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WHEN AN EVIDENT FACT CANNOT BE ALLOWED TO BE TRUE

Daniel C. Peterson

Abstract: *Miracles occur relatively often in scripture, as do people who, for various reasons, want or even need to deny their occurrence. The arguments that are deployed to justify such denial haven't changed all that much over the centuries. In fact, they're still around today.*

Most if not all present or former missionaries for The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints are quite familiar with the first three verses of the ninth chapter of the gospel of John:

And as Jesus passed by, he saw a man which was blind from his birth.

And his disciples asked him, saying, Master, who did sin, this man, or his parents, that he was born blind?

Jesus answered, Neither hath this man sinned, nor his parents: but that the works of God should be made manifest in him. (John 9:1–3)

We know these verses because they seem to presuppose at least the possibility of premortal human existence. Thus, and importantly, they are congruent with the Latter-day Saint belief that we all lived in the presence of our Heavenly Parents before we were born. The notion that undergirds the disciples' question, that the "man which was blind from his birth" might have been born blind because he had sinned, presupposes the idea that the man *could* have sinned prior to his birth. Obviously, though, that makes no sense if he hadn't *existed* before his birth.

To pursue the typical missionary argument a bit further: Assuming, for the sake of argument, that the disciples' implicit belief in an antemortal human existence was misguided, the Savior could easily

have corrected them. He could simply have informed them that the blind man *couldn't* have sinned before his birth because he hadn't yet *existed*. That he didn't do so suggests rather strongly that he didn't regard belief in human premortal human existence as misguided. He didn't reject the concept, and the text may even imply that he shared it.

This is, as I say, all quite familiar and unexceptional. I expect that very few Latter-day Saint missionaries, at least among those who have served in predominantly Christian areas of the world, have never used John 9:1–3 in order to ground the restored doctrine of human existence before mortality. What I would like to do here, though, is to look briefly at some of the rest of the account, which takes up almost the entirety of John 9.

So, we return to the account of the *healing* of the blind man. Of course, a life of genuine Christian discipleship isn't merely one of subscribing to a set of theological propositions — it entails action. The apostle James is unmistakably clear on this point:

But be ye doers of the word, and not hearers only, deceiving your own selves ...

Pure religion and undefiled before God and the Father is this, To visit the fatherless and widows in their affliction, and to keep himself unspotted from the world. (James 1:22, 27)

Accordingly, it's significant that Jesus doesn't simply pass on after using the unfortunate blind man as a teaching tool for a doctrinal lesson on the problem of evil. He *cures* him. Or, anyway, he initiates the *process* of curing the man:

When he had thus spoken, he spat on the ground, and made clay of the spittle, and he anointed the eyes of the blind man with the clay,

And said unto him, Go, wash in the pool of Siloam, (which is by interpretation, Sent.) He went his way therefore, and washed, and came seeing. (John 9:6–7)

It may be significant, though it's quite beyond the scope of this little essay to consider possible explanations or implications, that the Savior doesn't instantly *cure* the blind man in this story — as he seems to have done in other cases. Instead, the anointing seems to represent the first stage of a two-stage cure. The man is told that he needs to proceed to the pool of Siloam and wash himself there. Clearly, action on his part, as well as on the Savior's, is required. Probably, too, someone else's help was

required for the still-blind man to make his way to the pool of Siloam, which was located outside of Jerusalem's city walls. I suppose that we might, if we choose to read it so, see in this story a justification for seeking medical help when it's available and not "merely" relying upon the power of prayer and of priesthood blessings. But I won't pursue that thought here. It's also interesting that Jesus uses a material substance — and pretty much the most humble material substance that we can possibly imagine — as part of his healing of the blind man. That, too, is surely worthy of contemplation. But I'll leave such contemplation to others elsewhere, at least for now.

What interests me here is the reaction of those who become aware of the miraculous healing of the "man which was blind from his birth." Is everybody willing to credit the miracle? No, definitely not. Is everybody even happy about it? It would appear that they aren't. In what ways do they seek to dismiss what Jesus has done? We shall see.

The neighbours therefore, and they which before had seen him that he was blind, said, Is not this he that sat and begged?

Some said, This is he: others said, He is like him: but he said, I am he. (John 9:8–9)

The people who were familiar with the blind man who had sat for much of his life, begging for alms in their neighborhood, knew that he was the same person as this man who could now see. And, of course, *he* knew that he was the same man. Others, though — and very probably people who weren't as familiar with him, who didn't know him as well — granted that he looked a lot like the familiar street beggar but they insisted that it couldn't really be the same person. Why not? Presumably because there wasn't room in their worldview for such a miracle, that a man blind since birth could be given his sight. Perhaps they disallowed miracles in general. Perhaps they believed in miracles long ago, but not in *present-day* miracles, not in *this* particular miracle.

In the Americas, as recorded in the Book of Mormon, people who were determined not to accept the authority of the prophets likewise sought to evade the evidence of accurate predictions that had been made and fulfilled in earlier years:

Nevertheless, the people began to harden their hearts, all save it were the most believing part of them, both of the Nephites and also of the Lamanites, and began to depend upon their own strength and upon their own wisdom, saying:

Some things they may have guessed right, among so many;
but behold, we know that all these great and marvelous works
cannot come to pass, of which has been spoken.

And they began to reason and to contend among themselves,
saying:

That it is not reasonable that such a being as a Christ shall
come ... (Helaman 16:15–18)

In the Middle East, there's a well-known figure of popular folklore who, although recognizably the same “wise fool” across languages and cultures, goes by various interrelated names such as *Goha*, *Juha*, and *Nasr al-Din Hoja*. One of the tales told about him involves a neighbor who comes to him, seeking to borrow his donkey. Goha (to use the Egyptian form of the character's name) tells the neighbor that, while he would very much like to loan his donkey to the man, another neighbor has already borrowed the animal. As the neighbor walks away, though, he hears the donkey braying loudly from within the walls of Goha's property. Understandably displeased, he returns and confronts Goha. But Goha is serene. “Whom do you believe?” he asks. “Me or a donkey?”¹

Goha is suggesting that his neighbor should be persuaded by his words rather than by the plain evidence of the neighbor's own senses (in this case, from his sense of hearing), which Goha implies cannot be trusted. In similar fashion, the unbelieving Nephites and Lamanites persuade themselves, and seek to persuade others, to reject the evidence of what they directly know — it was just “guesses,” after all — in favor of skeptical conclusions based “upon their own strength and upon their own wisdom” and upon their standard of what is “reasonable.” Helaman, however, finds a deeper, more fundamental explanation for their clear desire to disbelieve: It is, he says, because they had hardened their hearts.

Some of the unbelieving neighbors of the formerly blind man seem to have done precisely the same:

Therefore said they unto him, How were thine eyes opened?

He answered and said, A man that is called Jesus made clay,
and anointed mine eyes, and said unto me, Go to the pool
of Siloam, and wash: and I went and washed, and I received
sight.

1. The story is widely told, and I've heard it orally more than once. For an example, see Idries Shah, *The Sufis* (London: Jonathan Cape, 1964), 78–79, https://www.google.com/books/edition/The_Sufis/S6pLvb5FYEOC?hl=en&gbpv=0.

Then said they unto him, Where is he? He said, I know not.
(John 9:10–12)

For the moment, at least, the idea that this man is merely a *Doppelgänger* of the familiar beggar seems to have been abandoned. So, the questions shift. But the formerly blind man didn't know where Jesus was because, obviously, he had still been unable to see until after he had made his way to the pool of Siloam — and the text suggests that, while Jesus sent him to the pool, he did not accompany him and may even have departed from the place where he had anointed the man's eyes.

The questions that are asked of the man here are interesting, though. It's possible that the questioners are looking for aspects of the miracle — its method, perhaps, or the identity of the particular person by whom it was performed or initiated. Perhaps there might be something in the manner of the healing, or in the identity of the healer, that can be used to discredit what had happened. Of course, it also may be the case that, as we all would be, they were simply curious about how this seemingly inexplicable change, the transformation of a congenitally blind man into a seeing one, had come about. Now, though, the religious leaders of Jerusalem's Jews become involved in the matter, and the man is once again asked to tell what happened to him:

They brought to the Pharisees him that aforetime was blind.

And it was the sabbath day when Jesus made the clay, and opened his eyes.

Then again the Pharisees also asked him how he had received his sight. He said unto them, He put clay upon mine eyes, and I washed, and do see.

Therefore said some of the Pharisees, This man is not of God, because he keepeth not the sabbath day. Others said, How can a man that is a sinner do such miracles? And there was a division among them. (John 9:13–16)

When the Pharisees enter into the matter, their preferred mode of rejecting the miracle is a different one. They take direct aim at the character of the man who had initiated the cure: Jesus had healed a man on the Sabbath day. That did not sit well with their doctrines or teachings about proper Sabbath behavior. Accordingly, in their judgment, he was a sinner and any miracle wrought by him need not be taken seriously as entailing any theological implications or religious conclusions. They accorded more weight to their doctrinal understanding, in other words,

than to what might seem, at least at first glance, to be the undeniable empirical fact of a divinely wrought, humanly inexplicable miracle.

But they understand that the miracle is a powerful one, and that it may require still more firepower to dismiss it completely. And, in the next verse, they take their first step toward constructing yet another reason for dismissal:

They say unto the blind man again, What sayest thou of him, that he hath opened thine eyes? He said, He is a prophet. (John 9:17)

They will drop this approach for now, but they will return to it very soon as a means of devaluing the testimony of the formerly blind man. He was, it must be remembered, the direct recipient — and, thus, the primary and very literal eyewitness — of the miracle wrought by Christ. And, for that reason, those who needed to reject the miracle knew that he needed to be discredited. First, though, they resort yet again to the suggestion that there has been a mistake, that this man who can see simply isn't the same man as the blind beggar whom they had seen so often over previous years:

But the Jews did not believe concerning him, that he had been blind, and received his sight, until they called the parents of him that had received his sight.

And they asked them, saying, Is this your son, who ye say was born blind? how then doth he now see?

His parents answered them and said, We know that this is our son, and that he was born blind. (John 9:18–20)

So *that* avenue of escape has now been pretty well sealed off: The neighbors, the parents, and the man himself all certify that he is indeed the formerly blind beggar and that suddenly, somehow, he can now see. But they had also asked another question: Exactly how was this done? They're probably hoping that the parents will confess to some explanation other than the one that has been repeatedly provided. They would like an explanation that doesn't validate the inconvenient messianic claims of Jesus.

Remember how the unbelieving Nephites and Lamanites in the book of Helaman explained inconvenient truths such as miracles and accurate prophecies:

And they will, by the cunning and the mysterious arts of the evil one, work some great mystery which we cannot

understand, which will keep us down to be servants to their words, and also servants unto them, for we depend upon them to teach us the word; and thus will they keep us in ignorance if we will yield ourselves unto them, all the days of our lives.

And many more things did the people imagine up in their hearts, which were foolish and vain; and they were much disturbed, for Satan did stir them up to do iniquity continually; yea, he did go about spreading rumors and contentions upon all the face of the land, that he might harden the hearts of the people against that which was good and against that which should come. (Helaman 16:21–22)

Compare the response of the Jewish leadership in Jerusalem to the first report of the resurrection of Jesus and of the empty tomb:

Now when they were going, behold, some of the watch came into the city, and shewed unto the chief priests all the things that were done.

And when they were assembled with the elders, and had taken counsel, they gave large money unto the soldiers,

Saying, Say ye, His disciples came by night, and stole him away while we slept.

And if this come to the governor's ears, we will persuade him, and secure you.

So they took the money, and did as they were taught: and this saying is commonly reported among the Jews until this day. (Matthew 28:11–15)

Back, however, to the story of the blind beggar in John 9. The parents decline to *say* how the miracle was done, and not merely because they most probably don't know:

But by what means he now seeth, we know not; or who hath opened his eyes, we know not: he is of age; ask him: he shall speak for himself.

These words spake his parents, because they feared the Jews: for the Jews had agreed already, that if any man did confess that he was Christ, he should be put out of the synagogue.

Therefore said his parents, He is of age; ask him. (John 9:21–23)

They refuse to commit, hoping against hope not to be involved. There is plainly humor in the evasive responses of the parents but, just as plainly, there is also fear. The religious authorities hold intimidating power, and there is no question that they are willing to use it. Dissent from orthodoxy, as the Pharisees define orthodoxy — and please recall that their authority is assumed rather than divinely ordained — can result in social exclusion and marginalization. Not a pleasant option in a close-knit ancient society that was largely based upon a religious identity and that was many centuries away from any real notion of religious pluralism.

So, the parents effectively avoid testifying. But their son *cannot* avoid it. His very existence — sighted as he now is — is an ongoing public testimony in and of itself, even if he says nothing at all, and a challenge to those who wish to deny the claims of Jesus.

Then again called they the man that was blind, and said unto him, Give God the praise: we know that this man is a sinner.

He answered and said, Whether he be a sinner or no, I know not: one thing I know, that, whereas I was blind, now I see.
(John 9:24–25)

Having abandoned their attempt to maintain that the miracle simply hadn't actually happened, that it was just a case of mistaken identity, the Pharisees now return to trying to discredit Jesus as an unworthy sinner, a violator of (their interpretation of) the law of Moses. And this, of course, won't be the last time that such a technique is employed. As William Smith, Joseph's younger brother, would much later reminisce regarding his own family,

We never knew we were bad folks until Joseph told his vision. We were considered respectable till then, but at once people began to circulate falsehoods and stories in a wonderful way.²

Yes, the Pharisees concede, a miracle has occurred. Quite implausibly, though, they insist that Jesus was not the agent through whom the miracle took place. But the onetime blind beggar sticks to the

2. John W. Peterson, "Wm. B. Smith's last Statement," *Zion's Ensign* 5, no. 3 (Independence, MO), 13 January 1894, quoted in Dan Vogel, "William Smith Interview with E. C. Briggs, 1893," in *Early Mormon Documents*, Vol. 1 (Salt Lake City: Signature Books, 1996), 512, https://archive.org/details/volume-1_202010/page/512/mode/2up.

basic fact, that he was the recipient of an undeniable divine miracle. As of yet, though, he draws no theological conclusion from that fact.

However, they continue to press him, and — he is plainly his parents' son — he responds with scornful sarcasm:

Then said they to him again, What did he to thee? how opened he thine eyes?

He answered them, I have told you already, and ye did not hear: wherefore would ye hear it again? will ye also be his disciples? (John 9:26–27)

He has had enough of their questioning, of their attempt to find some way to deny the significance of what he personally, more than anybody else, knew to have been a miraculous cure of his blindness. His impatience and his growing lack of respect for their self-assigned authority angers them, so, having failed to muster a sound argument, they resort to insult and personal abuse and, in the end, essentially to force:

Then they reviled him, and said, Thou art his disciple; but we are Moses' disciples.

We know that God spake unto Moses: as for this fellow, we know not from whence he is.

The man answered and said unto them, Why herein is a marvellous thing, that ye know not from whence he is, and yet he hath opened mine eyes.

Now we know that God heareth not sinners: but if any man be a worshipper of God, and doeth his will, him he heareth.

Since the world began was it not heard that any man opened the eyes of one that was born blind.

