelts were highly prized. Coe and Houston, *The Maya*, 26, 148, and Sorenson, *Mormon’s Codex*, 32.


108 Lamanite plundering from fellow Lamanites is described in Alma 17:26–27 and Alma 18:7.

109 2 Nephi 5 (when Nephi’s brothers sought to take away his life, a skin of blackness came upon them); Alma 3:4 (when the Amlicites went to war, they marked their foreheads red). Except for references to the Red Sea, the color red is mentioned only in Alma 3:4 and 13. The word “blackness” is mentioned only twice: once to describe the Lamanites in 2 Nephi 5:21 and once in reference to the heavens being clothed in blackness (2 Nephi 7:3). The word “black” also is mentioned only twice, once to describe hair color (3 Nephi 12:36), and again in the statement that the Lord invites all to come unto him (2 Nephi 26:33).

110 Nibley, *Approach*, 441. Gold and silver are mentioned only as metals. The Bible also mentions colors sparingly. When testing the authenticity of an ancient text, Nibley, speaking figuratively, suggested that scholars focus on whether the “local color” is correct. See Givens, *The Book of Mormon: A Very Short Introduction*, 119. Joseph Smith did not randomly colorize pre-Columbian literature with black and red warpaint.

111 Stephen Houston et al., *Veiled Brightness: A History of Ancient Maya Color* (Austin, TX: University of Texas, 2009), 69.


113 Manuel Aguilar-Moreno, *Handbook to Life in the Aztec World* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2007), 100. A reviewer of this article, with expertise in the Nahuatl language, pointed out that *telpoch-tli* means “youth” and *calli* means “house.” The same reviewer also pointed out that there are alternate Nahuatl spellings for “someone who is brave or valiant” — *tiahcauh*, *tiacauh*, *tiyacauh* — and that the suffix *tin* indicates plurality.

114 Ibid., 111.

115 Ibid., 109–10.

116 The Mixtec, known for their artistic abilities, occupied an area at the western edge of Mesoamerica, now part of the state of Oaxaca. Aguilar-Moreno, *Handbook to Life in the Aztec World*, 18.
The portion of this manuscript that shows the Tree of Apoala can be viewed at https://research.britishmuseum.org/research/collection_online/collection_object_details/collection_image_gallery.aspx?partid=1&assetid=561007001&objectid=3179214.


Houston, Veiled Brightness, 62–63. Maya paint technology was complex. To produce long-lasting colors, the Maya drew from mineral pigments, lakes (a kind of synthetic pigment), and organic compounds. Ibid., 61–62.

According to one 16th-century source from Central Mexico, some black body paint was created by burning insects and scorpions. See “Clothing: Skirt, Huipil,” Body Paint, Mesolore (website), http://www.mesolore.org/tutorials/learn/24/Clothing-Skirt-Huipil/87/Body-Paint.

Houston, Stuart, and Taube, The Memory of Bones, loc. 655–56 of 8579, Kindle.


Ibid.

Houston, Stuart, and Taube, The Memory of Bones, loc. 484–93 of 8579, Kindle.

They distinguished themselves, however, by using red only upon their foreheads (Alma 3:4). In Mesoamerica, the reddish pigment used anciently was probably an organic material like annatto. Ibid., loc. 647–56, Kindle. It produces hues that are closer to orange than red. Houston, Veiled Brightness, 60.

Laman and Lemuel may have been followers of Josiah and the Deuteronomists who “mandated that sacrifices be made only in Jerusalem (Deuteronomy 12:13–14).” Larsen, “Josiah to Zoram to Sherem to Jarom and the Big Little Book of Omni.”

Within days after leaving Jerusalem, Lehi’s sons returned to bargain for the brass plates. When Laban, their owner, cheated and threatened them, Laman and Lemuel beat Nephi with a wooden
rod. An angel intervened, and Nephi succeeded in obtaining the plates (1 Nephi 3–4). During their second return to persuade Ishmael to join them, Laman and Lemuel bound Nephi with cords, intending to leave him in the wilderness to be devoured by wild beasts, but the Lord answered Nephi’s prayers and the “bands were loosed” (1 Nephi 7:16–18). After Ishmael died in the wilderness, Laman urged Lemuel and Ishmael’s sons to slay both Lehi and Nephi, but “the voice of the Lord chastened” the conspirators “and they did turn away their anger” (1 Nephi 16:34–39). Next, when Nephi tried to build a ship they attempted to throw him from a cliff and drown him in the depths of the sea, but the power of God shook them into submission (1 Nephi 17:48–55). Also, during the transoceanic voyage, Laman and Lemuel mutinied, bound Nephi with cords, and nearly caused the entire family to be drowned in the sea during a fierce storm, but they finally recognized that the “judgments of God were upon them” and they were about to be swallowed up in the depths of the sea,” so they repented and released Nephi (1 Nephi 18:11–15).

128 Mormon’s more comprehensive history states that according to the original words of the prophecy, “a mark” would be “set upon” a dissenter who “mingleth his seed” with the Lamanites (Alma 3:15) and upon enemies: “him that fighteth against” Nephi and his seed (Alma 3:16). In each case, “a mark” was described as being “set upon” the person, but the repeated use of the words “a mark” suggests that all marks may not have been the same. For example, the Amlicites “had marked themselves with red in their foreheads after the manner of the Lamanites” (Alma 3:4).


130 See 2 Nephi 9:6 (after the fall, Adam and Eve were “cut off from the presence of the Lord”) and Genesis 4:16 (Cain “went out from the presence of the Lord”). The Lord described those who risked being cut off when he spoke to the surviving Nephites and Lamanites in 34 ce. He promised that in that future day when the Lord performed His “great and marvelous work,” unbelievers, adversaries, witchcrafts, graven images, lyings, deceivings,
envyings, strifes, priestcrafts, whoredoms, and whoever will not repent” would be cut off (3 Nephi 21:9–20).

131 Mormon made that clear (Alma 50:20). The Nephite prophet Alma cautioned his sons with these same words. See Alma 36:30 and 37:13 (speaking to Helaman) and Alma 38:1 (speaking to Shiblon). To Corianton, he said that the process applied to “all mankind” (Alma 42:14). The Book of Mormon teaches that Adam and Eve were the first to be “cut off both temporally and spiritually from the presence of the Lord” (Alma 42:6). A Nephite priest and king known as Benjamin described how one can be cut off (Mosiah 2:37–39). See also Doctrine and Covenants 121:13–19. Yet, God’s “charity endures forever,” even for those who “deny” him, “if they will repent and come unto him.” Jeffrey R. Holland, “Prophets in the Land Again,” Ensign (November 2006), 104, https://www.churchofjesuschrist.org/study/ensign/2006/11/prophets-in-the-land-again.html. Through repentance and the atonement, all can again come unto Christ, who is “merciful” and whose “arm is lengthened out all the day long” (2 Nephi 28:32).

132 See also Helaman 7:28 and 15:17. Nephi foresaw that after the tragic end of his descendants, Gentiles would come to the Americas, but they could not claim to be chosen, nor claim the land to be exclusively their own, neither by right or inheritance. They would be trodden down “as salt that hath lost its savor” if they rejected the fulness of Lord’s gospel (3 Nephi 16:10–15). For the “earth is the Lord’s, and the fullness thereof,” reserved for those who have “clean hands and a pure heart (Psalms 24:1–4). Thus, although the Book of Mormon speaks of “precious,” “promised,” and “chosen” lands (e.g., 1 Ne. 17:38; 2 Nephi 9:2; Ether 13:2), Rosalynde Welch concludes that it does not endorse the idea of a chosen people. “If there is any group to whom it seems there is some kind of deep connection to and right to the land, it is the … indigenous native peoples of the Americas,” which include remnants of Lehi’s seed, primarily through the Lamanites. Rosalynde Welch and James E. Faulconer, “Briefly Ether with Rosalynde Welch and James E. Faulconer,” MIPodcast #121, Nov. 6, 2020, https://mi.byu.edu/mip-bti-welch/.

133 The lack of punctuation and versification for our current 2 Nephi 5:21 is evident on page 57 of the printer’s manuscript, where it occurs at the bottom of the page. “Printer’s Manuscript

Skousen, *The Book of Mormon: The Earliest Text*, 90. Confusion also can arise from Mormon’s synopsis of the Nephite battle against Lamanites and Amlicites. He distinguished the curse from the mark in Alma 3:7 and Alma 3:14 by using the words in separate clauses, inferring that they are not the same, but in verse 6 of that same chapter he referred to “the mark as a curse upon Laman and Lemuel because of their rebellion” (Alma 3:6). Alma, however, was the actual eyewitness and original author of this war-time account. Alma’s own words in speeches that he delivered shortly after that battle unequivocally decoupled the curse and the mark. He repeated three times that transgressing God’s commandments fulfilled the curse by cutting one off from God’s presence (Alma 9:13–14). Conflating the curse and the mark in a few instances may be an imperfection in Mormon’s writings, a risk that his son acknowledged before finishing the record (see Mormon 8:12).


138 For example, when Laman and Lemuel tied Nephi up and left him to die in the wilderness, it was the Lord who loosened the bands from his hands and feet (1 Nephi 7:18). According to Nephi, the Lord blessed Lehi’s family to be able to live on raw meat in wilderness (17:2). He said that the Lord promised to “carry” Lehi’s people across the sea (17:8). When Nephi’s brothers bound him with ropes during their stormy ocean voyage, “nothing save it were the power of God, which threatened them with destruction” could cause them to loosen him (18:10–22). These words were meant to inspire his family, however, his words about some alleged effects of the curse should not be taken literally. For example, a curse cannot reasonably be construed to cause idleness, mischief, subtlety, and hunting for beasts of prey. See 2 Nephi 5:24. At times Nephi recognized natural causes and the role of human initiative and agency. The Lord’s promise to carry the Lehites across the sea was fulfilled in the form of ore, timber, stones that create fire, skins of beasts, bellows, tools, labor, supplies, and a boat that, with someone to steer and the aid of the compass-like Liahona, was driven by the wind (1 Nephi 17–18).