If this man were not of God, he could do nothing.

They answered and said unto him, Thou wast altogether born in sins, and dost thou teach us? And they cast him out. (John 9:28–34)

Unable to discredit the message, they attempt to discredit the messenger — an approach that, overall and much more importantly, they had also been pursuing with Jesus himself and the report of this particular miracle that he had performed. Compare the experience of Joseph Smith after receiving his First Vision in the early nineteenth-century United States:

I soon found ... that my telling the story had excited a great deal of prejudice against me among professors of religion, and was the cause of great persecution, which continued to increase; and though I was an obscure boy, only between fourteen and fifteen years of age, and my circumstances in life such as to make a boy of no consequence in the world, yet men of high standing would take notice sufficient to excite the public mind against me, and create a bitter persecution; and this was common among all the sects — all united to persecute me. (Joseph Smith — History 1:22)

But the formerly blind beggar of John 9 has properly sensed the message, and he accepts it:

Jesus heard that they had cast him out; and when he had found him, he said unto him, Dost thou believe on the Son of God?

He answered and said, Who is he, Lord, that I might believe on him?

And Jesus said unto him, Thou hast both seen him, and it is he that talketh with thee.

And he said, Lord, I believe. And he worshipped him. (John 9:35–38)

Jesus lamented the inability of most of those in his day and his environment to hear and accept his message,

...because they seeing see not; and hearing they hear not, neither do they understand.

And in them is fulfilled the prophecy of Esaias, which saith, By hearing ye shall hear, and shall not understand; and seeing ye shall see, and shall not perceive:

For this people's heart is waxed gross, and their ears are dull of hearing, and their eyes they have closed; lest at any time they should see with their eyes and hear with their ears, and should understand with their heart, and should be converted, and I should heal them. (Matthew 13:13–15)

“But,” he said to his disciples, “blessed are your eyes, for they see: and your ears, for they hear” (Matthew 13:16).

Human patterns of accepting and rejecting God's outreach to us have scarcely changed, if in fact they have changed at all, since the beginning of time. Illustrating that fact is one of the many ways in which

the scriptures can benefit us, if we will permit them to do so. May we always find ourselves among the Lord's disciples, who see and who hear.

Helping us to see and hear is a principal focus of the work of The Interpreter Foundation. As always, I want to express my gratitude here to the authors, reviewers, designers, source checkers, copy editors, donors, and other volunteers who generally make that work — very much including this publication — possible. I especially want to thank the authors who have contributed to this particular volume, along with Allen Wyatt and Jeff Lindsay, both members of the Interpreter Board of Trustees who also serve specifically as the managing or production editors for the Journal. As all of the other officers of The Interpreter Foundation do, they volunteer their time, their talents, and their labor without financial compensation. Were it not for them, however, there would be no *Interpreter*, and were it not for others like them, The Interpreter Foundation as a whole could not function. As I write, the Foundation has recently celebrated the tenth anniversary of its inception. That is a remarkable achievement, made possible by a large number of very good and selfless people. I'm deeply grateful to all of them, past and (mostly still) present.

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THERE IS NO BEAUTY THAT WE SHOULD DESIRE HIM

Loren Spendlove

Abstract: *In two separate passages Isaiah appears to describe the mortal Messiah as lacking in physical beauty and perhaps as even having some type of physical disfigurement (see Isaiah 52:14 and 53:2–4). On the contrary, Joseph, David, Esther, and Judith — portrayed in the biblical text as physical saviors or deliverers of Israel — are represented as beautiful in form and appearance. In fact, their beauty seems to be a significant factor in the successful exercise of their power as physical saviors of Israel. Unlike Joseph, David, Esther, and Judith, Christ may have been foreordained to descend to his mortal state with a less than attractive physical appearance and as someone who experienced illness throughout his life so that “he may know according to the flesh how to succor his people according to their infirmities” (Alma 7:12).*

Following his initial rejection by the people of King Noah, “after the space of two years ... Abinadi came among them in disguise, that they knew him not, and began again to prophesy among them” (Mosiah 12:1).¹ During this second period of preaching Abinadi² cited many of the words of Isaiah, including:

For he shall grow up before him as a tender plant, and as a root out of a dry ground. He hath *no form* [לֹא-תֹאֵר *lo-toar*] *nor comeliness* [וְלֹא הָדָר *ve'lo hadar*]. And when we shall see him, there is *no beauty* [וְלֹא-מְרֹאֶה *ve'lo-mareh*] that *we should desire him* [וְנַחֲמֵדֵהוּ *ve'nechmedehu*].³ He is despised and rejected of men, a man of sorrows [מַכְאֹבֹת *machovot*] and acquainted [וִידוּעַ *vidua*] with grief [חֹלִי *choli*]. And we hid, as it were, our faces from him. He was despised and we esteemed him not. Surely he hath borne *our griefs* [חֹלֵינוּ *cholaenu*] and carried *our sorrows* [מַכְאֹבֵינוּ *machovenu*]. Yet we did esteem

him stricken, smitten of God and rejected. (Mosiah 14:2–4; see Isaiah 53:2–4 KJV)

Although Isaiah’s “man of sorrows” is not plainly identified in the Masoretic text, Abinadi clarified that he was “God himself” who “shall come down among the children of men and shall redeem his people” (Mosiah 15:1). This passage, as rendered in the Book of Mormon and in the KJV translation of the Bible, informs us that Christ would appear bodily deficient in three ways: he would lack form (תאר *toar*), comeliness (הדר *hadar*), and beauty (מראה *mareh*), contributing to his rejection by the people of Israel. While the KJV correctly translates תאר (*toar*) as *form*, it would be more accurate to render הדר (*hadar*) as *splendor* or *majesty*, and מראה (*mareh*) as *appearance*. The modern *New American Standard Bible 2020* (hereafter NASB20) provides a more accurate translation of this passage from Isaiah:

For He grew up before Him like a tender shoot, and like a root out of dry ground; He has *no stately form* or *majesty* that we would look at Him, nor an *appearance* that we would *take pleasure* in Him. He was despised and abandoned by men, a man of great *pain* and *familiar with sickness*; and like one from whom people hide their faces, He was despised, and we had no regard for Him. However, it was *our sicknesses* that He Himself bore, and *our pains* that He carried; yet we ourselves assumed that He had been afflicted, struck down by God, and humiliated. (Isaiah 53:2–4 NASB20, emphasis added)

David Penchansky expressed that the Hebrew word for *form* (תאר *toar*) “refers to the body, while ‘appearance’ [מראה *mareh*] refers to the face.”⁴ So, there was nothing about Christ’s physical form, his outward bearing, nor in his facial appearance that would physically draw the people of Israel to him. In addition, Isaiah adds that Christ would be burdened with pains and sicknesses. By way of allegory, just as Abinadi came among the people of Noah in disguise, it is possible that Christ also came among the people of Israel in disguise,⁵ without the trappings of an attractive bodily form, without adornment or majesty, and without any facial attractiveness that would entice the Israelites to follow him.⁶

In Isaiah 52 we are given another description of the future Christ using two of the Hebrew words found above: תאר (*toar*, “form”) and מראה (*mareh*, “appearance”):

Just as many *were appalled* [שָׁמְמוּ *shammu*, “shudder, be appalled”⁷] at you, My people, So *His appearance* [מֵרֵאשִׁית *me-re’asit*]

marehu] was *marred* [משחת *mishchat*] beyond that of a man,
And His form [ותארן *ve'toaro*] beyond the sons of mankind.
 (Isaiah 52:14 NASB20, emphasis added, see also 3 Nephi 20:44)

The noun משחת (*mishchat*), often translated as *marred* in this passage from Isaiah, is only used in one other biblical verse — part of a section detailing the physical requirements for sacrificial animals — where the word connotes some type of physical disfigurement or deformity, rendering the animal ritually unfit for sacrifice:

Nor shall you offer any of these animals taken from the hand of a foreigner as the food of your God; for their *deformity* [משחת *mishchat*] is in them, they have an *impairment* [מום *mum*, physical blemish⁸]. They will not be accepted for you.
 (Leviticus 22:25 NASB20, emphasis added)

Isaiah 52:14 informs us that Christ would be marred (משחת *mishchat*) — that he would be deformed, blemished, or disfigured⁹ — in appearance (מראה *mareh*) and in form (תאר *toar*).¹⁰ Drawing a comparison with Leviticus 22:25, this physical deformity, blemish, or disfigurement could have disqualified him in the eyes of the people as the promised Messiah. While some students of the Bible may understand Isaiah 52:14 as a reference to the physical effects of Christ's scourging by the Romans, or of his crucifixion, it is just as likely a reference to his lack of physical beauty resulting from some type of physical defect during his mortal life.¹¹

In his hometown of Nazareth, Jesus “went into the synagogue on the sabbath day, and stood up for to read” (Luke 4:16 KJV). Following his reading of a text from Isaiah he explained to those present: “This day is this scripture fulfilled in your ears” (Luke 4:21 KJV). He then added, “Ye will surely say unto me this proverb, Physician, heal thyself” (Luke 4:23 KJV). Why did Jesus cite this proverb to the people? Was this a public admission of a personal illness or physical deformity? While we cannot be sure of the source of this proverb, it is possible that it was a popular aphorism derived from a passage from the book of Sirach:¹²

My son, in thy sickness be not negligent: but pray unto the Lord, and he will make thee whole.... Then give place to the physician, for the Lord hath created him: let him not go from thee, for thou hast need of him. (Sirach 38:9, 12 KJV)

The proverb that Jesus cited raises the possibility that he had a lingering and observable physical illness or deformity. Perhaps members of the synagogue had publicly expressed confusion over Jesus's

healing of others while he himself appeared to be neglecting his own obvious physical weakness. This apparent paradox may have seemed hypocritical, or even deceitful to them. Later, during his crucifixion, the chief priests, scribes, and elders mocked Christ: “He saved others; himself he cannot save. If he be the King of Israel, let him now come down from the cross, and we will believe him” (Matthew 27:42 KJV). Perhaps members of the Nazareth synagogue were thinking something similar: “He healed others; himself he cannot heal. If he be the King of Israel, let him now heal himself, and we will believe him.”

In this paper I principally focus on two of the Hebrew nouns that Isaiah uses to describe Christ, the suffering servant, as lacking: תֹּאֵר (*toar*, form) and מַרְאֶה (*mareh*, appearance). I also explain how these two words are used to positively describe and identify six saviors of Israel, or mothers of saviors, in the scriptures. I also argue that sickness, and possibly deformity, were a lifelong aspect of Christ’s mortal state and were important aspects of his messianic mission.¹³

Moses — Pattern of a Beautiful Savior/Deliverer

The birth of Moses is briefly described in the Hebrew Bible as follows: “And the woman conceived and gave birth to a son; and when she saw *that he was beautiful* [כִּי־טוֹב הָיָא *ki-tov hu*], she hid him for three months” (Exodus 2:2 NASB20, emphasis added). The phrase translated as “that he was beautiful” is literally “that he was good” in Hebrew. In the Greek Septuagint translation of Exodus the Hebrew word טוֹב (*tov*) was rendered ἀστεῖος (*asteios*). This Greek word is used only twice in the New Testament, both with reference to the birth of Moses, and generally rendered as *beautiful* or *fair* in English translations:

At this time Moses was born; and he was *beautiful* [ἀστεῖος *asteios*] to God. He was nurtured for three months in his father’s home. (Acts 7:20 NASB20, emphasis added)

By faith Moses, when he was born, was hidden for three months by his parents, because they saw he was a *beautiful* [ἀστεῖος *asteios*] child; and they were not afraid of the king’s edict. (Hebrews 11:23 NASB20, emphasis added)

Presumably based on this passage from Exodus 2:2, much folklore developed around the physical appearance of the young Moses. Philo, a Hellenistic Jewish philosopher from Alexandria who lived during the lifetime of Jesus, wrote:

And when the king's daughter saw that [Moses] was more perfect than could have been expected at his age, and when from his appearance she conceived greater good will than ever towards him, she adopted him as her son.¹⁴

In *The Antiquities of the Jews*, Flavius Josephus, a first-century Jewish historian, added:

God did also give [Moses] that tallness, when he was but three years old, as was wonderful. And as for his beauty, there was nobody so unpolite as, when they saw Moses, they were not greatly surprised at the beauty of his countenance; nay, it happened frequently, that those that met him as he was carried along the road, were obliged to turn again upon seeing the child; that they left what they were about, and stood still a great while to look on him; for the beauty of the child was so remarkable and natural to him on many accounts, that it detained the spectators, and made them stay longer to look upon him.¹⁵

Both Philo and Josephus portray the young Moses as an exemplary specimen of beauty and childhood perfection. Also, given that Moses is depicted as an ideal prototype of a deliverer of Israel in both the Bible and the Book of Mormon (cf. Deuteronomy 34:10, 1 Nephi 4:2, and 2 Nephi 3:9), these representations of beauty and physical perfection seem fitting. In his seminal work *Legends of the Jews*, Louis Ginzberg wrote that when the daughter of Pharaoh found the ark of Moses among the reeds and opened it, “her amazement was great. She beheld an exquisitely beautiful boy, for God had fashioned the Hebrew babe’s body with peculiar care.”¹⁶ Ginzberg added: “His royal foster-mother caressed and kissed him constantly, and on account of his extraordinary beauty she would not permit him ever to quit the palace.”¹⁷ Joan Taylor explained: “The portrayal of Moses as handsome in ancient biographies and other accounts correlates with widespread expectations in antiquity that a royal ruler should be good-looking.”¹⁸

Since the scriptural record of the physical appearance of Moses is scant, my sole purpose in discussing his perceived beauty is to help us identify a standard or model by which the ancients likely judged their leaders and rulers. To be a leader, and especially a deliverer, a person needed to be perceived as possessing physical beauty. Even today, multiple studies have shown that physically attractive people are more likely to be perceived as good leaders.¹⁹

The Use of תאר *Toar* and מראה *Mareh* in the Bible

As previously explained, the nouns תאר (*toar*) and מראה (*mareh*)²⁰ are best translated into English as *form* and *appearance*, respectively, especially when describing individuals in the biblical record. While מראה (*mareh*) is used quite frequently in the Bible (103 times), תאר (*toar*) is mentioned only 15 times. When used to describe people, these nouns are generally coupled with an adjective, like *beautiful*, *good*, *bad*, etc. In most biblical passages one, but not both, of these nouns is used when describing a person's physical appearance (see Table 3 in Appendix 1 for a complete list).²¹

For example, in Genesis 12:11 Sarai, Abram's wife, is depicted as "a fair woman to look upon (יפת־מראה *ishah yefat-mareh*)" — more accurately, "a woman of beautiful appearance" — but תאר (*toar*) is not used to describe her. Conversely, Abigail is described as being "of good understanding, and of a beautiful countenance (וּיִפֹּת תֹּאֵר *vifat toar*)" (1 Samuel 25:3 KJV, emphasis added). More precisely, she is described as having a "beautiful form." In describing her, the author of 1 Samuel used the noun תאר (*toar*) but not מראה (*mareh*). This usage of one word, but not the other, is the most commonly used pattern when describing the physical appearance of individuals in the Bible, except for specific individuals that will be discussed in the following sections.