139 Examples of Nephi’s family-focus are numerous. He repeatedly stated that he was writing for “my children” and “my people.” Originally, he vaguely perceived that there was another “wise purpose” (1 Nephi 9:5), and he eventually learned in a vision that the writings of his successors concerning the ministry of the Lamb would go to other people (1 Nephi 13:35). But until almost the end of his writings on the small plates, Nephi’s children remained his target audience — their salvation, his primary concern (see 2 Nephi 25:26). Only at the end of his small plates did he expand his audience to include the Jews and all the “ends of the earth” (see
2 Nephi 33:10). In contrast, Mormon knew that his abridgement was destined for the Lamanites, Jews, Gentiles, and indeed “all nations.” See the title page.

Although history is usually one of the “spoils of war,” the “reverse is true of the Book of Mormon. The Lamanites vanquished the Nephites and survived; yet by virtue of a record that went into the earth with them, the Nephite’s version of history is the one we now read.” Richard L. Bushman, “The Lamanite View of Book of Mormon History,” in Believing History: Latter-Day Saint Essays by Richard Lyman Bushman, ed. Reid L. Nielson and Jed Woodworth (New York: Columbia University, 2004), 79.


James E. Talmage, Jesus The Christ (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 1963), 149 (italics added).


Nina Jablonski reports that in the absence of a selective genetic sweep, 10,000 to 20,000 years may have been required for optimal skin color adaptation to the respective regions of the world. Jablonski, Living Color, 52. However, “major changes in pigmentation may have happened in as little as 100 generations (=2,500 years) through selective sweeps.” Wikipedia s.v. “Human Skin Color,” last edited September 24, 2021, 19:10, https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Human_skin_color.

Jablonski, Living Color, 52.

“In 1931, when there was intense discussion on the issue of organic evolution, the First Presidency of the Church … addressed all of the General Authorities of the Church on the matter, and concluded, ‘Our mission is to bear the message of the restored gospel to the world. Leave geology, biology, archaeology, and anthropology, no one of which has to do with the salvation of the souls of mankind,

148 In the same year that the Book of Mormon was published, “the founder of the University of Louisville’s School of Medicine … released a polygenesis treatise in which he argued that the book of Genesis contained the origin story of only the Caucasian race.” Mueller, *Race and the Making of the Mormon People*, 13–14. The Book of Mormon contradicts the polygenesis theory, teaching that the Holy One of Israel would suffer the pains of “every living creature, both men and women, and children, who belong to the family of Adam” (2 Nephi 9:21), who with his wife Eve, “brought forth the family of all the earth” (2 Nephi 2:19–20; cf. 2 Nephi 26:33).

149 Brant Gardner states: “The Nephites could not have survived without a wider range of marriage partners than the very small number of lineal Lehites.” Gardner, *Second Witness*, loc. 2887 of 21265, Kindle. Sorenson agrees that “the Nephites must have gained population by amalgamation of native peoples.” Sorenson, *Mormon’s Codex*, 39. However, James Faulconer cites reasons why there may have been little intermarriage with other indigenous people, at least not until after Book of Mormon times when assimilation was a matter of survival. The text never states that marriage with the natives occurred. There are only two references to “Lamanitish” people (Alma 17:26 and 19:16), which might infer inter-marriage, and there are no references to “Nephitish” people. The Lamanites were monogamous, the Nephites shunned exogamy, and neither group left a lot of descendants. Moreover, even the Lamanites continued to consider themselves in some sense, Israelite, as descendants of Lehi. James C. Faulconer, telephone conversation, June 1, 2020.

150 Nibley, *Teachings of the Book of Mormon*: Semester 2, 244.


152 Amerigo Vespucci, who like Nephi was a Mediterranean, recognized the effect of nakedness on a “farmer’s tan.” He encountered dark natives on the New World shores and said, “I believe that, if they were properly clothed, they would be white


155 Fiona Givens and Terryl Givens, *The Christ Who Heals: How God Restored the Truth that Saves Us* (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 2017), 70. The Church’s second Article of Faith declares that “men are to be punished for their own sins.” Articles of Faith, 2. Sterling McMurrin opined: “Nothing in the Mormon conception of man is more in evidence or relates more importantly to the total theological structure than the affirmation of the freedom of the will. Nothing is permitted to compromise that freedom as the essential meaning of personality, whether human or divine, and at every turn of Mormon theological discussion the fact of moral freedom and its implied moral responsibility must be met and accounted for.” Sterling M. McMurrin, *The Theological Foundations of the Mormon Religion* (Salt Lake City, University of Utah Press, 1965), 77.

156 John Tvedtnes points to Old World sources, including early Christian and Islamic texts, where “black-and-white imagery” is used to typify “purity and righteousness” versus “impurity and wickedness” or “salvation and damnation.” Tvedtnes, “The Charge of ‘Racism’ in the Book of Mormon,” 195–96. Following this line of reasoning, Douglas Campbell concludes: “White-skinned Nephites and black-skinned Lamanites are metaphors for culture, not for skin color.” Campbell, “‘White’ or ‘Pure’: Five Vignettes,” 134 (italics in original). Armand Mauss reminds us that in “modern colloquial English (or American) we sometimes speak of people as having ‘thick’ or ‘thin’ skins, without intending any literal dermatological meaning. Attributions of ‘white’ versus ‘black’ or ‘dark’ skins could be read in a similarly figurative manner.” Armand L. Mauss, *All Abraham’s Children: Changing Mormon Conceptions of Race and Lineage* (Urbana, IL: University of Illinois Press, 2003), 128. Marvin Perkins says that the words
“black” and “white” in the scriptures never refer to race per se but are synonymous with “wicked and righteous” and “out of the church or in the church.” Marvin Perkins, “Blacks in the Scriptures,” (lecture, FairMormon Conference, Provo, UT, August 7 and 8, 2014), https://www.fairlatterdaysaints.org/conference/august-2014/blacks-scriptures. Brant Gardner wrote that “white” is “almost always used in the Book of Mormon in a figurative sense.” He suspected that the Maya used body paint, but he also concluded “that the association between skin and white/black is metaphoric, not intended to indicate pigmentation.” Gardner, Second Witness, loc. 3158–207 of 21265, Kindle.


158 Tvedtnes, “The Charge of ‘Racism’ in the Book of Mormon,” 197. In the Book of Mormon, there are in fact very few references to complexion, and almost always they occur during a time of conflict or reconciliation. They include Nephi’s reference to the “skin of blackness” at the time of the rebellion after Lehi’s death; shortly thereafter, Jacob’s reference to the “darkness” of Lamanite skins; Mormon’s account of the marks and dark skins of Lamanites and the marks upon the Amlicites in 87 BCE; and in 15 CE Mormon’s statement that the Lamanites’ skins became white when they united with the Nephites. Armand Mauss admonishes readers not to “attribute racist intentions when the Book of Mormon uses such terms as dark or filthy versus white or pure, especially when ‘racial traits,’ such as skin color, are not even explicitly mentioned — which is the case most of the time” Mauss, Abraham’s Children, 128.

159 Campbell, “‘White’ or ‘Pure’: Five Vignettes,” 133. One refers to hair: “thou canst not make one hair black or white” (3 Nephi 12:36), reflecting the binary choice between the hair colors of Mediterraneans — black during youth, and white in old age.


161 Leland Ryken, James C. Wilhoit, Tremper Longman II, eds, Dictionary of Biblical Imagery (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1998), 97–98. In the earliest Hebrew tradition darkness was not always perceived in a negative way. Jehovah was in the dense cloud by day, as well as in the pillar of fire by night (Exodus 13:21). Also, the Torah tells us that as the people stood afar off, “Moses
drew near unto the thick darkness where God was” (Exodus 20:21). However, long after Nephi wrote, the Apostle John made the contrast between light and darkness a major theme of his gospel.


163 E.g., “secret works of darkness” (2 Nephi 10:15); “everlasting darkness and destruction” (Alma 26:15). In Lehi’s dream of the tree of life, he saw himself in “dark and dreary waste,” travelling “for the space of many hours in darkness,” praying for the Lord’s mercy, and then beholding a tree with fruit that was “white, to exceed all whiteness” and that filled his soul “with exceedingly great joy.” He also dreamed that humanity was travelling through a “great mist of darkness” and that many lost their way (1 Nephi 8). Kerry Hull reminds me that the prophet Ammon describes certain Lamanites, prior to their conversion, as being “in darkness, yea, even in the darkest abyss” (Alma 26:3); that Helaman refers to “works of darkness and abominations” (Helaman 6:28); and that the Book of Mormon pairs darkness with other human conditions, including being filthy, indolent and uncultured (1 Nephi 12:23). Personal correspondence to author, April 11, 2021.

164 Nibley, Lehi in the Desert, 85.

165 Citing what he referred to as a linguistic coincidence of opposites, he said: “With the Arabs, to be white of countenance is to be blessed and to be black of countenance is to be cursed.” Nibley, Lehi in the Desert, 84. In his lectures during the 1990s Nibley explained, “As I said, ‘shahor’ is a skin of blackness, which means dark. A good source for that would be Morris Jastrow’s Aramaic Dictionary. For the word black it gives dark, unpleasant — everything sort of uncomplimentary.” Hugh W. Nibley, Teachings of the Book of Mormon: Semester 1 (Provo, UT: Foundation for Ancient Research and Mormon Studies, 1993), 287.


167 In a personal conversation, Darius Gray, one of the pillars of the Genesis Group in Salt Lake City, drew my attention to bias in the pre-diluvian era against two groups of people. First, in a barren
land “with much heat,” Enoch saw the children of Canaan, upon whom “there was a blackness” and who “were despised among all people” (Moses 7:8). Second, some of the posterity of Cain were black and they also were marginalized and ostracized. The text says that they “had not place among” the residue of the seed of Adam (Moses 7:21–23). Enoch was stunned by God’s reaction: “the God of heaven looked upon the residue of the people, and he wept.” The heavens too shed “forth their tears as the rain” (Moses 7:28). Deeply distressed, Enoch asked God twice, “How is it that thou canst weep?” (Moses 7:29, 31). God’s response denounced racial bias. He told Enoch that He wept because He had commanded Adam’s posterity to “love one another” and to “choose God as their Father,” but instead “they are without affection, and they hate their own blood” (Moses 7:33). God called their failure to love one another “great wickedness” and foretold where that would lead: “misery shall be their doom, and the whole heavens shall weep over them” (Moses 7:33–37).


170 Isaac, The Invention of Racism in Classical Antiquity, 2. Contact between lighter-skinned Egyptians and darker-skinned Nubians began more than five thousand years ago. Although the complexion of people living along the Nile from Upper Nubia to the delta differed greatly, they “were not designated by color terms, and slavery was not associated with darker skin.” Jablonski, Living Color, 105–6.

171 Jablonski, Living Color, 114.

172 David Brion Davis, Slavery and Human Progress (New York: Oxford University Press, 1984), 337n144.
173 Ibid., 87.

174 Isaiah 2:2. Other writings of Isaiah that expressed a universalistic theology include Isaiah 5:26 (the Lord “will lift an ensign to the nations from afar”); Isaiah 45:22 (“be ye saved, all the ends of the earth”); Isaiah 49:6 (covenant Israel will be a light to the nations and take “salvation unto the end of the earth”); Isaiah 56:7 (the Lord’s house will be “an house of prayer for all people”); and Isaiah 66:18–21 (the Lord “will gather all nations and tongues” and “take of them for priests and Levites”).


176 Snowden, Before Color Prejudice, 7.

177 It is conceivable that Zoram may have been a trusted Ethiopian servant. He became Nephi’s true friend and received a patriarchal blessing from Lehi just prior to Lehi’s death. 2 Nephi 1:30–32.

178 These references are in the same genre as the New Testament’s description of Christ’s transfiguration and the angel who appeared at his resurrection. “And his raiment became shining, exceeding white as snow; so as no fuller on earth can white them” (Mark 9:3). “His countenance was like lightning, and his raiment white as snow” (Matthew 28:3).


180 For example, notwithstanding their religiosity, early colonists tolerated the enslavement of Africans even though a Book of Mormon prophet rejected the idea that people “make slaves of one another” (Mosiah 2:13); before enacting the Constitution and adopting the Bill of Rights, they persecuted religious dissent even though the Book of Mormon favored a society in which it was “strictly contrary to the commands of God” that there should be a law “against a man’s belief” (Alma 30:7); and, according to Nephi, they scattered and smote the remnants of the Lehites (1 Nephi 13:14).

181 The Ibscha Relief from the tomb of Khnumhotep II shows lighter-skinned Semitic traders (possibly the Hyksos) encountering darker skinned Egyptians. Philippe Bohstrom, “Were Hebrews Ever Slaves in Ancient Egypt? Yes,” Haaretz, March 25, 2021,
https://www.haaretz.com/israel-news/were-hebrews-ever-slaves-in-ancient-egypt-yes-1.5429843. Other images showing the diversity of complexions are found elsewhere in Egyptian tombs and art. See Snowden, Before Color Prejudice. See also the reference to Ham and his descendants in the Bible Dictionary in the Latter-day Saint version of the Holy Bible.

182 Sorenson, Mormon’s Codex, 551. See note 74 and accompanying text.

183 The desperate circumstances led the Nephites to “repent of all their sins” (3 Nephi 3:25).

184 The punctuation in the 1830 edition is suspect. See note 133. It shows the typesetter’s insensitivity to race, a common bias at that time. Based on the manuscript, he could have placed a period after the words “curse was taken from them” and moved the following words to the next sentence that describes physical appearance. This minimalist revision would better distinguish the curse from the mark and could be printed as follows:

15 And their curse was taken from them.

16 And their skin became white like unto the Nephites; and their young men and their daughters became exceedingly fair. And they were numbered among the Nephites, and were called Nephites, and thus ended the thirteenth year.

185 Bishop Diego de Landa observed that the Maya painted captives with black and white stripes. Morley and Brainerd, The Ancient Maya, 233–37. Stephen Houston points to one artifact that shows “white painted celebrants about to torch the back of a captive.” Houston, Stuart, and Taube, The Memory of Bones, loc. 4834 of 8579, Kindle. Because black body paint was common, the question arises whether the murals at Chichen Itza or Bonampak show a white body paint tradition with a particular purpose. See Gardner, “John L. Sorenson’s Complete Legacy: Reviewing Mormon’s Codex,” 119. But so far archaeologists, anthropologists, and ethnohistorians have not come to that conclusion.

186 The Maya painted the skins of their gods blue. Coe and Houston, The Maya, 216. Bishop de Landa also observed that “priests were painted blue.” Morley and Brainerd, The Ancient Maya, 237.

187 Sorenson, Mormon’s Codex, 3–4.

Ibid., 307.


Exegesis and eisegesis represent ideal, nonexistent ends of a continuum along which interpretations lie. If interpretations tend too far in the direction of putting things into the text (eis, the prefix of eisegesis, means “into”), they are not good interpretations. Yet if they tend too far toward only saying what can be taken from the text (ex, the prefix of exegesis, means “out of”), then they tend to be empty; they tend in the direction of being little more than a paraphrase of the original. Good interpretations lie somewhere between the two poles of exegesis and eisegesis, relying on assumptions and being as open about those assumptions as possible. (Ibid.)

Royal Skousen and Robin Scott Jensen, eds., The Joseph Smith Papers (Facsimile Edition), Revelations and Translations, vol 3, part 1, Printer’s Manuscript of the Book of Mormon, (Salt Lake City: Church Historian’s Press, 2015), 217. The plural word “cursings” has been replaced by “cursing” in the current printed edition.

See 2 Nephi 1:18, 22; 5:21, 24; Alma 45:16.


M. Kathryn Brown and James F. Garber, 2003, “Evidence of Conflict During the Middle Formative in the Maya Lowlands: A View from Blackman Eddy, Belize” in Ancient Mesoamerican Warfare, 91. Sorenson agrees: “Religion and cult, which emphasize religion’s ritualistic aspects, were integral to the conduct of war in Mesoamerican cultures and affected every aspect of warfare.” Sorenson, Mormon’s Codex, 387.

Laban had previously confiscated all of Lehi’s gold, silver, and riches without offering anything in return and had attempted to kill Lehi’s sons. Laman and Lemuel saw the property that Laban had extorted as their own inheritance, not Nephi’s alone, and, indeed, as the elder sons, they had a legitimate claim. See 1 Nephi 2:11. The reasons for their animosity also may include the challenges of a blended family with two or perhaps three different mothers for Lehi’s six sons, as was the case with Jacob’s dysfunctional, blended Hebrew household.

Arguably, the terms wild, hardened, and ferocious to describe Lamanites were complimentary descriptions of people whose survival depended upon hunting wild beasts and warfare. Nephites described Lamanite warriors as courageous (Alma 43:43). Nephites tried to dissuade missionaries from going to the Lamanites by arguing that they were a stiffnecked people (Alma 26:24), but the authors of the Book of Mormon apply that term more often to the Nephites themselves.

In addition to Jacob’s encomium of Lamanite husbands and fathers (Jacob 3:5), other Nephite prophets spoke approvingly of Lamanites, especially those who converted and were baptized (Alma 17:4; 19:31–36; 23:3–13). They praised Lamanites as zealous for keeping the commandments (Alma 21:23). After living among Lamanites for 14 years, Ammon, a Nephite prince who became a missionary praised them for refusing to take up arms, even in self-defense, but being willing to “sacrifice their lives” rather than “to take the life of their enemy” (26:32) and for being “perfectly honest and upright in all things” (Alma 27:27). He called them “a highly favored people of the Lord” (Alma 27:30). Describing their brotherly love, Ammon said: “And now behold, I say unto you, has there been so great love in all the land? Behold, I say unto you, Nay, there has not, even among the Nephites” (Alma 26:33). He highlighted one Lamanite woman’s exceeding faith, saying “there has not been such great faith among all the people of the Nephites” (Alma 19:10). Nephite prophets praised the sons of converted Lamanites for heroism and for fighting with miraculous strength because of their exceeding faith (Alma 56–57). They reported that the Lamanites preached to and converted many Nephites and even succeeded where the Nephites had failed miserably by converting the Gadianton robbers, a mafia-like group that had infiltrated their society (Helaman 6:4, 37). They also paid tribute to Lamanites who
were baptized by fire and the Holy Ghost because of their faith and yet were so humble that “they knew it not” (3 Nephi 9:20). Nephite record keepers may have initially omitted the fulfillment of one prophecy by Samuel, a courageous and gifted Lamanite seer, but they had included most of Samuel’s explicit Messianic prophecy (Helaman 13–15), and they promptly amended their records when Jesus reminded them of Samuel’s additional words about graves being opened (3 Nephi 23:8–13).