Saviors of Israel — Both תאר *Toar* and מראה *Mareh*

As with the description of the future Christ in Isaiah 52:14 and 53:2, in some special cases both תאר (*toar*) and מראה (*mareh*) are used to describe the physical appearance of other biblical figures. In this section I consider four specific individuals: Joseph, David, Esther and Judith (see Table 1). What these four individuals have in common is their identification as saviors or deliverers of Israel, and like the suffering servant in Isaiah 52:14 and 53:2, their physical appearances are all described using the nouns תאר (*toar*) and מראה (*mareh*). However, unlike the suffering servant they are all depicted as having a beautiful form and appearance.

Table 1. *Toar* and *Mareh* in the Bible.

Person	Passage	תאר <i>toar</i>	מראה <i>mareh</i>
Joseph	Genesis 39:6	✓	✓
David	1 Samuel 16:18	✓	
	1 Samuel 17:42		✓

Person	Passage	תאר <i>toar</i>	מראה <i>mareh</i>
Esther	Esther 2:7	✓	✓
Judith	Judith 8:7	✓	✓

In Genesis 39:6 we are told that “Joseph was a *goodly person* [יפה־תאר *yefeh-toar*], and well favoured [יפה מראה *yifeh mareh*]” (KJV, emphasis added). A better translation would be: “Joseph was of beautiful form and of beautiful appearance.” In addition to being described as physically beautiful, Joseph is identified as a physical savior of the house of Israel (Genesis 45:7) and of the Egyptians (Genesis 47:25). In fact, as early as the 4th century CE Joseph was described by Ambrose, the Bishop of Milan, as “a mirror of purity” and characterized as “a type-figure of Christ.”²² Kristian Heal added that “in early Syriac Christianity” Joseph was seen “first and foremost as a type of Christ.”²³

As with Joseph, David is described by the author of 1 Samuel as physically attractive. In 1 Samuel 16:18 we are told that David was “a comely person [איש תאר *ish toar*].” איש תאר (*ish toar*) literally means “a man of form,” but perhaps more fittingly, “a well-formed man.” In chapter 17 the author described David as being “of a fair countenance [יפה מראה *im-yefeh mareh*]” (1 Samuel 17:42). This later phrase is better rendered: “with a beautiful appearance.” So, like Joseph, David is characterized as both pleasing of form and appearance. And like Joseph, David is also identified as a type of Christ, a savior of Israel: “Ahithophel was David’s counsellor [*sic*], and he is said to be a type of Judas, and David a type of Christ.”²⁴ James Hamilton added that “Joseph functioned as a type of David” and that “David functioned as a type of Jesus the Messiah.”²⁵

Esther, who replaced Vashti as the new queen of king Ahasuerus, is described as “fair and beautiful [יפת־תאר וטובת מראה *yefat-toar ve’tovat mareh*]” (Esther 2:7 KJV). However, a more accurate translation from the Hebrew would be, “beautiful of form and of good appearance.” Like Joseph and David, Esther is depicted as having a beautiful form and appearance, and she also has been identified as a deliverer of her people. Clayton Fausett expressed that both “Esther and Mordecai depict Christ in His atoning and future Messianic role. Their tandem role for the salvation for mankind is displayed when Mordecai is noted donning sackcloth and ashes, while Esther instead dons royal robes.”²⁶ Similarly, Hamilton noted messianic comparisons between the stories of Esther and Joseph:

Like Joseph, Esther is virtually a slave in a foreign land. Like Joseph, she is described as being “handsome in form and appearance.” Like Joseph, she is cleaned up and presented to the king. Like Joseph, she finds favor in the king’s sight. The wording of her resolution is reminiscent of Israel’s words (cf. Esther 4:16 and Genesis 43:14), and like Joseph she makes requests of the king that benefit, yea, deliver the Jewish people from wicked opposition.²⁷

Regarding the eponymous book of Judith²⁸, the Jewish Encyclopedia states: “As most students of the book have recognized, it was originally written in Hebrew. The standard Greek version bears the unmistakable marks of translation from this language.”²⁹ One of those “unmistakable marks of translation” from Hebrew can be seen in the depiction of Judith’s physical beauty: “She was also *of a goodly countenance*, and *very beautiful to behold*” (Judith 8:7 KJV, emphasis added).³⁰ Since the extant text is in Greek, I provide an interlinear Greek/English translation below, with footnotes from Thayer’s Greek Lexicon:

καὶ	ἥ	καλὴ	τῷ	εἶδει	καὶ	ὡραία	τῇ
And / she	/ good	(טוב <i>tov</i>) ³¹	/ the / form	(תאר <i>toar</i>) ³²	/ and / beautiful	(יפה <i>yafeh</i>) ³³	/ the
	ὄψει		σφόδρα				
appearance or sight	(מראה <i>mareh</i>) ³⁴	/ exceedingly.					

Like Joseph, David, and Esther, Judith was both of *good form* (תאר טובת *tovat-toar*) and of beautiful appearance (יפת מראה *yefat mareh*). Additionally, she is strongly identified as a savior of Israel. Robin Branch wrote that Judith’s “beheading of Holofernes, the invading Assyrian general — in his own tent, with his own sword, and surrounded by his own heretofore victorious army, no less — marks her as a political savior in Israel on a par with David.”³⁵ In fact, Andrea Sheaffer characterized David as the archetype for Judith:

The praise David and Judith receive for their heroic actions of liberating Israel from a formidable enemy seals the evidence that David is an archetype for the Judith story. In 1 Samuel 18:6, the women of Israel come out to meet David with dancing and “with timbrels, and with rejoicing, and with cymbals.” Reminiscent of David’s celebration, all the women of Israel run together to see Judith; they dance and bless her (Judith 15:12), and Judith leads the women in a song of praise to the Lord also with timbrels and cymbals (Judith 16:1). Here we have validation that Judith has fully entered the realm of

warrior, receiving the same victor's welcome as David, and their celebrated accomplishments are identical.³⁶

Unlike the book of Esther, which is included in the Hebrew Bible, the book of Judith, although numbered among the books of the Greek Septuagint, was not accepted into the later Jewish canon, the Masoretic text.³⁷

Beauty as Power in the Bible

Influenced by Greek thought, our modern civilization is able to experience and describe the world in abstract ways. But to ancient Hebrews the world was conceptualized through a concrete rather than an abstract framework. Greek thought teaches us to interpret the world with our minds, while ancient Hebrew thought, or concrete thought, relied on the five senses to understand the world and its environs. James Faulconer explained:

Unlike the noun in English or Greek, “the action of the Hebrew noun is active, dynamic, visible, and palpable.” Because nouns represent things (whether material things or emotional or conceptual ones, such as feelings), this is also true of the difference between how Hebrews and Greeks perceive things. In Hebrew thinking, things are always visible and palpable. For us, perhaps the most important category of things are the abstract things — such as ideas and concepts — that we use to manipulate the particular entities we deal with every day. But such things are not only not active, they are also neither visible nor palpable. For us the world is the enactment of something static, pregiven, and abstract (whether a Platonic realm or the formulae of physicists), but for the Hebrew mind the world is itself physical activity. Activity in a physical body is the most fundamental category of Hebrew thought.³⁸

Since the ancient Hebrew mind conceived of reality in concrete rather than abstract ways, one could say that in the Hebrew Bible physical beauty represents power; or, perhaps more properly, physical beauty begets power.³⁹ David Penchansky explained:

The Hebrew words translated as “beauty” do not carry the same meaning as the English word. Although some overlap exists, they are not the same. Western philosophers regard beauty as one of the “transcendentals,” along with truth and goodness. In the Hebrew Bible, יפה [*yafeh*] and other corresponding

words are more geared to physical appearance. Although the Western tradition tends to disparage the physical appearance, in the Hebrew Bible a character described as beautiful has power.⁴⁰

As demonstrated in the preceding section, these four physical saviors of Israel — Joseph, David, Esther, and Judith — were all described as beautiful of form and appearance. In other words, they were portrayed as *ideally* beautiful. In fact, this *ideal* beauty factored significantly into all four of these saviors' success.

In the case of Joseph, the text in Genesis appears to create a causal relationship between his physical beauty and his pursuit by Potiphar's wife:

And Joseph was a *goodly person* [יפה־תאר *yefeh-toar*, beautiful form], and *well favoured* [ויפה מראה *vifeh mareh*, and beautiful appearance]. And it came to pass after these things, that his master's wife cast her eyes upon Joseph; and she said, Lie with me. (Genesis 39:6–7 KJV, emphasis added)

Regarding Potiphar's wife, Ginzberg wrote: "Like Rachel his mother, Joseph was of ravishing beauty, and the wife of his master was filled with invincible passion for him."⁴¹ However, scorned by Joseph, Potiphar's wife lied about the substance of the story, resulting in Joseph's imprisonment. What appeared to be an unjust and unfortunate outcome at the time actually laid the foundation for Joseph's salvific mission of preserving the entire house of Israel from destruction through starvation.

In 1 Samuel 16:17 we are told that King Saul was looking for a musician to join his court. One of Saul's servants reported that David was "cunning in playing, and a mighty valiant man, and a man of war, and prudent in matters, and a *comely person* [איש תאר *ish toar*], and the Lord is with him" (1 Samuel 16:18 KJV, emphasis added). From this list of attributes we can gather that David's physical attractiveness was a factor in obtaining his position at court. Later, we are told that David's beautiful face (appearance) was one of the elements that caused Goliath to underestimate him. In fact, David's physical beauty⁴² assisted in the metaphorical disarming of Goliath: "And when the Philistine looked about, and saw David, he disdained him: for he was but a youth, and ruddy, and of a *fair countenance* [עם־יפה מראה *im-yefeh mareh*, beautiful appearance]" (1 Samuel 17:42 KJV, emphasis added). This disdain for David's youth and beauty led to Goliath's demise, resulting in the Israelites' victory over the invading Philistine army.

Esther, for her part, won the equivalent of an ancient beauty contest that resulted in her being crowned as the new queen, placing her in a position to save Israel from Haman's plan of destruction (see Esther 2:8–9). When Esther realized and accepted that she had “come to the kingdom for such a time as this” (Esther 4:14), she prepared herself, and trusting in the beauty that the Lord had bestowed upon her, she bravely “put on her royal apparel, and stood in the inner court of the king's house” (Esther 5:1). Esther's courageous act led to the unraveling of Haman's murderous plot and to the physical salvation of her people. Like David before, Esther saved her people from a formidable enemy.

Just as Esther's beauty gained her access to the Persian court, Judith relied on her physical beauty to gain access to the camp of the Assyrians who had laid siege to the city of Bethulia. As with David, Judith's beauty served as a powerful weapon in metaphorically disarming her enemy. Like David's beheading of Goliath, Judith's beheading of Holofernes led to the flight and rout of the Assyrian army by the Israelites. As a second David, Judith's beauty laid the groundwork for saving the house of Israel from imminent danger and potential annihilation.

Mothers of Saviors

In addition to the four saviors of Israel discussed above only one other person is described in the Bible as both beautiful of תאר (*toar*) and מראה (*mareh*) — Rachel, the mother of Joseph. In contrast with her sister, Leah, in Genesis 29:17 we are told that Rachel was beautiful יפת־תאר [*yefat-toar*] and well favoured ויפת מראה [*vifat mareh*]. More precisely, Rachel is described as having a beautiful form and appearance. In fact, Joseph is descended from a line of attractive women. Sarah is described as “יפת־מראה (*yefat mareh*)” (Genesis 12:11), or beautiful of appearance, while Rebekah is portrayed a little less favorably, as “טבת מראה (*tovat mareh*)” (Genesis 24:16, 26:7), or of good appearance. It is only Rachel who is described as both beautiful of form and appearance. Perhaps this is appropriate as the mother of one of the most important physical saviors of Israel and as a significant matriarch of the house of Israel.

Even though Rachel gave birth to only two of the twelve sons of Israel, Jeremiah seems to acknowledge her as the matriarch of the entire house of Israel: “Thus says the Lord: ‘A voice is heard in Ramah, lamentation and bitter weeping. Rachel is weeping for her children; she refuses to be comforted for her children, because they are not’” (Jeremiah 31:15). In this passage it is not Leah who weeps, although she mothered six of the

sons of Jacob, including Judah, or even Leah and Rachel together. Rather, Rachel, the acknowledged matriarch of the house of Israel, weeps alone.

Like Esther and Judith, Rachel had a beautiful form and a beautiful appearance. As the mother of Joseph — a physical savior of Israel and the recipient of the birthright — and as the matriarch of the house of Israel, Rachel is portrayed as a paragon of physical beauty. Because we are dealing in stereotypes, whether Rachel actually was a model of beauty during her lifetime, or whether we would pronounce the same judgment today, misses the point. Any discussion of Rachel's beauty must be conducted through the worldview of an ancient Hebrew reader and not from our modern mindset. Rachel's reported beauty was the source of her power — specifically power over her sister, Leah — which she was able to pass on to her sons, and especially to Joseph.

Paralleling the beauty of Esther, Judith, and Rachel is one more woman of extreme importance in the scriptures — Mary, the mother of Christ. Luke tells us that she was “highly favoured [χαριτόω *charitoō*]” (Luke 1:28), which can carry the connotation of *charming* or *lovely*, but she is not depicted as beautiful anywhere in the Bible. Nephi, on the other hand, describes Mary as “a virgin most beautiful and fair above all other virgins” (1 Nephi 11:15). Nephi's description parallels that used to depict Esther in the KJV — beautiful and fair. From our prior study of Esther we know that she was described as being of attractive form and appearance. Interestingly, Jo Carruthers informs us that “Catholic tradition embraces Esther as a prototype of Mary.”⁴³ Carruthers added:

The late fifteenth-century carol by James Ryman speaks of ‘Hestere so fayre of face’ as ‘benigne meyde, modere and wyffe,’ reflecting a traditional reading of Esther as a type of Mary in her representation of womanhood in all of its acceptable guises.⁴⁴

With the Book of Mormon's propensity to closely correspond with KJV English, it is reasonable to conclude that Nephi saw Mary — as Rachel, Esther, and Judith before her — as both beautiful of תאר (*toar*, form) and beautiful of מראה (*mareh*, appearance) (see Table 2). In fact, as the mother of the Savior of the world this description seems both appropriate and even expected.⁴⁵ In his article, “Nephi and His Asherah,” Daniel Peterson makes a compelling argument for connecting the tree of life in Nephi's vision with Mary the mother of Jesus. Nephi describes the tree of life as “exceeding of all beauty” and Mary as “most beautiful and fair” (1 Nephi 11:8, 15). In addition, both the tree and Mary are described as white, which seems to imply purity. Likewise, Lehi describes the fruit of the tree as “white, to exceed all the whiteness that I had ever seen”

(1 Nephi 8:11), but neither Lehi nor Nephi describe the fruit as beautiful or visually attractive. These connections can help us visualize the tree of life as a representation of Mary and its fruit as a stand in for Jesus.⁴⁶

Table 2. Rachel and Mary.