A Nephite military leader berated his own governor for idleness, slothfulness, and exceedingly great neglect, for loving glory and the vain things of the world, and for sitting upon his throne in a state of “thoughtless stupor” (Alma 60). Furthermore, Mormon explicitly compared the Nephites to two ritually unclean animals that the Jews of Lehi’s time had despised. Early in the Christian era, within a span of a few years the Nephites went from great wickedness (3 Nephi 2:3) to being a people among whom “there was not a living soul … who did doubt in the least the words of all the holy prophets” and who served God “with all diligence day and night” (3 Nephi 5:1–3), but they swiftly degenerated again to a “state of awful wickedness” (3 Nephi 6:17). Incorporating unsavory terms from Proverbs 26:11, Mormon accused them of turning from righteousness “like the dog to his vomit, or like the sow to her wallowing in the mire” (3 Nephi 7:8). The current King James version of Proverbs 26:11 refers only to a dog: “As a dog returneth to his vomit, so a fool returneth to his folly.” But the writings of Peter suggest that the “true proverb” on which the slur is based originally referred to both dogs and swine. 2 Peter 2:22. The proverb predated Lehi’s departure, and Mormon used its apparently more ancient form.

Personal correspondence to author, April 10, 2021.

Nephite prophets and political leaders disavowed both slavery and racism. Nephi’s success in obtaining the brass plates led to the Book of Mormon’s first act of social justice — Nephi’s offer to free Laban’s servant (1 Nephi 4:30–36). King Benjamin would not suffer his people to make slaves of one another (Mosiah 2:13). In contrast, servitude of mix-race people may have existed among the Lamanites. Ammon’s missionary report describes as “Lamanitish” King Lamoni’s servants who were charged with tending the royal flocks and who were killed if they allowed the flocks to be
scattered (Alma 17:26–27). When these Lamanites converted, they offered to become slaves to the Nephites as penance for their murders (Alma 27:8). But it was against Nephite law to have slaves (Alma 27:9). Lamanites were not conscripted into Nephite armies; indeed, even when converted Lamanites were desperately needed for defense, the Nephites honored their conscientious objection to taking up arms (Alma 53:9–15).

Sorenson, *Mormon’s Codex*, 234–35. See note 41 and accompanying text.

Tvedtnes, “The Charge of ‘Racism’ in the Book of Mormon,” 185. For example, Ammon, a Nephite, described descendants of Laman and Lemuel as “dearly beloved brethren” (Alma 26:9). Samuel the Lamanite prophet delivered his stern warnings to Nephites while Nephite archers shot arrows at him, but still addressed them as his “beloved brethren” (Helaman 15:1).


The Lord made this clear during His 34 CE ministry to the Lamanites and Nephites. In describing the distant future of Lehi’s descendants, after they were to be scattered by the Gentiles, He did not refer to the eventual survivors as Lamanites. He used interchangeably and collectively the terms “thy seed,” “your seed,” “my people,” “a remnant of Jacob,” “my people who are of the covenant,” and “the remnant of this people” (3 Nephi 21).

Givens, *The Book of Mormon: A Very Short Introduction*, 118. Tvedtnes also relied on idioms from the Hebrew scriptures and the Middle East, although he cites one example of prejudice (not based on skin color) in Aztec-era writings. Tvedtnes, “The Charge of ‘Racism’ in the Book of Mormon.” Sproat relies on biblical traditions and definitions of “skins.” Sproat, “Skins as Garments in the Book of Mormon.” In the 1940s, Nibley believed that “the search for external evidence was a misdirection.” At that time, he suggested a literary approach focused on Old World language and customs. Givens, *The Book of Mormon: A Very Short Introduction*, 118–19; Nibley, *Teachings of the Book of Mormon*: Semester 1. Later, however, he came to consider John Sorenson’s early work on
a Mesoamerican setting to be “our best hope to replace the pseudo scholarship of previous generations with substantive insights.” Magelby, *Hugh Nibley and Book of Mormon Geography* (italics added).

208 Many intriguing questions remain. See Houston, Stuart, and Taube, *The Memory of Bones*, loc. 674–93 of 8579, Kindle; and Houston, *Veiled Brightness*, 42. For example, were pigments used for body décor while charcoal-based paints were used for hunting and war? Were brushes and quills used for body décor while paints for hunting were applied by hand? What emotions and aesthetic values were linked to various colors? For what special moments did the Lamanites use body paint, other than for warfare, hunting, plunder, and ceremonies? Did warriors paint themselves during oath-making ceremonies? Did leaders paint themselves for royal occasions? Did the use of black relate to the cult of the jaguar? It is the “overriding impression” of Mayanist color experts that “black is a color of supernaturals or the near supernatural, and of dark and foreboding places.” Houston, *Veiled Brightness*, 35.

209 If the Lamanite pioneers did not mimic the Maya tradition, they may have invented it themselves. At sporting events we routinely see intimidating face and chest painting; during the annual deer hunt, we observe camouflaged archers with their faces blackened; and I have watched young boys invent similar concealment techniques at night when playing capture the flag in the woods.

210 Email from Richard D. Hansen.

211 Elsie Talmage Brandley was quoting a speech by her father, James E. Talmage, “The Earth and Man,” delivered on August 9, 1931, as reported in *Deseret News*, Nov. 21, 1931, 7–8. Elsie Talmage Brandley, “The Religious Crisis of Today,” Jenifer Reeder and Kate Holbrook, eds., *At the Pulpit* (Salt Lake City, Intellectual Reserve, 2017), 137.


215 “President Nelson Shares Social Post about Racism and Calls for Respect for Human Dignity,” *Press Release of The Church of*


217 This type of witness was anticipated by Joseph Smith when he said that a person “would get nearer to God by abiding by its precepts, than by any other book.” Joseph Smith, *History of the Church*, 4:461.


220 Patricia T. Holland, “Fulfilling the Measure of Your Creation” (speech, Brigham Young University, Jan. 17, 1989), https://speeches.byu.edu/talks/patricia-t-holland/filling-measure-creation/. This concept conveys a breathtakingly expansive view of all of God’s creations.

221 Arnold, *Nibley Observed*, 317.


223 The word “stain” is rarely used in the Hebrew scriptures. There is one reference to a stain upon pride, but otherwise it describes an external effect. See Job 3:5 and Isaiah 63:3.

224 Gardner, “If Lamanites were black, why didn’t anyone notice?”

225 Nibley, *Teachings of the Book of Mormon*: Semester 2, 244.

226 The original typesetter added punctuation, verses, and initial paragraphs. Skousen, *The Book of Mormon: The Earliest Text*, xlv. In this case his punctuation contributes to confusion between the curse and the mark. In verse 14, the reference to the mark would be expressed more clearly and sensitively in a parenthetical phrase, in this manner:

14 Thus the word of God is fulfilled, for these are the words which he said to Nephi: Behold, the Lamanites have
I cursed (and I will set a mark on them that they and their seed may be separated from thee and thy seed from this time henceforth and forever) except they repent of their wickedness and turn to me that I may have mercy upon them.


228 Gardner, Second Witness, 4:696 (emphasis added).

229 Sorenson, Mormon’s Codex, 280.

230 Aguilar-Moreno, Aztec Handbook, s.vv. “idolatry,” “human sacrifice.”

231 Ibid., 100.

232 This brazen assassination came one year to the day after Teancum’s Nephite battalion had defeated the Lamanite army (Alma 50:35). In a personal conversation, Richard Hansen pointed out that the Maya calendar has 18 months of 20 days each plus a five-day period at the end of the year that was known as Uayeb and considered to be unlucky. Thus, Teancum was strategic when he killed Amalickiah on the anniversary of the earlier defeat. Two successive military disasters, each under the five unlucky days of Uayeb, “would have had a devastating and demoralizing effect on the Lamanites” and must have been “an ominous augury” for the Lamanites’ intended military conquest.
BEYOND CALCULATION: A REVIEW OF ROBERT J. SAWYER’S CALCULATING GOD

Jeff Lindsay


Abstract: In an entertaining and provocative science fiction novel, Calculating God, Robert J. Sawyer presents us with a likable alien scientist visiting earth to obtain more data about God’s ongoing work of creation. The alien is astounded that a human scientist does not believe in God despite the obvious evidence. Sawyer’s work introduces a variety of reasonable scientific arguments for the existence of God in a series of cleverly conceived dialogs and uses dramatic events to develop some perspectives on God. Sawyer’s purpose is not to evangelize, and the troubling concept of an utterly impersonal God who emerges in Sawyer’s interplay between multiple worlds is quite alien to Christianity and especially to the revelations from Joseph Smith, which offer a much more hopeful perspective. Calculating God is a delightful read that raises some questions that need to be discussed more often, but to obtain meaningful answers, a different calculus is needed.

[Editor’s Note: We have, from time to time, published reviews or essays that draw upon disciplines that some may not consider as having bearing on The Interpreter Foundation’s mission. For example, how can a literary genre such as science fiction fit into our mission? Some may even scoff, presuming that science fiction has no place in academic discourse. Consider, though, that science fiction attempts to create fantastic worlds, and that those worlds (and the beings that populate those worlds) necessarily reflect a “world view” consistent with the cultural views of the authors. In the realm of religion, Joseph Smith similarly described and promoted a future world which he credited to revelation and interaction with the divine. Perhaps we can learn new
insights by comparing the man-made views of our potential future with the revealed views of our future. In this review, Jeff Lindsay describes one science fiction author’s take on the question of God’s existence and compares the God in these pages to the God described by Joseph Smith.

Robert J. Sawyer, a Canadian science fiction author who has published 23 books and won major awards for his writing, such as the Nebula Award (1995) and the Hugo Award (2003), takes on an unusual and controversial topic in his 2000 novel *Calculating God*, nominated for the 2001 Hugo Award. Scientists from two alien civilizations have teamed up to visit earth to learn more about God’s work and God’s plans. They are astounded to learn that humans, in spite of their basic scientific knowledge, are not absolutely convinced of the reality of God.

The book begins with a humorous but dramatic visit of an eight-legged alien being whose ship descends next to Toronto’s Royal Ontario Museum (ROM). The alien that steps out of the smooth, sleek ship is a female, we later learn, looking something like a large brown spider with a torso resembling a big beach ball with eight limbs going in every direction, two of which have six-fingered hands, with a couple of moving eye stalks as well. She makes an awkward entrance up the steps and through the doors to the ROM, then approaches a security guard and in perfect English says, “Excuse me. I’d like to see a paleontologist.”

Her name is Hollus, she’s a mom with two children of whom she’s very proud and misses very much, and she has come to Earth to learn more about God by studying our fossil record.

The novel is narrated by Dr. Thomas Jericho, a paleontologist who works at the ROM conducting research on the Burgess Shale collection. Here I must recommend spending some time at the ROM’s fascinating website *The Burgess Shale*.1 This famous and gargantuan collection of 500-million-year-old fossils comes from the Canadian Rockies in British Columbia, discovered in 1909 by paleontologist Charles Walcott, who spent years collecting and studying the fossil treasures there. The fossils are highly unusual in that the soft body parts of many creatures have been preserved. The Burgess Shale illustrates the incredible and often bizarre richness of marine life during the Cambrian Period after a dramatic event 541 million years ago known as the Cambrian explosion, in which large numbers of new species of life appeared. The importance of the fossils in the Burgess Shale was not recognized until

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the 1960s, when scientists noted that numerous bizarre species in the collection often did not fit any known category of life. Since then it has been used to provide many treasures of knowledge about early life. A *New York Times* bestseller, Harvard paleontologist Stephen Jay Gould’s book *Wonderful Life: The Burgess Shale and the Nature of History* (New York: Norton, 1989) created increased popular awareness of the Burgess Shale. There are two other massive deposits of fossils, both in China: the Chengjiang fossil site in Yunnan Province, and the newly discovered Qingjiang fossil site in Hubei Province.

The security guard at the ROM is used to having film crews in the area and thinks the alien is part of a stunt, so he is not shocked by the visitor. He gives Dr. Jericho a call, and he arrives promptly, not knowing who the visitor is but instantly recognizes that this is a real biological entity that could not have evolved on earth. There is a great deal of humor but also seriousness in the early encounters of Hollus with humans, including authorities who insist that Hollus must go see the local political leaders because — well, isn’t that what aliens are supposed to do? “Take me to your leader” and such? Hollus asks them to send her regards, but she has no time to meet and must get on with her scientific work.

A genuinely engrossing and entertaining aspect of the book is the series of conversations between Hollus and Dr. Jericho, who has a family of his own and is struggling with his own mortality as he fights terminal cancer. Very quickly we see that Hollus is stunned to learn that Dr. Jericho is an atheist. How could a man with advanced scientific education miss the obvious evidence that the universe has been designed by a creator? This is certainly an unusual twist in mainstream science fiction.

Jericho learns that two alien species have examined the scientific evidence and independently recognized that, of course, there is a God. But far more than that, God is clearly up to something, and they wish to learn more. Information from Earth may help them solve the mystery.

Hollus is a paleontologist herself, a member of the Forhilnor species living about 25 light years away in the Beta Hydri system. They have also brought along a team of scholars from yet another planet about 20 light years away from the species known as the Wreeds. The Wreeds are

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an intensely devout people who dedicate half of their time every day to prayer, though there is no evidence so far that God has heard or answered their prayers.

When the two species first met and shared information, they were stunned to find that during the evolutionary history of both planets, there were five major cataclysmic events at approximately the same times that helped shape the development of life. Hollus wanted to see if something similar had happened to Earth and quickly learned that yes, there were indeed five major cataclysms in Earth’s history and that each occurred at about the same times as on the planets of the Forhilnors and the Wreeds.

The mystery is why God was tailoring life on these planets to develop intelligent species at precisely the same times.

Jericho, of course, doesn’t accept the belief that these coincidences are due to God or that God is needed to explain life and the cosmos. With my personal interest in science and faith in and marveling at the divine Creation, I enjoyed the depiction of the alien scientist trying to explain to a human scientist why God as the Creator should be self-evident. Here Sawyer draws upon many of the arguments that have been used to support the need for a Creator, including

- The combination of fundamental constants governing the properties of matter that seem perfectly balanced to allow stars to exist and life to form. Hollus explains, for example, that if the strength of gravity were stronger or weaker by 1 part in many trillions, stars could not exist for long and would either collapse into dwarves or black holes due to gravitational force, or explode (53‒54). Such a delicate balance in the fundamental properties of matter surely seems designed to make life possible.
- The ability of stars not only to exist but also to create the heavier elements we need, especially carbon, which depends on a mathematical coincidence involving resonance states of the carbon nucleus that allows three helium nuclei to fuse and create carbon (58‒59).
- The design of amino acids (92).
- The complexity and brilliance of DNA (91–92).

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• The clever and complex design of the cilia on many different bacteria and in human lungs, essential for removing dust and debris (89–90).
• The remarkably unusual properties of water that are essential not just for cellular life, but for the ability to maintain liquid oceans that don’t fill up with ice due to the unusual ability of water to expand and float rather than condense and sink when it freezes (60–61).

I would have liked to see included a discussion of the wonders of proteins, including such improbabilities of engineering as the motorized energy-producing enzyme ATP synthase, the spliceosome,\(^5\) and the enzymes that create and control microtubules and the stunning robot-like proteins that literally walk along them, transporting payloads vast distances to keep cells functioning smoothly. I would have enjoyed a discourse on the wonders of melanin, the widely used biopolymer that shields our DNA from damage from the sun, helps protect some nerves and brain tissue from other threats, adds beauty and diversity to human skin and hair, colors our lips, fortifies many fungi, enhances the feathers of many birds, and cloaks deep-sea fish with near invisibility in a bioluminescent world using some of the strangest, darkest materials known. I also might have included a discussion on the elaborate systems that repair DNA damage, with a complex of tools that detect DNA damage and that automatically prioritize responses to cope.\(^6\)

But it would take countless chapters to mention most of the remarkable clues in nature or just within our own bodies that cry out as witnesses of not just intelligent creation but miraculously brilliant creation. I say “miraculously brilliant” because, in my view, the real question is not whether God designed this cosmos, but how it was even possible to find the combination of the fundamental properties of matter and energy that enabled the achievement of the wonders before us. How can the delicate balance of these basic properties that allow stars to exist also allow them to be carbon producing engines, and also allow water not only to be the ideal solvent to allow proteins to function in cells but also to sustain the planet’s ecosystem? Here we have water vapor, liquid water, and solid ice that can all exist in harmony without, as mentioned, ice sinking and overwhelming oceans or water vapor turning earth into a Venus-like overheated greenhouse. There are so many interactions

to consider, so many wonders at every level, how was it even possible to make all this with a single selection of fundamental properties? Beyond those marvels, the brilliance behind DNA and protein design and function is simply beyond comprehension and worthy of frequent, reverent contemplation and rejoicing. On and on the wonders go. ... In response to Hollus’s statements, Jericho explains that seemingly improbable events can still occur by chance (58). He also explains that simple rules can lead to complex patterns, citing the numerical simulation from a computer program called “Life” developed in the 1970s by John Conway, a cellular automation in which pixels can move and change with many surprising features based on simple rules (79–81). He is not ready to admit that God must exist.

Hollus’s belief that scientific observations and calculations provide evidence for God is not presented in a way meant to resonate with opponents of evolution. In fact, fundamentalist believers are the villains in this novel, as two violent and fanatic religious thugs who have recently bombed abortion clinics come to the ROM ready to shoot up the Burgess Shale so that alien worlds won’t be influenced by evil evolutionary theory. The shallow, stereotypical portrayal of Christian zealots who are willing to kill and destroy in order to stop the spread of evolutionary doctrine is a weaker element of the novel, though it leads to a dramatic moment in which Hollus demonstrates remarkable presence of mind and saves the day without blasting the bad guys with advanced weaponry.

For Hollus and apparently all her people and for the Wreeds, God — whatever or whoever that Being is — is brilliant and powerful but is not concerned with individuals. God’s goals seem to be to provide the conditions for the evolution of intelligent life and to bring about intelligence on multiple nearby planets at the same time through carefully planned cataclysmic intervention that has spanned over 500 million years. But why? For what purpose?

Through their conversations, Jericho helps Hollus solve one set of mysteries. Other worlds with intelligent life have been found in our corner of the galaxy, but there is no sign of life anymore as if the intelligent species chose to flee somewhere else, but where? Hollus notes that near one seemingly abandoned planet, they could still see the traces of a plume from a fusion engine that had propelled a ship toward the star.

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Betelgeuse. With no habitable planets in that direction, the purpose of their journey is puzzling.

As Hollus describes the remnants found on that planet, such as vast slabs of rock placed over parts of the planetary surface, Jericho speculates that some of the inhabitants may not have left but rather have chosen to abandon organic life and instead have uploaded their minds into a massive computer system buried beneath those protective slabs, where they — as purely digital beings — may persist in an endless, vast simulation. The barren surface is likely meant to keep visitors away lest their virtual lives be threatened from the outside. Hollus sees that this may well explain the abnormal status of several once-inhabited planets, and may point to a defect in God’s plan.