Person	Passage	תאר <i>toar</i>	מראה <i>mareh</i>
Rachel	Genesis 29:17	√	√
Mary	1 Nephi 11:15	√	√

Jesus — Lacking a Beautiful תאר *Toar* and מראה *Mareh*

While physical beauty appears to have factored significantly into the success of the four saviors of Israel discussed above, curiously, the same cannot be said of the true Savior of Israel — Christ. Although it seems paradoxical, Christ’s *lack* of physical beauty seems to have played a significant role in his success as the spiritual Savior of the world. If Christ had come with a beautiful form (תאר *toar*) and a beautiful appearance (מראה *mareh*) perhaps his mission of spiritual redemption may have failed. Unlike the four physical saviors of Israel discussed in this paper — Joseph, David, Esther, and Judith — Christ’s redemptive mission was principally spiritual in nature. He had to fail physically — he needed to be rejected as a physical liberator/deliverer of the house of Israel — in order to succeed in his spiritual mission of redemption from sin; Christ’s physical and spiritual rejection, resulting in his crucifixion and resurrection, were necessary and inevitable. While the stories of Joseph, David, Esther, and Judith are centered around physical salvation, Christ’s mission was focused on spiritual salvation.⁴⁷

Not only was Christ the exception to this pattern of beautiful saviors of Israel, he appears to be its very antithesis. Penchansky commented:

The opposite of attraction is repulsion. Attraction is primal and immediate, not a result of cognition or considered judgment. Its opposite is equally strong and deep-seated. Aside from Leah, there are few references to unattractiveness or ugliness in the Bible. In Second Isaiah, there is one. The servant of Yahweh

had no form [לֹא־תֹאֵר *lo-toar*] or majesty [וְלֹא־הָדָר *ve’lo hadar*] that we should look at him, nothing in his appearance [וְלֹא־מֵרֶאֱהָ *ve’lo-mareh*] that we should

desire him. He was despised and rejected by others;
a man of suffering and acquainted with infirmity;
and as one from whom others hide their faces he was
despised (Isaiah 53:2–3).

The appearance of the Servant of Yahweh revolts people and drives them away. This response is precognitive, a visceral reaction to sensory stimuli. It runs very deep.⁴⁸

However, the Bible teaches us that our ways are not God's ways (Isaiah 55:8–9) and that God's judgments are not flawed like ours. While our human tendency is to ascribe undue power and influence to those who are physically beautiful, God's judgments are not based on outward appearance (מראה *mareh*):

And He will delight in the fear of the LORD, And He will not judge by what His eyes see [ולא־למראה עיניו ישפוט] *ve'lo-le'mareh einav yishpot*], Nor make decisions by what His ears hear. (Isaiah 11:3 NASB20)

But the LORD said to Samuel, “Do not look at *his appearance* [מראהו *marehu*] or at the height of his stature, because I have rejected him; for God does not see as man sees, since *man looks at the outward appearance* [ראה לעינים] *ha'adam yireh la'einaim*, man looks at the eyes], but the LORD looks at the heart.” (1 Samuel 16:7 NASB20, emphasis added)

The gospels record several occasions on which the resurrected Christ appeared to his disciples but was not recognized by them. Even though they were intimately familiar with his physical appearance the disciples were still unable to identify Jesus in his resurrected state. The first of these events involved Mary Magdalene on the morning of the resurrection. Distressed that the body of Jesus was missing from the tomb, “she turned around and saw Jesus standing there, and yet she did not know that it was Jesus” (John 20:14 NASB20). According to Luke, “on that very day two of them were going to a village named Emmaus.... While they were talking and discussing, Jesus Himself approached and began traveling with them. But their eyes were kept from recognizing Him” (Luke 24:13, 15–16 NASB20). Finally, “Jesus revealed Himself again to the disciples at the Sea of Tiberias,... yet the disciples did not know that it was Jesus” (John 21:1, 4 NASB20).

How is it that those most familiar with the mortal Jesus were unable to recognize his physical appearance when he appeared to them as

a resurrected being? One obvious answer is that Christ's resurrected body was most likely vastly different in form and appearance from his mortal body. As Paul wrote: "So also is the resurrection of the dead. It is sown in corruption; it is raised in incorruption. It is sown in dishonour; it is raised in glory: it is sown in weakness; it is raised in power" (1 Corinthians 15:42–43 KJV). Our mortal bodies begin their earthly journeys as seeds "sown in corruption ... dishonor ... and weakness." That is, defects, deficiencies, and imperfections are embedded in our genetic code even before the seed is germinated. However, in the resurrection, these deficiencies are removed and reversed. As one who took "upon him [our] infirmities, that his bowels may be filled with mercy according to the flesh" (Alma 7:12), Jesus could not have been an exception to this genetic order.

Given these points, was Christ's lack of physical beauty merely a circumstance of birth, or was it somehow integral to the eternal plan of salvation? Taylor asserted:

But, if Jesus was not good-looking, and perhaps quite the opposite, this could also have been used to make an important theological point, also on the basis of a biblical model. Given that Jesus's kingdom was not of this world, why not show that his body did not fit the standard expectation of a king either? In the writings of the prophet Isaiah the figure identified as the 'suffering servant of God' is not handsome (Isaiah 53:2). As the King James Version has it, 'he has no form nor comeliness; and when we shall see him, there is no beauty that we should desire him (to be king)'.⁴⁹

As Taylor noted, Jesus is an atypical king. His kingdom is not of this world (John 18:36), his ways and judgments are not of this world, and even his physical appearance did not seem to fit the worldly demands for a kingly messiah. As the "new Moses" or the "new David" Jesus did not seem to fit the part. Taylor added that although New Testament authors quote extensively from Isaiah 53, they all averted any reference to the physical description of Christ given by Isaiah in verse 2:

But the Gospel writers do not note the lack of Jesus's comeliness either. This is all the stranger because this passage about the suffering servant is much used in the New Testament to explain the terrible end of Jesus's earthly life. John 12:38 and Romans 10:16 cite Isaiah 53:1: 'Who has believed our message?'; Matt. 8:17 has Jesus cite Isaiah 53:4: 'He himself

took our infirmities and carried away our diseases'; Acts 8:32 and Romans 10:16 have Jesus taken as a 'Lamb to the slaughter' (Isaiah 53:7); in 1 Peter 2:24, we learn that 'by his [whip-]stripes you were healed' (Isaiah 53:5) and 1 Peter 2:22 'he committed no sin' (Isaiah 53:9); Mark 15:28 and Luke 22:37 cite that Jesus was 'numbered with transgressors' (Isaiah 53:12)... In none of these is the crucial verse of Isaiah 53:2, concerning the servant's unfortunate physical appearance, considered to be a description of Jesus in the flesh.⁵⁰

This avoidance of Isaiah 53:2 by New Testament writers seems intentional. After all, what could these writers really say on the matter? What benefit would be derived from acknowledging that Jesus was less than attractive, or perhaps even homely? Would pointing out any physical defects help the gospel cause? Early church fathers, however, were not as reluctant to broach the subject:

While third-century Christian scholars like Origen thought Jesus beautiful, Tertullian thought of him as a 'worm'.⁵¹ Many of the writers of the Christian church in the late second onwards used the 'suffering servant' portrayal in Isaiah 53, a passage that included mention of the servant's lack of beauty, as a positive attribute of Jesus. They argued that it explained many things about him, including his ignominious death.⁵²

Finally, Taylor postulated what Jesus's mortal body may have looked like:

Nowhere in the Gospels do we have mention of anything about what Jesus looked like, in terms of his facial features, hair, tallness or physical characteristics. The most likely reason for this is that he was average in every way, and there was nothing distinctive about his appearance that it made it worthy of comment. We have therefore explored what we can know of averages at the time of Jesus, largely from excavated bones, and determined then that he would have been about 166 cm (5 feet 5 inches) tall, with olive-brown skin, brown-black hair and brown eyes. He was a man of 'Middle Eastern appearance', whose ethnicity can be compared to Iraqi Jews of today.⁵³

Ministering unto the People in Power

The physical beauty of the four deliverers of Israel that we have discussed in this paper seems to be closely linked with their saving power. Although the same cannot be said of Christ, Nephi tells us that even without physical beauty Jesus ministered with power to the people:

And I beheld that he went forth ministering unto the people in power and great glory, and the multitudes were gathered together to hear him. And I beheld that they cast him out from among them. (1 Nephi 11:28)

Even though Jesus ministered “in power and great glory,” he was still “rejected of men” (Isaiah 53:2). But if power was linked to physical beauty in the ancient Hebrew world, as seems to be the case with the other four saviors of Israel, what was the source of Christ’s power, if not beauty? Lehi told his rebellious sons, Laman and Lemuel, that they were guilty of murmuring against Nephi:

Ye say that he hath used sharpness; ye say that he hath been angry with you. But behold, his sharpness was the sharpness of the power of the word of God which was in him. And that which ye call anger was the truth according to that which is in God, which he could not constrain, manifesting boldly concerning your iniquities. (2 Nephi 1:26)

Nephi’s sharpness, that provided a reason for Laman and Lemuel to take offense, was the “power of the word of God which was in him.” This same “power of the word of God” was also in Christ.⁵⁴ But this was not his only source of power. Four times in 1 Nephi we are told of the “power of the Lamb,” implying that power was wholly integrated into the person and mission of Christ. Additionally, Nephi, the son of Helaman, informed us that Christ “hath power given unto him from the Father” (Helaman 5:11). Just as Nephi’s brothers were offended by his preaching, Christ was destined to become “a stone of stumbling and for a rock of offence to both the houses of Israel” (Isaiah 8:14 KJV). Nephi added:

For the things which some men esteem to be of great worth, both to the body and soul, others set at naught and trample under their feet, yea, even the very God of Israel do men trample under their feet. I say trample under their feet, but I would speak in other words: *they do set him at naught* and hearken not to the voice of his counsels. (1 Nephi 19:7)

Already put off by his lack of physical beauty — considering him to be a “thing of naught” (1 Nephi 19:9) — the addition of the “power of the word of God” that was in Christ led those in power among the Jews to take offense and to reject him completely (cf. Matthew 15:12). It seems that the Jews were not only offended by Christ’s lack of a beautiful appearance, but also by the “sharpness of the power of the word of God,” causing them to reject both the man and the message.

Conclusion

While Isaiah appears to describe the future Christ as lacking in physical attractiveness, the opposite is true of the four physical saviors of Israel discussed here — Joseph, David, Esther and Judith. Concerning David and Judith, Andrea Sheaffer observed:

One of the earliest facts we learn about David and Judith is that they are both beautiful, a detail that is sometimes thought to denote divine favor. In I Samuel 16:12 — David’s first appearance in the biblical text — the initial detail given is that David is “ruddy, and had beautiful eyes, and was handsome.” This is immediately followed by God’s command to Samuel: “Rise and anoint David; for he is good” (1 Samuel 16:12). Later, in I Samuel 17:42, when Goliath first sees David, he disdains him because he was only a boy, “ruddy and handsome in appearance.” Likewise, in her introduction, Judith is described as “shapely and beautiful” (Judith 8:7), and shortly after the narrator tells us that she is not only beautiful, he adds that, “No one spoke ill of her because she feared God greatly” (Judith 8:8). Later, when Holofernes first sees Judith, we learn that he and his attendants were “all struck by her beautiful face” (Judith 10:23). This juxtaposition between David’s handsomeness and his anointing, and Judith’s beauty followed by the mention of her piety, are indicators that for the authors of these texts, beauty denotes divine favor.⁵⁵

David and Judith, as well as Joseph and Esther, are depicted in the Bible as beautiful and divinely-favored saviors of Israel. The power of all four of these physical deliverers is narratively linked with their physical beauty. As with these deliverers of Israel, Rachel and Mary, the mothers of Joseph and Jesus, are similarly described as beautiful in form and in appearance.

On the other hand, the mortal messiah appears to deviate significantly from this observed arrangement. Unlike many modern portrayals of Jesus as a strong and handsome man, it is likely that the mortal Jesus was less than attractive, or even homely in appearance. He also may have been sickly or deformed in some way. Concerning the mortal Jesus, Alma wrote:

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 binds 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. (Alma 7:11–12)

Alma explained that Christ would suffer pains, afflictions, and temptations “that the word might be fulfilled which saith: He will *take upon him* the *pains* and the *sicknesses* of his people.” This passage from Alma is a clear paraphrase of Isaiah 53:4: “It was our *sicknesses* that *He Himself bore*, and our *pains* that *He carried*” (NASB20, emphasis added).⁵⁶ In addition, Alma’s word choice — “he shall go forth, suffering pains and afflictions” — implies that Jesus enjoyed less than robust physical health, perhaps even being sickly, throughout his mortal life. From these passages we can understand that during his whole life, not just while in the garden of Gethsemane, Jesus likely was plagued with illness, infirmity, and perhaps even deformity. But, not without purpose: “that he may know according to the flesh how to succor his people according to their infirmities.” Christ knew what it was like to suffer repeated or protracted illness, to not stand out as the most attractive person in the room, and to even be rejected by his peers. With bowels “filled with mercy” he knows how to “succor his people according to their infirmities” because he has experienced the same.⁵⁷ Given a physical body beset with illness, lack of beauty, and perhaps even deformity, the mortal Messiah was scorned and rejected by the House of Israel. But although his physical body was “sown in corruption,” Christ’s resurrected body was “raised in incorruption” (see 1 Corinthians 15:42), becoming “the most handsome of the sons of mankind” (Psalm 45:2 NASB20).

As a possible allegory, the prophet Jeremiah was told to “arise, and go down to the potter’s house, and there I will cause thee to hear my words” (Jeremiah 18:2 KJV). While there, Jeremiah observed the potter

making a vessel, but “the vessel that he made of clay was marred [נִשְׁחַת *nishchat*]⁵⁸ in the hand of the potter: so he made it again another vessel, as seemed good to the potter to make it” (Jeremiah 18:4 KJV). The root of the verb used in this passage [נִשְׁחַת *nishchat*] and translated as “was marred” is ש-ח-ת (*sh-ch-t*). The noun מִשְׁחַת (*mishchat*) in Isaiah 52:14 used to describe the marred body of Christ is derived from the same Hebrew root. It is possible that the original “vessel made of clay” by Jeremiah’s potter represented the flawed, mortal body of Christ while the second vessel typified his perfected, resurrected body.

Jeremiah added: “O house of Israel, cannot I do with you as this potter? saith the LORD. Behold, as the clay is in the potter’s hand, so are ye in mine hand, O house of Israel” (Jeremiah 18:6 KJV). Just as the first vessel was flawed “in the hand of the potter” (בִּיד הַיּוֹצֵר, *be’yad ha’yotser*, more properly “in the hand of the creator”), the potter/creator reworked the clay and “formed it into another pot, shaping it as seemed best to him” (Jeremiah 18:4 NIV). As members of the House of Israel, a two fold lesson emerges from this story:

1. As with Christ, the potter/creator will remake our marred, mortal bodies into perfected, immortal bodies; and,
2. Christ — both the potter and the clay in this metaphor — is also able to remake us into unmarred and unflawed spiritual vessels if we are willing to repent, willing to “return ye now every one from his evil way, and make your ways and your doings good” (Jeremiah 18:11 KJV).