God apparently wants organic life to evolve for some purpose, but when that life chooses to abandon its organic form and stop evolving, it may frustrate some purpose God had. And perhaps this new collaboration between the Forhilnors, the Wreeds, and now Earth (at least via Jericho and a handful of other humans associating with other team members elsewhere on the planet) may play some role in further advancing God’s plans.

The impersonal God recognized by the Forhilnors and worshipped daily by the Wreeds finally in a sense reveals Itself when a dramatic tragedy strikes. The star Betelgeuse suddenly becomes a supernova. Hollus and Jericho recognize that the fusion trail that had been detected heading toward Betelgeuse was that of a ship not loaded with fleeing migrants, but with a doomsday weapon meant to trigger the supernova that would produce a brief burst of massive radiation intense enough to sterilize all planets within roughly 100 light years, thereby eliminating potential threats to their virtual paradise beneath the surface of a seemingly forsaken planet. This reflects the dark and utterly selfish potential of intelligent life similar to the “dark forest” theme developed in the Three-Body Problem trilogy of China’s most famous science fiction writer, Liu Cixin, discussed in my review of some key Chinese science fiction works. It is even possible that Sawyer’s depiction of widespread

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planetary cleansing to preemptively destroy potential enemies was an inspiration for Liu Cixin, and a reasonable depiction of what we might expect from other inhabited planets in a tooth-and-claw universe unchecked by the teachings of a loving, personal God.

As the exploding Betelgeuse becomes brighter and brighter, on course to outshine the sun, the Wreeds and the Forhilnors recognize that their planets are doomed, as is Earth. At this dramatic juncture, the advanced telescope on the Forhilnors’ ship detects what appears to be a rupture in space out of which a jet-black fluid seems to emerge and form a massive shield around part of Betelgeuse, enough to protect their planets. This, no doubt, is God, intervening to stop a premature destruction of intelligent life. Indisputable evidence of divine intervention is suddenly on the table.

Jericho, who is dying from lung cancer, has a strong desire to learn more. He was frustrated to learn that cancer appears to be a common incurable illness on other planets as well. Forhilnor technology, not very much more advanced than our own, can do nothing to help him. (A defect in the novel, actually — the more advanced Forhilnors seem to have given up on medical advances to treat cancer and probably could learn much from the progress that humans continue to make.) But they do make a life-changing offer to Jericho. Now that the hand of God has, in effect, been revealed, with God for the moment apparently being near Betelgeuse, the Forhilnors and the Wreeds feel they must go seek God, and decide they must bring some of their favorite earthlings along, if they are willing. A Chinese peasant, Jericho, a few others, and an ape are selected. All agree to go on the hundred-year journey to Betelgeuse, spending most of the time in suspended animation.

Jericho leaves, knowing that when he awakes near Betelgeuse, his family will long since have died. But he, being months away from death as it was, felt that in this way he could add some meaning to his life. When the delegates of three planets approach the great black cloud that is associated with God, a miracle happens that reveals the purpose for the millions of years God has invested in creating these lifeforms. For the first time, it seems, the prayerful Wreeds receive a clear communication from God telling them to take DNA samples from all three planets and place them together in a cell. A strange light from the black cloud then passes through the ship and activates the DNA mix, joining genes and creating what will rapidly grow into a godlike baby apparently destined to guide the universe through its next cycle of collapse and rebirth. It’s

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a strange, unsettling ending. So many eons of work to create one new being? But this is science fiction, not theology, and Sawyer still does much to bring clever, complex possibilities to our attention.

In spite of the interesting discussion of the evidence for God, the God of *Calculating God* leaves us and its various intelligent species with little reason not to be atheists, apart from the cold calculations that point to something’s apparent design of the laws of physics and occasional well-timed eradications of vast swaths of life. God’s existence and plans don’t involve us as individuals. Further, calculated awareness that there must be a Designer behind the brilliant design around us and in us does not necessarily transform us. It is not sufficient to make us yearn to overcome our natural selfishness and rise to higher standards of behavior, to love our fellow men, to seek to adore God, or emulate, for example, His Son.

The goal of the remote, detached Being in *Calculating God* seems to be to create an unusual mix of genes from multiple worlds in order to make a junior god ready to guide the cosmos after everything in this galaxy and all the other galaxies in the cosmos collapse into nothingness. It’s perhaps a calculated god to be acknowledged by scientists and mathematicians, but what is there to seek? Or to worship? Such a god is even more remote from the pains and joys of individuals than the god of the ancient Greek philosophers may seem. The novel’s God is wholly other and incomprehensible, inaccessible, ethereal, and always remote, even when It drops in for a visit to a nearby star.

On the other hand, the unsettlingly narrow purpose of the God’s cosmic work in the novel is not much more disappointing than some competing theologies of our day that cannot comprehend the majesty of God’s real work and glory in mercifully giving life, agency, and the opportunity for eternal joy and enormously productive, meaningful, eternal lives to endless millions of His children across an endless cosmos.

I much prefer the God revealed in the scriptures of Restoration and taught by Joseph Smith, a God who weeps for us, a God who knows our pains, and has even taken them upon Himself to atone for our sins. The God of infinite love, of ultimate mercy, Who is so close to us that we are His children and He is our Father, Who sent His Son, the Creator, to represent Him and live among us, thus coming to know all that we face and all that we suffer. His work and glory is not to just create one successor after hundreds of millions of years of life and death on many planets, but to help each one of us be embraced with His love and be brought into His presence eternally, sharing with us all that He has in
lives of endless joy and growth. The universe that we see through the revelations given to Joseph Smith is one of infinitely expanding joy and meaning, not one with no purpose other than to perish and start again, guided by a remote, reborn God whose only purpose seems to be to persist.

Calculating God is an impressive novel well worth the read, but nothing compares to the views of God and His loving plans for us that are found in the scriptures of the Church, and especially in the revelations given to the prophet Joseph Smith.

Jeffrey Dean Lindsay recently returned to the United States after almost 9 years in Shanghai, China. Jeff has been providing online materials defending the LDS faith for over twenty years, primarily at JeffLindsay.com. His Mormanity blog (http://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 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 twelve grandchildren.
A MASTERPIECE ON RESISTING
OUR IMPULSES TO LEAVE

Daniel Ortner


Abstract: In his latest book, S. Michael Wilcox has written a masterpiece on grappling with doubts and overcoming our impulses to leave the Church. Wilcox displays a refreshing degree of personal vulnerability and openness, deep empathy and compassion for the struggling; and concrete and memorable suggestions for successfully dealing with faith crises. These traits give this book a power that no other work published by Deseret Book on this topic can match.

In the past decade, there have been many wonderful books directed at those who are struggling with doubts or who find themselves in a crisis of faith. Deseret Book has published several of these stellar titles from such notable authors as Patrick Mason, Bruce and Marie Hafen, and Terryl and Fiona Givens. Now they have published S. Michael Wilcox’s *Holding On: Impulses to Leave and Strategies to Stay*, which deserves the same amount of attention and praise these illustrious forebearers received.

Wilcox’s book is somewhat unassuming. It is a slim 128-page volume. Its tone is devotional yet conversational. Wilcox offers at least three things that together set this work apart from others I have read on the topic. First of all, Wilcox shows a degree of personal vulnerability and

openness with his own personal faith struggles that is very refreshing. Second, Wilcox shows a great degree of empathy and compassion for those who struggle. Third, Wilcox offers in his compact volume many memorable and concrete tips for reframing and overcoming doubt.

**Personal Perspective on Faith Crises**

“I remember vividly my first ‘faith crisis’” (p. 7). This is how Wilcox begins the first chapter of the book. He goes on to describe his teenage agony of being unable to gain a testimony of the Book of Mormon. This story sets the stage for other similar reflections throughout the book.

Wilcox admits that he “had to grapple with faith-shakers, interrupting moments, and even individuals who desired to destroy my ‘rejoicings’” (p. 26). He emphasizes that these types of moments of struggle through doubt and darkness have “happened more than once in my life” (p. 10), and that for him this is an “ongoing battle” (p. 12). Indeed, he notes his “awareness that I will probably go to the grave facing the battlefront of personal faith’s oppositions” (p. 17).

Wilcox, a popular devotional speaker and the well-known author of many books published by Deseret Book, is no stranger to sharing deeply personal experiences in his books. For instance, in 2011 Wilcox published *Sunset: On the Passing of Those We Love*, a highly personal reflection on loss and mourning, written shortly after the death of his wife Laurie. And yet it is still somewhat jarring and deeply refreshing to hear an author, in a Deseret Book work on faith and doubt, so openly and candidly discuss his own personal moments of doubt and uncertainty.

Other works on faith crisis published by Deseret Book have lacked this personal element. For instance, Mason effectively relays stories of others unsettled in their faith, as do the Hafens. These works lack the personal touch of the author’s own experience grappling with doubts. And this type of personal reflection is largely outside of the scope of Givens’s philosophical musings.

Most memorably, Wilcox poignantly speaks of his own faith struggles connected to the death of his wife:

> When my wife, my beautiful Laurie, died ten years ago, my path narrowed. Unease and hidden fears crept into my mind, troubling me when alone at night. All my hopes and happiness rested on the beliefs of my chosen religion and the path I had walked since childhood. They rested on temple ordinances,

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promises, and authority vested in a temple sealer. They rested on the assurances of life after death and an eternal family. Was there a Laurie? Was she still mine? Did Joseph Smith teach revealed truth when he introduced celestial marriage? (p. 12)

Later on, Wilcox returns to his relationship with Laurie, emphasizing how his love for her and the power of their sealing provide a touchpoint for the faith he returns to in moments of doubt or struggle:

I lay that sealing splendor on the scale. It alone, independent of any other weight, tips the scale down on the side of staying belief and faith. It was the supreme moment of my life, its summit, the best day to be alive. How can I leave that? If God gave me only this memory, I would have lived a fulfilled life — more than compensated for all the gratitude, services, and obedience I could offer in return. (p. 37)

At other times, Wilcox openly discusses how he struggles with certain doctrines or events in Church history, such as the priesthood ban (pp. 55–58) and polygamy (pp. 60, 86–89). For instance, Wilcox does not mince words, noting, for example, that he “sincerely wish[es that] we didn’t have this racial discrimination in Church history” and that “we had continued on the more racially inclusive track Joseph Smith had started” (p. 57).

But what is most refreshing about Wilcox’s reflections on his own personal doubts is that he does not write as someone who inevitably overcame these doubts through his own personal strength and merits. To the contrary, Wilcox is very open to the possibility that each of these struggles may have ended differently for him.

As an example, when discussing his teenage failure to learn if the Book of Mormon was true, Wilcox muses, “Had I been older, would things have turned out differently? Would I have followed the impulse to leave?” (p. 9). Wilcox attributes his willingness to stay to the example of his mother, who had an “abiding love of the book,” which motivated him to “return and receive the witness I desperately wanted” (p. 9). Later, Wilcox describes his “traumatic” first temple experience, from which he was left “bewildered, frightened, confused, filled with doubt, [and] overpowered with anxiety” (p. 111). He notes, with humility, that “had I been older, more settled, and more secure in my own wisdom, perhaps the impulses to leave would have been strong enough at that moment to shift the essentials out of my center. What a world of fulfillment and joy I would have missed” (p. 111).
Wilcox’s willingness to share his own struggles is not incidental. Wilcox recognized that “as we journey on the road of faith, we can take comfort in knowing that others face and have faced similar challenges” (p. 24). There is great value to being led by a guide that has personally traversed the terrain. Wilcox’s own personal struggles give the book depth and relatability.

Empathy for Those Struggling
Wilcox couples his personal reminiscences with a profound sense of empathy and understanding for those who struggle. This empathy permeates every aspect of the book. For instance, Wilcox chooses to use the term “impulses to leave” rather than faith “crises” because he notes that “the word crisis can be a bit threatening, especially when questioning implies a lack of faith” (p. 15).

Wilcox recognizes that many of the issues individuals struggle with in Church history or doctrine are difficult and can “wring the heart” (p. 23). He acknowledges that “many who leave the Church have done so with great inner turmoil, grief, and introspection” (p. 15). Wilcox, therefore, does not condemn those who doubt. On the contrary, he explains that questioning and facing doubts are not condemnable wrongs. In the long run, they often bring greater conviction. … Questions are often hammers that break the opaque windows of our lives to let in light. The very word question suggests a quest. We want it to be a quest for truth and goodness. It is a search, and searching is something we are commanded to do. (pp. 23‒24)

This combination of the author’s humility and willingness to admit his own personal doubts and the charity and compassion he shows for those who struggle and doubt seems very basic, but its effect is nevertheless nothing short of revelatory. This combination of humility and empathy has the power to build bridges and destroy barriers. It is my hope that this will allow those who read this book to let down their guard and to be touched by the powerful recommendations that Wilcox offers.

Concrete Suggestions to Strengthen Faith
One of Wilcox’s strengths as a speaker and author is his ability to paint concrete and memorable images that powerfully teach gospel principles. This book is no exception. Wilcox offers several that remain etched in my mind:

- He asks us to imagine a deer or goat walking on a tiny ledge at the top of a tall mountain. In doing so he urges us to “hold on’ until the path widens” (p. 11).
• He uses the image of a brass, antique balance scale to urge us to “balance the scale” when we face doubt (p. 30). He urges those struggling to “remember the weights on the believing, staying side — the touches of love, rays of glory, and words from the Savior” (p. 32). Wilcox then describes several of these positive weights, including the experiences and testimony of Joseph Smith (p. 33), touches of love from God in the form of patriarchal and temple blessings (pp. 35–37), and powerful words of comfort and inspiration from the scriptures (pp. 37–44), among others (pp. 47–49).

• When balancing the scale, Wilcox further urges us to remove negative weights from the scale by “celebrat[ing] the good” and “forgiv[ing] all the rest” (pp. 53–63).

• He retells Hans Christian Anderson’s story of the Snow Queen, which involves a magic mirror that showed all the worst and most negative aspects of the world. The fragments of that mirror were then scattered across the world, impacting our vision. Wilcox laments the “tendency in human beings to see things through the mirror dust, focusing on negative qualities rather than positive” (p. 67). In contrast, God’s mirror “diminishes the ugly and the negative while enhancing the beautiful and positive” (p. 67).

• Wilcox urges us to “draw strength from the chain,” meaning that we should both draw courage from those who have come before us and left a legacy of faith, and also look forward to our descendants with the goal of leaving a legacy of faith and testimony (pp. 83–92).

Chapter 6, “Draw Strength from the Chain” (pp. 83–92), was for me the most powerful and evocative. I especially loved Wilcox’s description of going into the sealing room of the temple and imagining past generations urging him to “draw strength from us” and pleading with him, “Don’t break the chain!” (p. 85). But true to form, Wilcox imagines these ancestors “question[ing] not with condemnation, not with judgment, but with gentleness” (p. 89). As a convert to the Church, when I have personally experienced my own impulses to leave, envisioning my ancestors for whom I have been able to do temple work cheering me on, is a very powerful motivator to stay and continue.

In Chapter 7, “Center the Essentials” (pp. 95–113), Wilcox first describes “fortified churches” built in Romania with a tight protective wall around them. Using this metaphor, he urges us to “center the essentials,” including faith, family, and the “center of the center,” which is
“the constant, deeply personal, open, pouring-out, holding-nothing-back communication with the Father and the accompanying desire of doing only that which pleases Him” (p. 108).

This chapter was, in my opinion, the weakest of the book. The metaphor involving fortified churches felt like a bit of a thematic departure from the rest of the book. At times this chapter felt like material for a separate talk later molded to fit the theme of the book rather than an organic outgrowth of what had come before.

Despite this slight unevenness, there is much depth and wisdom in Wilcox’s stories, and the powerful images leave a lasting impression. He has, in short, written a masterpiece on faith and doubt. I could not recommend it more highly for either those who grapple with “impulses to leave” or those of us who minister to or care about those who face such impulses — in other words, all of us.

Daniel Ortner is a constitutional lawyer who specializes in the First Amendment. He joined The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints while an undergraduate. He comes from a Jewish background. He lives in the Sacramento area with his wife and three daughters.
Christmas and a Condescending God

Daniel C. Peterson

Abstract: As religious holidays go, Christmas has been domesticated unusually well — and effectively commercialized — among people and even whole cultures that don't accept (or even care about) the central theological claim that Christmas asserts. After all, who doesn’t like cute little babies, at least when they’re not crying? But that theological claim is stunning. Radical. It’s radical in the strictest sense of that word, because it goes down deep, to the very root (Latin radix). Beyond the pleasant and comfortable sentimentality of favorite holiday foods, scenes of carolers in snowy villages, and warm family gatherings, Christmas dramatically distinguishes Christianity from every other major world religion.

Landing during the Christmas season at the international airport in Cairo, Egypt — the busy gateway to a city and a nation that are roughly 85%-90% Sunni Muslim — you will see Christmas decorations everywhere. And such decorations show up prominently in hotels and public spaces well beyond the airport and the city.

In Japan, where estimates put the number of Christians at somewhere between 1%-2% of the population or perhaps even lower, a quite secularized version of Christmas focused on Santa Claus and gift-giving is widely observed. Also prominent among Japanese Christmas traditions, by the way, is eating fried chicken from KFC, where the statues of Colonel Sanders that stand in front of KFC restaurants are dressed as Santa Claus during the holidays. Residents of Japan who don’t pre-order their KFC Christmas dinners can end up waiting in long lines for them, and could miss out altogether.

“Why KFC?” you might ask.

In 1970, just a few months after Takeshi Okawara opened the first KFC restaurant in Japan — he would go on thereafter to become the CEO of Kentucky Fried Chicken Japan from 1984 to 2002 — he conceived
the idea of a Christmas “party barrel” containing not only chicken but, in some premium cases, also ribs and stuffing and cake and even wine. In 1974, the promotional campaign went national with the slogan “KurisumasuniwaKentakkii” (“Kentucky for Christmas”). Since, in the 1970s, there were few if any traditional Japanese Christmas observances, KFC filled a void.

In the West, too, Christmas remains by far the dominant holiday, even among those indifferent to its theological underpinnings, including many non-Christians. In increasingly post-Christian Europe, for example, the colorful Christmas markets of such cities as Krakow, Dresden, Cordoba, Berlin, Frankurt, and Amsterdam continue to flourish. In America, scores of virtually interchangeable Christmas-themed television movies celebrate “redemption through romance” nonstop throughout an elongated Christmas season, with little or (usually) no specific religious content at all.

What can explain the appeal of Christmas to people well beyond the community of committed Christian believers?

First of all, it must be recognized that a superficial view of Christmas can easily be rendered much less threatening, theologically speaking, than Easter. Everybody can accept and celebrate the birth of a baby, whereas the revivification and eventual ascent to heaven of a crucified dead man is difficult to reconcile with a secular or even merely non-Christian worldview.