Unfortunately, the inhabitants of Jerusalem responded to Jeremiah’s plea for repentance in a less than positive way: “It’s hopeless For we are going to follow our own plans, and each of us will persist in the stubbornness of his evil heart” (Jeremiah 18:12 NASB20). Paul, supplying a better answer, said that having “stripped off the old self with its evil practices,” we need to “put on the new self, which is being renewed to a true knowledge according to the image of the One who created it” (Colossians 3:9–10 NASB20). It is through Christ, our Potter, that we can become reworked vessels, both physically and spiritually. Because Christ has “descended below all things” he also “comprehended all things” (D&C 88:6). In Christ, and his atonement, it’s not hopeless.

Appendix 1

Table 3 presents every passage in which either ראת (*toar*) or הארמ (*mareh*) is used, but not both, in describing the physical appearance of a specific individual in the biblical text.

Table 3. The Use of *Toar* or *Mareh* in the Bible.

Person	Passage	תאר toar	מראה mareh
Sarai, Abraham’s wife	Genesis 12:11		√
Rebekah, Isaac’s wife	Genesis 24:16, Genesis 26:7		√
Angel who appeared to Samson’s mother	Judges 13:6		√
Abigail, the wife of Nabal	1 Samuel 25:3	√	
Bathsheba	2 Samuel 11:2		√
Tamar, daughter of David	2 Samuel 14:27		√
An Egyptian slain by Benaiah	2 Samuel 23:21		√
Adonijah, the son of David and Haggith	1 Kings 1:6	√	
Vashti, replaced by Esther as queen	Esther 1:11		√
A divine being seen in vision by Ezekiel	Ezekiel 8:2		√
A divine being seen in vision by Ezekiel	Ezekiel 40:3		√
Daniel, Hananiah, Mishaël, and Azariah	Daniel 1:15		√

Appendix 2

תאר Toar and מראה Mareh — Nile Cows

In addition to the seven people described with both תאר (*toar*) and מראה (*mareh*) — Christ, Joseph, David, Esther, Judith, Rachel and Mary — there is only one other occurrence in the Bible in which both of these words are used to describe something — the Nile cows in Pharaoh’s dream (see Table 4). During his dream Pharaoh saw “seven well favoured [יפות מראה *yefot mareh*] kine” (Genesis 41:2) and seven cows that were “ill favoured [רעות מראה *raot mareh*]” (Genesis 41:3). It would be more accurate to say that he saw seven cows of “beautiful appearance” and seven of “bad or evil appearance.” However, when he recounted this

dream to Joseph he revised his choice of words, replacing מראה (*mareh*) with תאר (*toar*):

And, behold, there came up out of the river seven kine, fatfleshed *and well favoured* [ויפת תאר *vifot toar*]; and they fed in a meadow: And, behold, seven other kine came up after them, poor and very ill favoured [ורעות תאר *ve'raot toar*] and leanfleshed, such as I never saw in all the land of Egypt *for badness* [לרע *laroa*]. (Genesis 41:18–19 KJV, emphasis added)

In this retelling of his dream, Pharaoh told Joseph that he saw seven cows of “beautiful form” and seven of “bad form” (see Table 4). He even provided a flourish at the end by adding that he had never seen cows of such “badness” in all of Egypt.

Table 4. The Nile Cows — *Toar* and *Mareh*.

Cows	Passage	תאר <i>toar</i>	מראה <i>mareh</i>
Seven fat cows from Pharaoh’s dream	Genesis 41:2		√
Seven fat cows from Pharaoh’s dream	Genesis 41:18	√	
Seven thin cows from Pharaoh’s dream	Genesis 41:3		√
Seven thin cows from Pharaoh’s dream	Genesis 41:19	√	

Rather than representing saviors of Israel or their mothers, we are told that the Nile cows in Pharaoh’s dream were symbolic of the seven years of plenty and seven years of famine that were to befall the region. But, is there possible additional symbolism in this usage?⁵⁹

The seven good cows were beautiful of תאר (*toar*), beautiful of מראה (*mareh*), and fat [בריאת *briot*], seemingly ideal characteristics in livestock. On the other hand, the undesirable cows had a bad or evil תאר (*toar*) and מראה (*mareh*), as well as being [דקות *daqot*], meaning small or thin. The two groups of cows appear archetypal in their descriptions.⁶⁰ Since the interpretation of the dream of the Nile cows is portrayed as the turning point of the Joseph story, it is possible that the cows serve to establish the idea that *beauty* of form and appearance is synonymous with *good*, while a *bad* form and appearance is tantamount to *evil*. This standard, then, helps reinforce Joseph’s role as a physical savior of Israel. It also became the new standard to describe later saviors of Israel. While not all biblical deliverers are described as beautiful of form and appearance,⁶¹

this physical beauty was apparently remarkable in those outlined in this paper, perhaps for the very reason that physical beauty was a significant factor in the role they played as saviors of Israel. The notable exception to this standard, of course, is Christ who is described as without an attractive form or appearance.

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Endnotes

- 1 All Book of Mormon citations are from Royal Skousen, ed., *The Book of Mormon: The Earliest Text* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2009).
- 2 Many Latter-day Saint authors have observed that Abinadi served as a type and shadow of Christ. For example, Elder Holland wrote: “But surely the most sublime, the lengthiest and most lyrical declaration of the life, death, and atoning sacrifice of the Lord Jesus Christ is that found in the 53rd chapter of Isaiah, quoted in its entirety in the Book of Mormon by Abinadi as he stood in chains before King Noah. Abinadi was, of course, a prefiguration, a type and shadow of the Savior, a fact that makes his moving tribute to Christ even more powerful and poignant (if that is possible) than when Isaiah wrote it.” Jeffery R. Holland, *Christ and the New Covenant: The Messianic Message of the Book of Mormon* (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 1997), 89.
- 3 The verb נחמד־הוּ (*nechmedehu*), translated as “we should desire him” in the KJV is derived from the root ח-מ-ה meaning *to desire* or *to take pleasure in*. See Ludwig Koehler and Walter Baumgartner, *The Hebrew and Aramaic Lexicon of the Old Testament* (Leiden, NDL: Brill, 2001), 2946. Hereafter cited as *HALOT*. The noun חמד (*chemed*), also derived from the same root, means *loveliness* or

beauty (see HALOT, 2947). So, perhaps a better translation than “we should desire him” would be “we should find beauty in him,” or as the New American Standard Bible 1995 (NASB95) translation renders it: “we should be attracted to Him.”

- 4 David Penchansky, “Beauty, Power, and Attraction: Aesthetics and the Hebrew Bible,” in Richard J. Bautch and Jean-François Racine, eds., *Beauty and the Bible: Toward a Hermeneutics of Biblical Aesthetics* (Atlanta, GA: Society of Biblical Literature, 2013), 52.
- 5 “In some ways, Abinadi’s disguise may also be symbolic of Jesus Christ and His earthly ministry. To King Noah and his priests, Abinadi quoted prophecies that the Messiah Himself would be unrecognizable to His people because He would appear as an ordinary man. He would have ‘no form nor comeliness’ or ‘beauty that we should desire him’ (Mosiah 14:2; cf. Isaiah 53:2). Instead, he would be ‘despised’ because the people ‘esteemed him not’ (v. 3). As recorded in the gospel of John, Jesus Christ ‘was in the world, and the world was made by him, and the world *knew him not*’ (John 1:10, emphasis added). Similarly, Abinadi ‘came among [the people] in disguise, that they *knew him not*’ (Mosiah 12:1, emphasis added).” “Why Did Abinadi Use a Disguise?,” KnoWhys, Book of Mormon Central, May 8, 2017, <https://knowhy.bookofmormoncentral.org/knowhy/why-did-abinadi-use-a-disguise>.
- 6 “As a true human being, Christ had a physical appearance on earth that lacked ‘beauty.’ Interesting questions have been raised about Christ’s pre- and postresurrection physical appearance. While passages like Isaiah 53:2 may convince us that Jesus was not a beautiful person while on earth, many early church fathers (e.g., Tertullian, Origen, Ambrose, Chrysostom, and Augustine) argued otherwise, based on Psalm 45:2: ‘You are the most handsome of the sons of men; grace is poured upon your lips; therefore God has blessed you forever.’ There is, I believe, an obvious difference between Christ’s states of humiliation and exaltation, which would entail a change in his physical appearance. While his glory was veiled in his state of humiliation, the resurrection transformed his physical appearance in his exalted state to make him ‘the most handsome’ of men.” Mark Jones, *God Is: A Devotional Guide to the Attributes of God* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2017), 162–63.
- 7 HALOT, 1563.
- 8 HALOT, 556.

- 9 The New International Version (NIV) renders this verse: “Just as there were many who were appalled at him — his appearance was so *disfigured* beyond that of any human being and his form marred beyond human likeness” (emphasis added).
- 10 Margaret Barker has pointed out a variant spelling of Isaiah 52:14 in the Great Isaiah Scroll (GIS) from Qumran. Rather than the word מִשְׁחַת (*mishchat*, from the root ט-ח-ש *sh-ch-t*) as found in the Masoretic Text (MT), meaning *marred* or *disfigured*, the GIS has מִשְׁחָתִי (*meshachti*), which Barker interprets as *he was anointed* (from the root ט-ש-ח *m-sh-ch*). So, rather than the NASB20 translation of Isaiah 52:14, “His appearance was marred [מִשְׁחַת *mishchat*] beyond that of a man,” Barker suggests “he was *anointed* [מִשְׁחָתִי *meshachti*] beyond human semblance.” One problem with Barker’s interpretation is that מִשְׁחָתִי (*meshachti*), if understood to be from the root ט-ש-ח (*m-sh-ch*), represents the first person, common, perfect form of the verb. As such, מִשְׁחָתִי (*meshachti*) would be rendered *I anointed* (see 2 Samuel 12:7) rather than *he was anointed*, which would more properly be represented by נִמְשַׁח (*nimshach*) (see 1 Chronicles 14:8). In addition, neither the LXX nor the Targum Jonathan give any indication of the servant being *anointed*. Finally, the Israel Museum’s website has: “so was *he marred* [from the root ט-ח-ש *sh-ch-t*] in his appearance, more than any human.” “English Translations of the Book of Isaiah,” The Digital Dead Sea Scrolls, The Israel Museum, Jerusalem, <http://dss.collections.imj.org.il/chapters>. See Margaret Barker, *Temple Mysticism: An Introduction* (London: SPCK Publishing, 2011), 155–57.
- 11 “His visage was so marred ... — The words conflict strangely with the type of pure and holy beauty with which Christian art has made us familiar as its ideal of the Son of Man. It has to be noted, however, that the earlier forms of that art, prior to the time of Constantine, and, in some cases, later, represented the Christ as worn, emaciated, with hardly any touch of earthly comeliness, and that it is at least possible that the beauty may have been of expression rather than of feature or complexion, and that men have said of Him, as of St. Paul, that his ‘bodily presence was weak’ (2 Corinthians 10:10).” Charles J. Ellicott, ed., *An Old Testament Commentary for English Readers* (London: Cassell & Company, 1884), 4:549.

- 12 The Book of Sirach — also called 1. *The Wisdom of Jesus the Son of Sirach*; 2. *The Wisdom of Sirach, Book of Sirach, Ben Sira*; or 3. *The Book of Ecclesiasticus* — was one of the books of the Septuagint. This book was included in the Latin Vulgate and was counted among the apocryphal books of the KJV.
- 13 I do not consider the Hebrew word הָדָר (*hadar*) in this paper because other than God himself no specific individual is described using this word in the Hebrew Bible.
- 14 Philo, *On the Life of Moses*, 1.5.19, <http://www.earlychristianwritings.com/yonge/book24.html>.
- 15 Flavius Josephus, *The Antiquities of the Jews*, 2.9.6, <https://www.gutenberg.org/files/2848/2848-h/2848-h.htm>.
- 16 Louis Ginzberg, *Legends of the Jews* (Philadelphia, PA: Jewish Publication Society, 2003), 1:478.
- 17 Ibid., 1:481.
- 18 Joan E. Taylor, *What Did Jesus Look Like?* (London: T&T Clark, 2018), 8.
- 19 Jenna Goudreau, “Why Attractive People Are More Likely to Be Leaders,” *Business Insider*, 26 September 2013, <https://www.businessinsider.com/why-attractive-people-are-more-likely-to-be-leaders-2013-9>.
- 20 The root of the noun מֵרֶאֱהַ (mareh) is ר-א-ה, meaning to see.
- 21 Table 3 (Appendix 1) presents every biblical passage in which either תֹּאֵר (*toar*) or מֵרֶאֱהַ (*mareh*) is used, but not both, in describing the physical appearance of a specific individual.
- 22 Ambrose, *Seven Exegetical Works*, trans. Michael P. McHugh, The Fathers of the Church Patristic Series (Washington, DC: The Catholic University of America Press, 2003), 188.
- 23 Kristian S. Heal, “Joseph as a Type of Christ in Syriac Literature,” *BYU Studies Quarterly* 41, no. 1 (2002): 29, <https://byustudies.byu.edu/article/joseph-as-a-type-of-christ-in-syriac-literature/>.
- 24 “The Inward Life of a Real Christian,” *The Earthen Vessel: and Christian Record*, 2 October 1865, 293, https://www.google.com/books/edition/The_Earthen_Vessel_and_Christian_Record/AC8EAAAQAQAJ?hl=en&gbpv=1&pg=RA3-PA293&printsec=frontcover.