It seems clear, though, that there is a very great deal, even in the most watered-down versions of Christmas (as illustrated in those television movies), which speaks to the deepest longings of human hearts around the world.

Whatever our culture or religious views, for instance, the message reported by the gospel of Luke as having been sung by the angels to the shepherds of Bethlehem two millennia ago resonates with all of us: “Peace on earth, good will toward men” (compare Luke 2:14). Every Lifetime or Hallmark Channel Christmas movie concludes with love and harmony, blessings for which we all yearn.

The practice of gift-giving reminds us of the generous, kind people we would like to be and among whom we would like to live. Think of the chastened and redeemed miser Ebenezer Scrooge in Charles Dickens’s

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1843 novella *A Christmas Carol*, which, like the television movies that proliferate during the Christmas season, is not an explicitly Christian tale: The new Scrooge became both generous and beloved, and, as Dickens writes, “It was always said of him, that he knew how to keep Christmas well, if any man alive possessed the knowledge.”

The birth of a baby — any baby — is a moment of hope and the inauguration of virtually boundless possibilities, and Christmas powerfully reminds us of these things once more each year.

But of course for Christian believers Christmas is about far more than merely the common event of the birth of an infant.

“Knowest thou the condescension of God?” (1 Nephi 11:16). We miss the significance of the question posed to Nephi if we think the verb *condescend* means “to patronize” or “to act in a smugly superior way.” As documented in Noah Webster’s great 1828 American dictionary, Joseph Smith’s contemporaries understood *condescension* to mean “to descend from the privileges of superior rank or dignity, to do some act to an inferior, which strict justice or the ordinary rules of civility do not require. Hence, to submit or yield, as to an inferior, implying an occasional relinquishment of distinction.”

This perfectly captures the remarkable central claim of Christianity, that God himself — moved by love for his very often unlovely and ungrateful creatures — chose to live among mortals in hopes of redeeming us by his grace. “Mild he lays his glory by,” sings the Christmas carol, in a line far too easily glossed over.

Nephi’s prophetic successors understood this well before Christ’s birth: “For behold,” declared King Benjamin in roughly 124 BC,

> the time cometh, and is not far distant, that with power, the Lord Omnipotent who reigneth, who was, and is from all eternity to all eternity, shall come down from heaven among the children of men, and shall dwell in a tabernacle of clay, and shall go forth amongst men, working mighty miracles, such as healing the sick, raising the dead, causing the lame to walk, the blind to receive their sight, and the deaf to hear, and curing all manner of diseases.

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And he shall cast out devils, or the evil spirits which dwell in the hearts of the children of men.

And lo, he shall suffer temptations, and pain of body, hunger, thirst, and fatigue, even more than man can suffer, except it be unto death; for behold, blood cometh from every pore, so great shall be his anguish for the wickedness and the abominations of his people. (Mosiah 3:5–7)

Why? Because, remarkably, he loves us.

And lo, he cometh unto his own, that salvation might come unto the children of men even through faith on his name; and even after all this they shall consider him a man, and say that he hath a devil, and shall scourge him, and shall crucify him. (Mosiah 3:9)

“Very rarely will anyone die for a righteous person,” wrote the apostle Paul, “though for a good person someone might possibly dare to die. But God demonstrates his own love for us in this: While we were still sinners, Christ died for us” (Romans 5:7–8, NIV). “Herein is love,” says 1 John 4:10, “not that we loved God, but that he loved us.”

The world’s most important acts and events rarely make the newspapers; its most truly interesting people seldom appear on magazine covers. “Out of small things proceedeth that which is great” (D&C 64:33). Jesus’s birth to an obscure young woman in a minor village in a backwater province of the Roman Empire was entirely fitting. The Lord seems to prefer doing things that way.

And one reason for his preference seems fairly easy to discern: If God were to reveal himself fully, grandly, and openly, the revelation would overwhelm us and destroy our freedom.

In his Philosophical Fragments, the Danish philosopher Søren Kierkegaard uses a parable about a king and a maiden to make this point: How can the king reveal his love to a maiden of humble parentage — given the huge disparity of rank, status, and wealth between them — without coercing and crushing her? “Not to reveal oneself is the death of love, to reveal oneself is the death of the beloved!”5 The only real choice open to the king is to court his beloved indirectly, by descending to her

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station, by taking on the character of a servant. But it’s no mere costume change. In order to be a convincing servant, he must really act as one.

The Savior wants us to freely choose to love him, not because he’s powerful or terrifying but because we come to know him as lovable. And we have abundant reason to do that. “We love him,” testified one of the ancient apostles who knew him intimately, “because he first loved us” (1 John 4:19). As a well-known Silesian folk hymn says,

Fair is the sunshine,
Fairer the moonlight
And all the stars in heav'n above;
Jesus shines brighter,
Jesus shines purer
And brings to all the world his love.

Fair are the meadows,
Fairer the woodlands,
Robed in the flowers of blooming spring;
Jesus is fairer,
Jesus is purer.
He makes the sorrowing spirit sing.6

However, in properly thinking of Christmas, in thinking of it in a fully Christian way, we must avoid not only the error of sentimentalizing Jesus as a mere baby but the equal and opposite error of thinking him “merely” divine.

The first verse of the popular late-nineteenth-century Christmas carol “Away in a Manger” (often mistakenly attributed to Martin Luther) ends peacefully with “the little Lord Jesus, asleep on the hay.” Unfortunately, though, not without disturbance: “The cattle are lowing; the poor baby wakes, but little Lord Jesus no crying he makes.”7

Richard Mouw, the prominent Calvinist theologian who also served for two decades as president of California’s Fuller Theological Seminary and who has been involved over many years in respectful dialogue with scholars belonging to The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, spoke a few years ago at the Latter-day Saint Institute of Religion adjacent to Utah Valley University.

I was in the audience to hear him. At one point in his remarks, he pronounced the carol’s portrayal of an uncrying infant Jesus “heresy.”

6. “Beautiful Savior (Crusader’s Hymn),” Children’s Songbook (Salt Lake City: The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, 1989), 62.
I’m sure that at least some in attendance were somewhat startled at the charge — which, I should say, Professor Mouw delivered with a smile, not harshly.

“Jesus was a real baby,” he reminded his large Latter-day Saint audience. “That baby cried. ... There was no Superman suit under those swaddling clothes.” Furthermore, Mouw said, the baby had no divine checklist that he was working through. (“Let’s see. Wise men? Check. Shepherds? Check. Hmmm. Could have designed that camel a bit better.”) So, said Professor Mouw, when you come to this particular verse, “You should sing those words with your fingers crossed.”

He spoke humorously, but he was entirely serious.

Among the perpetual temptations in the history of Christianity has been the false doctrine of “docetism.” (The term is derived from the Greek verb dokeo, meaning “to seem.”) It is, simply put, that Jesus Christ was fully God but not, not really, fully man. He only seemed human. He merely appeared to be subject to human limitations, pains, and weaknesses.

But this would be worrisome, for, if Jesus only pretended to take upon himself our nature, it’s not obvious how he could fully take upon himself our sins. If he didn’t really suffer, he didn’t really atone. He had to assume our human nature completely, or he wouldn’t be completely able to redeem it — and us.

“God became man,” declares the common ancient Christian formula, “so that man might become God.” St. Athanasius the Great, fourth-century bishop of Alexandria and a principal figure at the Nicene Council, put it this way: “The Word was made flesh in order that we might be enabled to be made gods. ... Just as the Lord, putting on the body, became a man, so also we men are both deified through his flesh, and henceforth inherit everlasting life.”

Continuing, Mouw cited the Book of Mormon. And, although frankly acknowledging he doesn’t share the Latter-day Saint view of its origin and doesn’t consider it scripture, he cited Alma 7:11‒12 with approval:

And he shall go forth, suffering pains and afflictions and temptations of every kind; and this that the word might be fulfilled which saith he will take upon him the pains and the sicknesses of his people.

And he will take upon him death, that he may loose the bands of death which bind his people; and he will take upon him their infirmities, that his bowels may be filled with mercy, according to the flesh, that he may know according to the flesh how to succor his people according to their infirmities.

Quoting further, Professor Mouw spoke of our common “faith on the Lamb of God, who taketh away the sins of the world, who is mighty to save and to cleanse from all unrighteousness” (Alma 7:14). Latter-day Saints and other Christians are on the same page here. “When it comes to the redemptive work of Christ,” he concluded, “we say the same things.”

But all of this depends upon the truth of the shared conviction that

In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. The same was in the beginning with God. All things were made by him; and without him was not any thing made that was made. In him was life; and the life was the light of men. And the light shineth in darkness; and the darkness comprehended it not. ... He was in the world, and the world was made by him, and the world knew him not. He came unto his own, and his own received him not. But as many as received him, to them gave he power to become the sons of God, even to them that believe on his name” (John 1:1–5, 10–12).

On the basis of this common faith, Latter-day Saints join the great Christian chorus that extends across two millennia and around the globe, rejoicing in the advent of Christ, knowing that “the Word was made flesh, and dwelt among us” (John 1:14), “that God was in Christ, reconciling the world unto himself” (2 Corinthians 5:19).

Veiled in flesh the Godhead see,
Hail th’ incarnate Deity!
Pleased as man with man to dwell,
Jesus our Immanuel.9

It’s appropriate that, in many national traditions, Christmas is marked by multitudes of brilliant lights. The fact that “God so loved the world that he gave his only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have everlasting life” (John 3:16) is, quite simply, dazzling.

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