- 25 James M. Hamilton, "Was Joseph a Type of the Messiah?: Tracing the Typological Identification between Joseph, David, and Jesus," *Southern Baptist Journal of Theology* 12, no. 4 (2008): 52, 53.
- 26 L. Clayton Fausett, "Evidence for a Typology of Christ in the Book of Esther," (master's thesis, Brigham Young University, 2020), 268, <https://scholarsarchive.byu.edu/etd/8654>.
- 27 Hamilton, "Was Joseph a Type?," 71.
- 28 Much gratitude to my wife, Tina, for encouraging me to consider Judith in this analysis of saviors of Israel.
- 29 Crawford Howell Toy and Charles C. Torrey, "Judith, Book of," in *The Jewish Encyclopedia*, (New York: Funk and Wagnalls Co., 1907), 7:389, <https://jewishencyclopedia.com/articles/9073-judith-book-of>.
- 30 "Judith is beautiful; that is a necessary characteristic in a heroine." Sidnie White Crawford, "Esther and Judith: Contrasts in Character," in Leonard Greenspoon and Sidnie White Crawford, eds., *The Book of Esther in Modern Research* (London: T&T Clark International, 2003), 73.
- 31 "καλός, -ή, -όν (probably primarily 'sound,' 'hale,' 'whole;,' ... Sept. for יפה beautiful, but much more often for טוב good." Joseph Thayer, ed., *Thayer's Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament* (New York: American Book Company, 1889), 322.
- 32 "εἶδος, -ους, τό, in Sept. chiefly for מראה and תאר; prop. that which strikes the eye, which is exposed to view; 1. the external appearance, form, figure, shape." Thayer, *Greek-English Lexicon*, 172.
- 33 "ὡραῖος, -α, -ον (from ὥρα, 'the bloom and vigor of life,' 'beauty' in the Grk. writ." Thayer, *Greek-English Lexicon*, 680.
- 34 "ὄψις, -εως, ή, ... Sept. chiefly for מראה; and 1. seeing, sight. 2. face, countenance.... the outward appearance, look." Thayer, *Greek-English Lexicon*, 471.
- 35 Robin Gallaher Branch, "Judith: A Remarkable Heroine," *Bible History Daily*, 5 September 2021, <https://www.biblicalarchaeology.org/daily/people-cultures-in-the-bible/people-in-the-bible/judith-a-remarkable-heroine/>.
- 36 Andrea M. Sheaffer, "Judith Versus Goliath? Visualizing David as Archetype," *ARTS: The Arts in Religious and Theological Studies*

- 25, no. 3 (2014), <https://www.societyarts.org/judith-versus-goliath-visualizing-david-as-archetype.html>.
- 37 It should be noted that the book of Judith is still included in the Catholic Bible, although it is considered deuterocanonical. Why was the book of Judith excluded from the Hebrew Bible? According to Sidnie Crawford, patriarchal politics helped determine the outcome: "The character of Judith herself made the patriarchal societies forming the canons uncomfortable, so uncomfortable that she was excluded from the Jewish canon without a fight, while in Christian circles a lot of interpretation took place to allay this discomfort.... Judith subverts the patriarchal social order of the period." As a rich, beautiful, confident, faithful, childless, and heroic widow, "in spite of her reputation for piety, Judith's conduct undercuts the patriarchal order," so she was deemed too dangerous to be included in the Hebrew Bible. Crawford, "Esther and Judith," 70, 73, 74.
- 38 James E. Faulconer, "Scripture Study: Tools and Suggestions," *Maxwell Institute Publications* (1999), 69. <https://scholarsarchive.byu.edu/mi/69>.
- 39 "In Western philosophical and theological discourse, the word 'beauty' (and its equivalents) refers to human beauty, divine beauty, and natural beauty. However, the ancient Israelites had two entirely different categories of what might be understood as aesthetic appreciation, employing different sets of words. If one takes these distinct Hebrew words and assumes that all of the words may reside in a larger category such as beauty or aesthetics, then one also lays down a heavy interpretive grid that forces many disparate concepts into the same anachronistic categorical space.... יפה [yafeh] is the word most commonly used for human beauty.... It never describes God." Penchansky, "Beauty, Power, and Attraction," 52.
- 40 Ibid., 47.
- 41 Ginzberg, *Legends of the Jews*, 352.
- 42 "The Hebrew term יפה [yafeh] does not refer to God but is rather a unisex adjective that refers to both men and women.... We look in vain to find anything feminizing or demeaning in the word when it refers to men." Penchansky, "Beauty, Power, and Attraction," 54.

- 43 Jo Carruthers, *Esther through the Centuries* (Malden, MA: Blackwell Publishing, 2008), 13.
- 44 Ibid., 112.
- 45 The Bible is silent on the physical characteristics of the mothers of David, Esther or Judith.
- 46 Daniel C. Peterson, “Nephi and His Asherah,” *Journal of Book of Mormon Studies* 9, no. 2 (2000): 16–25, 80–81.
- 47 Rather than a Messiah to redeem them from their fallen state, from their sins, the Jews at the time of Jesus were expecting a Davidic warrior king, a liberator to free them from foreign nations. See Gerbern S. Oegema, *The Anointed and His People: Messianic Expectations from the Maccabees to Bar Kochba* (Sheffield, UK: Sheffield Academic Press, 1998).
- 48 Penchansky, “Beauty, Power, and Attraction,” 51.
- 49 Taylor, *What Did Jesus Look Like?*, 12–13.
- 50 Ibid., 13.
- 51 “How much less man, that maggot, And the son of man, that worm” (Job 25:6 NASB95).
- 52 Taylor, *What Did Jesus Look Like?*, 193.
- 53 Ibid., 194.
- 54 More importantly, Christ is the very “Word of God” himself. See Loren Blake Spendlove, “The Word of the Lord as a Metonym for Christ,” *Interpreter: A Journal of Latter-day Saint Faith and Scholarship* 49 (2021): 137–66, <https://journal.interpreterfoundation.org/the-word-of-the-lord-as-a-metonym-for-christ/>.
- 55 Sheaffer, “Judith Versus Goliath?”
- 56 The English translation of Abinadi’s citation of Isaiah 53:4 (see Mosiah 14:4) aligns word for word with the KJV text. חֲלִינוּ (*cholaenu*) is translated as “our griefs” and מַכָּאוֹנֵינוּ (*machovenenu*) is translated as “our sorrows,” both of which are less than adequate translations of these Hebrew nouns. However, in Alma’s paraphrase of the same passage from Isaiah (see Alma 7:11) the English of the Book of Mormon renders these same nouns as “sicknesses” and “pains,” a much better translation from the Hebrew, and in agreement with

many modern Bible translations (for example, NASB20, NET, and YLT translations).

- 57 The word translated as *succor* in the Hebrew Bible is עֲזָרָה (*azar*, meaning *help*). Christ, our Ebenezer (אֶבֶן הָעֶזְרָה *even ha'azer*, meaning *the stone of help*) is always ready to succor us in our infirmities, whatever they may be.
- 58 English translations render the Hebrew word נִשְׁחָתָה (*nishchat*) in varying ways. For example: *spoiled* (NASB20), *flawed* (CSB), *something wrong* (NET).
- 59 Some have interpreted the cows as representations of the Egyptian goddess Hathor, something easily recognizable to Pharaoh. See Stephen Newman, "Pharaoh's Dreams: An Extended Interpretation," *Jewish Bible Quarterly* 40, no. 4 (2012): 253–54, https://jbqnew.jewishbible.org/assets/Uploads/404/jbq_404_PharaohsDream.pdf.
- 60 It is possible that Isaiah was referring to the appearance of the Nile cows when he prophesied of the future destruction and captivity of Israel: "And in that day it shall come to pass, that the glory of Jacob shall be made thin [יָדַל *yidal*], and the fatness [וּמִשְׁמָן *u'mishman*] of his flesh shall wax lean [יִרְזַח *yerazeh*]" (Isaiah 17:4 KJV, emphasis added).
- 61 For example, we are not given any physical descriptions of Deborah, Gideon, or Jephthah.

“BUT THAT THOU WOULDST CLEAR MY WAY BEFORE ME”: A NOTE ON THE PERSONAL AND EMOTIONAL RENDERING OF AN ANCIENT IDIOM IN 2 NEPHI 4:33

Matthew L. Bowen

Abstract: *The biblical Hebrew collocation pinnâ derek or pannû derek (cf. Egyptian 'Ir w3,t [n]), often rendered “prepare the way” or “prepare a way” in English, is an evident stylistic feature of Nephi’s writings. The most basic meaning of this idiom is “clear my way,” which is how it is rendered in 2 Nephi 4:33. Zeno’s use of “prepare the way” (Jacob 5:61, 64) in the context of “clear[ing] away” bad branches also reflects this most basic meaning.*

The Hebrew idiom *pinnâ derek* or *pannû derek* often appears in early English translations of the Hebrew Bible (including the KJV) as “prepare the way” (see, e.g., Isaiah 40:3 [cf. Matthew 3:3; Mark 1:3; Luke 3:4], 57:14, 62:10 [*pannû derek*]; Malachi 3:1 [*pinnâ derek*]). Nephi’s replete use of this idiom constitutes a stylistic marker in his personal writings (see 1 Nephi 3:7; 9:6; 10:7–8 [with reference to Isaiah 40:3]; 10:18; 11:27 [also with reference to Isaiah 40:3]; 14:17; 17:41; 22:20; 2 Nephi 2:4; 4:33; and 9:10).

The basic meaning of the Hebrew verb *pānâ* is “to turn.”¹ In its Piel stem (*pinnâ*), this verb means “to clear away, remove” (Zephaniah 3:15) or “tidy up” (Genesis 24:31; Leviticus 14:36).² As an idiomatic expression, *pinnâ derek* (and its plural imperative *pannû derek*) denotes “clear the

1. Ludwig Koehler and Walter Baumgartner, *The Hebrew and Aramaic Lexicon of the Old Testament* (Leiden, NDL: Brill, 2001), 937–38. Hereafter cited as *HALOT*.

2. *HALOT*, 938.

way”³ or “clear a track”⁴ — namely, “make” a way, road, track, or path “clear, free from obstacles.”⁵ The Egyptian equivalent of this idiom is *ʾr w3.t n* (“prepare a way for”).⁶ As a Hebrew speaker taught in the “learning of the Jews,” Nephi surely would have been familiar with the former, and as one whose education also included the “language of the Egyptians” (1 Nephi 1:2), he was plausibly familiar with variations of the latter. Thus, Nephi’s apparent use of the idiom in 2 Nephi 4:33 begs further scrutiny. Toward the end of what has come to be called “the Psalm of Nephi” (2 Nephi 4:16–35), a document written immediately after the death of Lehi⁷ and later transcribed by Nephi to his small plates, Nephi petitions the Lord thus:

O Lord, wilt thou encircle me around in the robe of thy righteousness! O Lord, wilt thou **make a way** for mine escape before mine enemies! **Wilt thou make my path straight before me!** Wilt thou **not place a stumbling block in my way — but that thou wouldst clear my way before me, and hedge not up my way,** but the ways of mine enemy.” (2 Nephi 4:33)

Notably, Nephi mentions a “stumbling block” (Hebrew *mikšôl*)⁸ in his list, a term that also appears in close connection with *pannû derek* in Isaiah 57:14: “Cast ye up, cast ye up, prepare the way [*pannû derek*], take up the stumblingblock [*mikšôl*] out of the way of my people.” The hedge he mentions would have presented a similar obstacle requiring clearing. Hosea, a prophet with whom Nephi would have been familiar, prophesied, “Therefore, behold, **I will hedge up thy way** [*hinēni-šāk*

3. It is translated “clear the way” in various Bible translations at Isaiah 40:3; 57:14, 62:10. See, e.g., the New American Standard Version, New American Standard Bible (1995, 1997); Amplified Bible; Contemporary English Version, JPS/NJPS Tanakh, NET Bible.

4. HALOT, 938.

5. Francis Brown, S.R. Driver, and Charles A. Briggs, *The Brown-Driver-Briggs Hebrew and English Lexicon* (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson Publishers, 1996), 815.

6. Raymond O. Faulkner, *A Concise Dictionary of Middle Egyptian* (Oxford: Griffith Institute/Ashmolean Museum, 1999), 52. Attested in Percy E. Newberry, *El Bersheh, Part I: The Tomb of Tehuti-Hetep* (London: Egypt Exploration Fund, 1895), plate 14, column 3: *r ʾr.t n=f w3.t* (“in order to prepare the way for it”; translation mine). See also the translation given on p. 18: “in order to make for it the road.”

7. See John W. Welch, “The Psalm of Nephi as a Post-Lehi Document,” in *Pressing Forward with the Book of Mormon: The FARMS Updates of the 1990s*, ed. John W. Welch and Melvin J. Thorne (Provo, UT: FARMS, 1999), 72–74.

8. Cf. the Lord acting as a “stone of stumbling” (*eben negep*) and a “rock of offence” (*šûr mikšôl*) to the unrighteous Israelites and Judahites in Isaiah 8:14.

darkēk] with thorns, and make a wall, that she shall not find her paths" (Hosea 2:6 [vs. 8 in the Masoretic text]). Zeniff perhaps quoted or had reference to this very prophecy when he states, "For behold, the Lord hath said: I will not succor my people in the day of their transgression; but **I will hedge up their ways** that they prosper not; and their doings shall be as **a stumbling block** before them" (Mosiah 7:29; cf. Isaiah 8:14).⁹

In every other instance in Nephi's writings, the underlying idiom is rendered as some permutation of "prepare the way" or "prepare a way." Here, however, the translation renders Nephi's apparent use of *pinnâ derek* more personally and with more emotional lucidity as "clear the way" even as Nephi intensifies his fivefold plea to have an unobstructed way of escape to the Lord.

"Prepare the Way for Them That They May Grow": The Work of Clearing the Way

Another Book of Mormon passage offers a very concrete example of how "prepare the way" means to "clear the way." Zenos evidently uses the idiom *pinnâ/pannû derek* twice in his allegory (see Jacob 5:61, 64). In Zenos's allegory of the olive tree, the Lord of the vineyard gives his servant specific instructions on what to do in order to rescue his vineyard from corruption, including preserving the tree and branches that represent the house of Israel:

Wherefore, dig about them, and prune them, and dung them once more, for the last time, for the end draweth nigh. And if it be so that these last grafts shall grow, and bring forth the natural fruit, **then shall ye prepare the way for them**, that they may grow. And as they begin to grow ye shall **clear away the branches which bring forth bitter fruit**, according to the strength of the good and the size thereof; and **ye shall not clear away the bad thereof all at once**, lest the roots thereof should be too strong for the graft, and the graft thereof shall perish, and I lose the trees of my vineyard. For it grieveth me that I should lose the trees of my vineyard; wherefore **ye shall clear away the bad according as the good shall grow**, that the root and the top may be equal in strength, until the good shall overcome the bad, and the bad be hewn down and cast into the fire, that they cumber not the ground of my vineyard;

9. Compare how the poisonous serpents "hedge up the way" against the people in Ether 9:33.

and thus will I sweep away the bad out of my vineyard. (Jacob 5:64–66)

The Lord of the vineyard states that the grafted-in branches need room to grow. The “way” will be “prepared” or *cleared* for their growth by “clear[ing] away” the bad branches. Zenos uses a verb translated “clear away” (perhaps the Piel verb *pinnâ* as in Zephaniah 3:15)¹⁰ three times in direct connection with branches and the idiom “prepare the way” (*pinnâ derek*) to emphasize the type of work required to “prepare the way” — or clear the way. Zenos’s words resemble Psalm 80:8–9 in content and theme: “Thou hast brought a vine out of Egypt: thou hast cast out the heathen, and planted it. Thou preparedst [*pinnîṭā* — i.e., cleared] room before it, and didst cause it to take deep root, and it filled the land.”

Beyond bad branches, “the bad” that needed to be cleared away may have also included stones in the vineyard (compare Isaiah 5:2) or “stumbling blocks” (2 Nephi 4:33; Isaiah 57:14) that obstruct the movement of people on the covenant path (“the way”) and thus restrict the growth of the tree. It is worth comparing this imagery to 1 Nephi 14:1 and the angel’s promise to Nephi that if the latter-day Gentiles would “hearken” unto the Lord, he would “manifest himself . . . unto the taking away of their stumbling blocks.”

Conclusion

The Book of Mormon English translation’s use of the phrase “clear my way” in 2 Nephi 4:33 appropriately reflects the clearest sense of the Hebrew idiom *pinnâ derek* or *pannû derek* (cf. Egyptian *ʾIr w₃.t [n]*) vis-à-vis the more abstract and usual English phrasing “prepare the way”/ “prepare a way” at a point in his psalm where he attempts to convey intense personal distress. Zenos’s apparent use of the idiom *pinnâ derek* (“prepare the way”) in connection with “clear[ing] away” branches bearing bad fruit (Jacob 5:61, 64–66) gives us another example of this idiom that helps us see its semantic range. Both passages are just two more examples that reflect the subtlety and beauty of an ancient text translated by the gift and power of God.

10. See also Genesis 24:31; Leviticus 14:36. Context perhaps suggests that “clear away” in Jacob 5:65–66 more likely reflects the use of *pinnâ* than Hebrew *gāraš* or *nāšal*, which denote to “drive out” or “drive away” and primarily have human beings as their explicit objects (see *HALOT*, 204 and 730), although both remain possibilities given the allegoric nature of Zenos’s text.

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HANNAH'S ADVERSITY AND PENINNAH'S REDEMPTION

Loren Spendlove

Abstract: *Most biblical students are familiar with the story of Hannah, who after years of barrenness, finally gave birth to the prophet Samuel. Some will remember her adversary, Peninnah, who allegedly tormented Hannah to tears. My objective in this article is to reclaim Peninnah's good name by reinterpreting the passage found in 1 Samuel 1:6.*

Imagine you are scrolling through Netflix and spot a movie that looks interesting, so you decide to watch it. When it ends you feel moved by its message. Interested in how others reacted, you get on your laptop and go to the movie's website. While reading comments left by other viewers, you notice that almost everyone is talking about one particular scene. The odd thing is that you don't remember that scene at all. Here is how one viewer summarized the scene:

Ken and Anna are sitting at a booth in a local diner. A young waitress, Pearl, approaches, hands them menus, and says something offensive to Anna, but Ken doesn't seem to notice. Anna, however, heard it and internalized it. When Pearl comes back to take their orders, she also takes the opportunity to get in another jab at Anna. When she brings the food to the table, she piles on yet more insults. Ken seems oblivious, but Anna is deeply hurt. She abruptly gets up from the booth and runs toward the front door, with Ken close behind. They both stop just outside the door of the diner and Ken embraces her. Unaware, he asks: "Anna, what's wrong? Why are you crying, and why won't you eat the meal we just ordered? Just then the door of the diner opens and out steps Pearl. She glances at the couple, gives Anna a nasty look, and then walks away.

When you finish reading this comment, the scene sounds even less familiar. You remember Ken and Anna standing outside of a building and hugging while she cried — it could have been a diner, you guess — but that is all you remember. So, you go back to Netflix, reload the movie, and skip to that scene. But, in your version of the movie, nothing comes before their embrace at the front door; Ken and Anna don't sit at a booth inside the building, and Pearl never talks to them. As you keep watching, a woman walks through the front door, glances at the couple, and walks off screen. Did she throw a “nasty” look at Anna? You don't think she did, but maybe you missed something. You rewind the scene and watch it again. This time you pause as the other woman looks over at Anna, and you notice that she is wearing a restaurant uniform, and she has a badge with the name *Pearl* on it. Those are details you never would have seen had you not paused the film. But does her glance appear mean-spirited? Not that you can tell. It seems more like just a curious look. And then the young woman walks away. After you turn off the TV, you sit and wonder if everyone else watched the director's cut while you saw an edited version of the movie. You even wonder if the other viewers were under some kind of mass hallucination. Either way, the whole situation leaves you puzzled and confused.

Does this sound far-fetched? Welcome to the story of Elkanah (Ken), Hannah (Anna), and Peninnah (Pearl). While most are familiar with the Old Testament story of Hannah, the mother of the prophet Samuel, few would be able to recall much, if anything, about Peninnah. Together they are the polygynous wives of Elkanah (אֵלְקָנָה), an Israelite from the tribe of Levi.¹ In this biblical narrative Hannah is portrayed as the humble victim of Peninnah's continual taunting and verbal abuse. Additionally, nearly every commentary about this passage of scripture portrays Hannah as the protagonist and Peninnah as the antagonist, Hannah's rival.

Peninnah's name has even been used by some as an offensive epithet, much like calling someone a “Judas”:

In short who is a Peninah [sic]? A Peninah is an adversary. One who rejoices at the misfortune of others and provokes with spiteful and disdain[ful] words. The spirit of Peninah is that spirit of rejoicing at the misfortune of others. It's easy to have the spirit of Peninah especially when the misfortune of others has a tendency to make us look better.²

My objective in this article is to reevaluate the circumstances surrounding Hannah's childlessness and to attempt to rescue Peninnah

from the slander to which she has been subjected — undeservedly in my opinion — throughout the centuries.

Hannah, Samuel, and Peninnah

After years of childlessness Hannah made a vow to the Lord and was blessed with the birth of a son, Samuel. Due to that vow, once Samuel was weaned — probably around the age of two or three — Hannah left him in the care of Eli, the High Priest at the sanctuary. Below is the KJV translation of the events that led up to the birth of Samuel:

Now there was a certain man ... and his name was Elkanah ... and he had two wives; the name of the one was Hannah, and the name of the other Peninnah: and Peninnah had children, but Hannah had no children. ... He loved Hannah: but the Lord had shut up her womb. And her adversary also provoked her sore, for to make her fret, because the Lord had shut up her womb.

And as he did so year by year, when she went up to the house of the Lord, so she provoked her; therefore she wept, and did not eat. Then said Elkanah her husband to her, Hannah, why weepest thou? and why eatest thou not? and why is thy heart grieved? am not I better to thee than ten sons? ...

Now Eli the priest sat upon a seat by a post of the temple of the Lord. And she was in bitterness of soul, and prayed unto the Lord, and wept sore. And she vowed a vow, and said, O Lord of hosts, if thou wilt indeed look on the affliction of thine handmaid, and remember me, and not forget thine handmaid, but wilt give unto thine handmaid a man child, then I will give him unto the Lord all the days of his life, and there shall no razor come upon his head.

And it came to pass, as she continued praying before the Lord, that Eli marked her mouth. Now Hannah, she spake in her heart; only her lips moved, but her voice was not heard: therefore Eli thought she had been drunken. And Eli said unto her, How long wilt thou be drunken? put away thy wine from thee. And Hannah answered and said, No, my lord, I am a woman of a sorrowful spirit: I have drunk neither wine nor strong drink, but have poured out my soul before the Lord. Count not thine handmaid for a daughter of Belial:³ for out of the abundance of my complaint and grief have I spoken

hitherto. Then Eli answered and said, Go in peace: and the God of Israel grant thee thy petition that thou hast asked of him. And she said, Let thine handmaid find grace in thy sight. So the woman went her way, and did eat, and her countenance was no more sad.⁴

And they rose up in the morning early, and worshipped before the Lord, and returned, and came to their house to Ramah: and Elkanah knew Hannah his wife; and the Lord remembered her. Wherefore it came to pass, when the time was come about after Hannah had conceived, that she bare a son, and called his name Samuel, saying, Because I have asked him of the Lord. (1 Samuel 1:1–20 KJV)

Hannah was beset with sadness and grief to the point that she cried frequently and even went for periods of time without eating. The KJV translation also adds another element that seems to have compounded her grief: an adversary who “provoked her sore” (1 Samuel 1:6). While unnamed in the Hebrew text, some English translations and most biblical commentators have chosen Peninnah — Elkanah’s other wife — as Hannah’s tormentor. An analysis of 54 English translations of the Bible revealed 15 that identify Peninnah by name as the “adversary.” For example, *The Voice* rendering of 1 Samuel 1:6 reads: “Peninnah used to infuriate Hannah until Hannah trembled with irritation because the Eternal had not given Hannah children.” In addition, most Christian theologians seem to have arrived at the same conclusion. Chuck Smith, a contemporary Christian pastor, opined on the opening chapter of 1 Samuel:

So the scene is set the man living in polygamy, two wives. One he loved more than the other. One had many children, but the one he really loved could not have any children. ... That is Hannah’s adversary, or *the other wife*. So there was friction in the house between the two wives as they [bid] for the attention and the love of the one man. As I said this morning, any man’s a fool who thinks that he can satisfy all of the needs of two women. You’re bound to have problems. So they did [emphasis mine].⁵

Adam Clarke, an early 19th century Methodist theologian, also expressed his opinion on the identity of Hannah’s “adversary.”

Verse 6. **And her adversary]** That is, Peninnah.

Provoked her sore] Was constantly striving to irritate and vex her, to make her fret-to make her discontented with her lot, because the Lord had denied her children.

Verse 7. **And as he did so year by year]** As the whole family went up to Shiloh to the annual festivals, Peninnah had both *sons* and *daughters* to accompany her, [1 Samuel 1:4], but Hannah had none; and Peninnah took this opportunity particularly to twit Hannah with her barrenness, by making an ostentatious exhibition of her children.⁶ [*emphasis original*]

Like Chuck Smith and Adam Clarke, early 18th century minister Matthew Henry also identified Peninnah, the other wife, as the “adversary.” Henry, however, went even further; he seems to have created his own midrash on 1 Samuel. Henry wrote:

Peninnah was *extremely peevish and provoking*. [1.] She *upbraided* Hannah with her affliction, *despised* her because she was barren, and *gave her taunting language*, as one whom Heaven did not favour. [2.] She *envied* the interest she had in the love of Elkanah, and the more kind he was to her, the more was she *exasperated against her*; which was all over *base and barbarous*. [3.] She did this most when they went up to the house of the Lord, perhaps, because then they were more together than at other times, or because then Elkanah showed his affection most to Hannah. But it was very sinful at such a time to show her *malice*, when pure hands were to be lifted up at God’s altar without wrath and quarrelling. It was likewise very *unkind* at that time to *vex* Hannah, not only because then they were in company, and others would take notice of it, but then Hannah was to mind her devotions, and desired to be most calm and composed, and free from disturbance. The *great adversary* to our purity and peace is then most industrious to ruffle us, when we should be most composed. When the sons of God come to present themselves before the Lord, *Satan* will be sure to come among them, Job 1. 6. [4.] She continued to do this from year to year, not once or twice, but it was her *constant practice*; neither deference to her husband nor compassion to Hannah, could break her of it; and Lastly, That which she designed, was, to *make her fret*; perhaps in hopes to *break her heart*, that she might possess her husband’s heart solely. Or, because she *took a pleasure in*

her uneasiness: nor could Hannah gratify her more than by fretting.⁷

Not only did Henry paint Peninnah in a very negative light, he even compared the actions and attitudes that *he attributed to her* with those of the “great adversary,” even Satan. While most of what Henry ascribed to Peninnah cannot be found in the KJV text itself, his opinion seems to reflect that of the majority of Christian commentators: as Hannah’s oppressor and adversary, Peninnah was a small, spiteful, jealous rival who enjoyed tormenting Hannah. In fact, 1 Samuel 1:2 can even be interpreted as setting up the confrontation between the two women with a chiasm:

A	the name of the one was Hannah,
B	and the name of the [second] Peninnah:
B’	and Peninnah had children,
A’	but Hannah had no children.

Latter-day Saint teachings about Hannah also identify Peninnah as her tormentor. While not portraying Peninnah with the same strong language used by Henry, some Latter-day Saint publications recognize Hannah as the victim of Peninnah’s spiteful provocation:

Hannah’s sorrows were further magnified by the reproaches of Elkanah’s other wife, Peninnah, who had borne him many children (see 1 Samuel 1:4). Certainly each child Peninnah bore would have deepened Hannah’s anguish over her own apparent barrenness. To make matters worse, Peninnah ‘provoked her sore’ for being barren (see 1 Samuel 1:6).⁸

Notice the phrase “her adversary also provoked her sore, for to make her fret” in 1 Samuel 1:6. This phrase means that someone, possibly Peninnah, was striving to upset Hannah because of Hannah’s inability to have children.⁹

Was Peninnah Hannah’s Adversary?

If we rely solely on English translations of the Bible, the commentaries of theologians, and religious instructional materials it seems apparent that Peninnah was indeed Hannah’s adversary and tormentor. However, a study of the Hebrew text possibly reveals a more plausible answer. Focusing only on verses 6 and 7 from 1 Samuel, we read:

And her adversary [צרתה *tsaratah*] also provoked her sore [וכעסטה צרתה גם־כעס *ve'khiasattah tsaratah gam-kaas*], for to make her fret [הרעמה *ha'reimah*], because the Lord had shut up her womb. And as he did so year by year, when she went up to the house of the Lord so she provoked her [תכעסנה *takhisennah*]; therefore she wept, and did not eat.

Twice in these two verses the KJV renders the Hebrew verbs derived from the root כ-ע-ס (*k-‘a-s*) as *provoked*. However, Koehler and Baumgartner (hereafter HALOT) inform us that a more appropriate translation for כ-ע-ס (*k-‘a-s*) in these verses would be to *grieve*.¹⁰ So, rather than *provoking* Hannah, her “adversary” caused her to *grieve*. The action of *provoking* someone seems to imply intentional malice. On the other hand, it is altogether possible to be the cause of someone’s grief without any malicious intent.

In addition, the KJV renders the verb הרעמה (*ha'reimah*) — from the root ר-ע-מ (*r-‘a-m*) — as *to make her fret*. Again, HALOT provides a different understanding with regard to the verb’s usage in 1 Samuel 1:6. In this verse, the verb is expressed in the Hiphil form, and can be understood as either causative or transitive.¹¹ Based on context, it is most likely that the verb should be understood as causative. Given these two verbal modifications, verse 6 could be reworked as: “And her adversary also *grieved her much, causing her to be depressed*, because the Lord had shut up her womb.”

But, we are not done with our analysis of the Hebrew in this passage; one more KJV word choice needs to be reconsidered: *her adversary*. The Hebrew word for *her adversary* in this verse is צרתה (*tsaratah*), which is derived from the noun צרה (*tsarah*). This noun is used quite frequently in the Hebrew Bible (73 times) and is translated as follows in the KJV:

Table 1

Translation	Qty
Trouble	44
Distress	8
Affliction	7
Adversity	5
Anguish	5
Tribulation	3
Adversary	1
Total	73

As shown in Table 1, with the exception of its usage in 1 Samuel 1:6, the KJV always translates the noun צרה (*tsarah*) as one of the following synonyms or near-synonyms: *trouble*, *distress*, *affliction*, *adversity*, *anguish*, or *tribulation*. It is important to point out that none of these 73 usages, with the possible exception of 1 Samuel 1:6, refers to a person. Rather, these verses in question always reference a situation, period of time, or emotional state in which people in the Hebrew Bible find themselves. For example: “I will make there an altar unto God, who answered me in the day of *my distress* [צרתִי *tsarati*]” (Genesis 35:3); “and cry unto thee *in our affliction* [מצרתֵנו *mi’tsaratenu*]” (2 Chronicles 20:9); or, “O the hope of Israel, the saviour thereof in time of *trouble* [צרה *tsarah*]” (Jeremiah 14:8). As such, the KJV’s word choice in 1 Samuel 1:6 — *adversary* — seems out of harmony with all other translations of the noun צרה (*tsarah*). Why, then, does the KJV translate this noun in 1 Samuel 1:6 as *adversary* when in all other instances it renders it as *trouble* or one of its near-synonyms? This is an important question, and the key to reclaiming Peninnah. Rather than *adversary*, if we choose one of the other words in Table 1 — I have chosen *adversity* due to its shared linguistic derivation with *adversary* — we can more fully rework this passage. In Table 2, I contrast 1 Samuel 1:6–7 from the KJV, Young’s Literal Translation (YLT), and the reworked passage:

Table 2

KJV	YLT	Reworked
And <i>her adversary</i> also provoked her sore, for to make her fret, because the Lord had shut up her womb. And as he did so year by year, when she went up to the house of the Lord, so she provoked her; therefore she wept, and did not eat.	And <i>her adversity</i> hath also provoked her greatly, so as to make her tremble, for Jehovah hath shut up her womb. And so he doth year by year, from the time of her going up into the house of Jehovah, so it ¹² provoketh her, and she weepeth, and doth not eat.	And <i>her adversity</i> also grieved her much, causing her to be depressed, because the Lord had shut up her womb. And as he did so year by year, when she went up to the house of the Lord, so it grieved her; therefore she wept, and did not eat.

Like the reworked passage, YLT renders צרתה (*tsaratah*) as *her adversity* rather than *her adversary*. Of the 54 English translations that I studied, YLT was the only one to render this word as *her adversity*. All other translations followed the KJV by identifying צרתה (*tsaratah*) as a person rather than as *trouble* or one of its synonymous terms (see Table 3 below):

Table 3

Translation	Qty
Rival	34
Peninnah	15
Adversary	7
Rival wife	2
Enemy	1
Adversity	1
Total ¹³	60

However, reinterpreting 1 Samuel 1:6–7 as shown in the reworked passage in Table 2 above yields several favorable outcomes. First, the interpretation of the noun צָרָתָה (*tsaratah*) as *her adversity* (or another near-synonym) aligns with the overall meaning of the word in the Hebrew Bible. On the other hand, *her adversary* requires a special understanding of the word for this single verse. Second, by adding the final line of verse 5 to verse 6 an elegant chiasmic structure is revealed (see Table 4 below):

Table 4

	KJV	Reworked
A	but the Lord had shut up her womb.	And the Lord had shut her womb.
B ₁	And <i>her adversary</i>	And <i>her adversity</i>
B ₂	also provoked her sore,	also grieved her much,
B ₃	for to make her fret,	causing her to be depressed,
A'	because the Lord had shut up her womb.	because the Lord had shut her womb.

While both the KJV and the reworked passage can be expressed as chiasms, the reworked passage seems to present a better symmetry. In the reworked passage, Hannah’s adversity — a metonym for her closed womb — is parallel with the grief and depression that she feels, and adversity, grief, and depression can be described as synonymous terms. In addition, this passage steers our attention away from an alleged adversary and redirects it to the real source of Hannah’s grief, her *closed womb*. On the other hand, in the KJV passage *her adversary* is not truly parallel with lines B₂ or B₃.

Finally, rather than *her adversary* — Peninnah — *provoking* her, the idea that Hannah’s *adversity* (her barrenness) caused her to grieve is a better fit with 1 Samuel 1:10–11. From this verse it seems reasonable to conclude that Hannah’s affliction — her barrenness — was the cause of her *bitterness of soul*:

And she was in bitterness of soul [מרת נפש *marat nafesh*], and prayed unto the Lord, and wept sore. And she vowed a vow, and said, O Lord of hosts, if thou wilt indeed look *on the affliction* [בעני *ba'oni*] of thine handmaid, and remember me, and not forget thine handmaid, but wilt give unto thine handmaid a man child

In this passage Hannah prays for the thing that truly afflicts her, her inability to have a son. So, why has Peninnah been scapegoated for so long and by so many? To answer that question we need to dive into the early Jewish texts (the Septuagint, Jewish historians, and rabbinic sages) and into the early Christian texts (the early church fathers and the Latin Vulgate).

Early Jewish Writings

Septuagint — circa 200 BCE, and approximately 900 years after Hannah and Peninnah

The Greek Septuagint translation (hereafter LXX) of 1 Samuel 1 renders these verses in a very similar way to our reworked passage. For comparison, I show the KJV, LXX, and reworked passages in Table 5.

Table 5

Verse	KJV	LXX	Reworked
5	... but the LORD had shut up her womb.	... and the Lord had shut up her womb.	... and the LORD had shut her womb.
6	And <i>her adversary</i> also <i>provoked</i> her sore, for to <i>make her fret</i> , because the LORD had shut up her womb.	For the Lord gave her no child in <i>her affliction</i> , and according to the <i>despondency of her affliction</i> ; and she was <i>dispirited</i> on this account, that the Lord shut up her womb so as not to give her a child.	And <i>her adversity</i> also <i>grieved her much</i> , <i>causing her to be depressed</i> , because the LORD had shut her womb.
7	And as he did so year by year, when she went up to the house of the LORD, so <i>she provoked her</i> ; therefore she wept, and did not eat.	So she did year by year, in going up to the house of the Lord; and <i>she was dispirited</i> , and wept, and did not eat.	And as he did so year by year, when she went up to the house of the LORD, so <i>it grieved her</i> ; therefore she wept, and did not eat.

As the earliest known interpretation of the Hebrew text, the LXX translation of this verse supports the rendering of the reworked passage.

Without any mention of an adversary, the LXX links the idea that “the Lord gave her no child” with “her affliction.” This affliction, in turn, caused Hannah to become despondent and dispirited. Since the LXX was the source document for the translation of the Old Latin texts (*Vetus Latinae*), the LXX’s understanding of these passages would have been taught among Christian churches until the Latin Vulgate eventually replaced both the LXX and the *Vetus Latinae*, becoming the dominant textual tradition in the church.

Josephus — circa 100 CE, and approximately 1,200 years after Hannah and Peninnah

The earliest written commentary that mentions Peninnah comes from the Jewish historian Flavius Josephus. With regard to 1 Samuel 1:1–20, Josephus wrote the following in his work *Antiquities of the Jews*, which he finished toward the end of the 1st century CE:

Elcanah, a Levite, one of a middle condition among his fellow citizens, and one that dwelt at Ramathaim, a city of the tribe of Ephraim, married two wives, Hannah and Peninnah. He had children by the latter; but he loved the other best, although she was barren. Now Elcanah came with his wives to the city Shiloh to sacrifice, for there it was that the tabernacle of God was fixed, as we have formerly said. Now when, after he had sacrificed, he distributed at that festival portions of the flesh to his wives and children, *and when Hannah saw the other wife’s children sitting round about their mother, she fell into tears, and lamented herself on account of her barrenness and lonesomeness; and suffering her grief to prevail over her husband’s consolations to her, she went to the tabernacle to beseech God to give her seed, and to make her a mother; and to vow to consecrate the first son she should bear to the service of God, and this in such a way, that his manner of living should not be like that of ordinary men. And as she continued at her prayers a long time, Eli, the high priest, for he sat there before the tabernacle, bid her go away, thinking she had been disordered with wine; but when she said she had drunk water, but was in sorrow for want of children, and was beseeching God for them, he bid her be of good cheer, and told her that God would send her children. So she came to her husband full of hope, and ate her meal with gladness. And when they had returned to their own country she found*

herself with child, and they had a son born to them, to whom they gave the name of Samuel, which may be styled one that was asked of God [emphasis mine].¹⁴

Absent from Josephus' commentary is any idea that Penninah was an "adversary" to Hannah. In fact, he specifically states that "when Hannah saw the other wife's children sitting round about their mother, she fell into tears, and lamented herself on account of her barrenness and lonesomeness." Again, when Hannah was in the tabernacle praying, Josephus affirms that she "was in sorrow for want of children." This retelling of the story harmonizes well with the reworked passage and with the LXX. According to Josephus, it was Hannah's *adversity* — her *barrenness and lonesomeness* — that grieved her, not Peninnah. Rather than portraying her as Hannah's adversary, Josephus casts Peninnah in a passive role, as a mother merely sitting with her children. Camille Fronk Olson added:

Of importance, neither the Greek translation of the Old Testament, the Septuagint (LXX), nor Josephus the Jewish historian makes any mention of Peninnah taunting Hannah to tears. More specifically, the parallel Septuagint passage of verses 6–7 reads: "For the Lord gave her no child in her affliction, and according to the despondency of her affliction; and she was dispirited on this account, that the Lord shut up her womb so as not to give her a child. So she did year by year, in going up to the house of the Lord; and she was dispirited, and wept, and did not eat." According to this account, Hannah was not vexed by Peninnah, but depressed by her empty life. She had plenty of heartache because the Lord had closed up her womb without considering Peninnah as a source of conflict. The narrative provided by the Septuagint is a hopeful clarification to the traditional interpretation of the relationship between Peninnah and Hannah.¹⁵

Pseudo Philo¹⁶ — date uncertain

Dates for the authorship of *Biblical Antiquities* range anywhere from the early 1st century CE to the 4th century CE, a broad window. Of interest to our study is the midrashic commentary about Peninnah found in this book. In it our previously mute Peninnah suddenly develops a voice, and a savage one at that:

Now [whereas] Elchana had two wives, the name of the one was Anna and the name of the other Phenenna. And because Phenenna had sons, and Anna had none, Phenenna reproached her, saying: What profiteth it thee that Elchana thine husband loveth thee? but thou art a dry tree. I know moreover that he will love me, because he delighteth to see my sons standing about him like the planting of an oliveyard. And so it was, when she reproached her every day, and Anna was very sore at heart, and she feared God from her youth, it came to pass when the good day of the passover drew on, and her husband went up to do sacrifice, that Phenenna reviled Anna saying: A woman is not *indeed* beloved even if her husband love her or her beauty. Let not Anna therefore boast herself of her beauty, but he that boasteth let him boast when he seeth his seed before his face; and when it is not so among women, even the fruit of their womb, then shall love become of no account. For what profit was it unto Rachel that Jacob loved her? except there had been given her the fruit of her womb, *surely* his love would have been to no purpose? And when Anna heard that, her soul was melted within her and *her eyes* ran down with tears. And her husband saw her and said: *Wherefore art thou sad, and eatest not, and why is thy heart within thee cast down?* Is not thy behaviour better than the ten sons of Phenenna?... And Anna prayed and said: Hast not thou, O Lord, examined the heart of all generations before thou formedst the world? But what is the womb that is born open, or what one that is shut up dieth, except thou will it? And now let my prayer go up before thee this day, lest I go down hence empty, for thou knowest my heart, how I have walked before thee from the days of my youth. And Anna would not pray aloud as do all men, for she took thought at that time saying: Lest perchance I be not worthy to be heard, and it shall be that Phenenna will envy me yet more and reproach me as she daily saith: Where is thy God in whom thou trustest? And I know that it is not she that hath many sons that is enriched, neither she that lacketh them is poor, but whoso aboundeth in the will of God, she is enriched. For they that know for what I have prayed, if they perceive that I am not heard in my prayer, will blaspheme. And I shall not only have a witness in mine

own soul, for my tears also are handmaidens of my prayers
[emphasis original].¹⁷

This midrash from Pseudo-Philo is a vast departure from the LXX and Josephus. In fact, its style and content are reflective of the passages from the Bava Batra and the Pesikta Rabbati that follow.

Bava Batra — circa 500 CE, and approximately 1,600 years after Hannah and Peninnah

Tractate Bava Batra in the Babylonian Talmud tells us the following:

Rabbi Levi says: Both Satan, who brought accusations against Job, and *Peninnah*, who tormented *Hannah*, mother of Samuel the prophet, acted with intent that was for the sake of Heaven. As for Satan, when he saw that the Holy One, Blessed be He, inclined to favor Job and praised him, he said: Heaven forbid that He should forget the love of Abraham. With regard to *Peninnah*, as it is written: “And her rival wife also provoked her sore, to make her fret” (I Samuel 1:6), i.e., *Peninnah* upset *Hannah* in order to motivate her to pray [emphasis mine].¹⁸

In this passage in the Bava Batra, as in Pseudo-Philo, *Peninnah* has become *Hannah*’s tormentor. However, the Bava Batra also states that *Peninnah*’s intentions were good; she merely wanted to motivate *Hannah* to pray so that God could bless her with a child. So, this portrayal of *Peninnah* depicts her as more of a *misguided ally* than a true *adversary*.

Pesikta Rabbati — circa 850 CE, and approximately 1,950 years after Hannah and Peninnah

The *Pesikta Rabbati* is a collection of aggadic¹⁹ midrashim, or homilies. The following midrash about *Elkanah*, *Hannah*, and *Peninnah* begins by explaining why and when *Elkanah* married *Peninnah*:

Ten years she [*Hannah*] lived with him and did not give birth, and he took *Peninnah* who gave him ten sons which is why *Elkanah* said to *Hannah*: Am I not better to thee than ten sons?²⁰

This short passage attempts to provide answers to a few questions left unanswered in the text of 1 Samuel, namely: 1. Why was *Elkanah* married to two wives at the same time? 2. When did he marry *Peninnah*? and, 3. Why did *Elkanah* tell *Hannah* that he was better to her than ten sons? The midrash explained that *Elkanah* only married *Peninnah*

after Hannah was unable to bare children during their first ten years of marriage. This seems to be an attempt to align his motives with the following teaching from the Mishnah:

If a man married a woman and stayed with her for ten years and she did not give birth, he is no longer permitted to neglect the mitzva [commandment] to be fruitful and multiply. Consequently, he must either divorce her and marry someone else, or take another wife while still married to her.²¹

So, following this teaching from the Mishnah, Elkanah would have been required to take a second wife due to Hannah's barrenness. This effort to exculpate Elkanah for his polygynous marriage to Peninnah is laudable, but most likely anachronistic. While the Mishnah was completed in the early 3rd century CE, the marriage of Peninnah to Elkanah would have preceded it by approximately 1,300 years, and a millennia before the halakha (rabbinic laws and decrees) could have been codified.

In addition, the midrash creates some chronological issues based on the delay of marrying Peninnah, her giving birth to ten children, and Hannah's conception of Samuel. If we assume that Hannah was fifteen years old when she married Elkanah, she would have been twenty-five when he married Peninnah. If Peninnah gave birth to ten sons — perhaps more properly ten children — before Hannah conceived Samuel, and assuming that these births were spaced two years apart, then another twenty-one years, at a minimum, would have passed before Hannah became pregnant with Samuel. This means that Hannah would have been around 46 when she conceived Samuel and perhaps 47 when he was born. When Hannah left him with Eli, Samuel most likely would have been at least two years old (1 Samuel 1:24), making Hannah at least 49. In 1 Samuel 2:21 we learn that Hannah went on to give birth to three more sons and two daughters. Again, if we space these births two years apart Hannah would have been nearing 60 by the time her last child was born. At such an advanced age, this seems improbable. A far more likely scenario is that Hannah and Peninnah were married to Elkanah within a few years of each other, and that Peninnah only had a handful of children when Hannah became pregnant with Samuel.²²

In this next passage from the *Pesikta Rabbati* we continue to see the formation of current Jewish views on Peninnah. While the *LXX* and Josephus cast Peninnah in a passive role, the *Bava Batra* depicts her as a supportive but misguided ally to Hannah. On the other hand, the

Pesikta Rabbati, more in line with *Biblical Antiquities*, frames Peninnah as the jealous, petty, and vindictive person that we know today:

Rabbi Nachman Bar Abba said that Peninah would rise early in the morning and say to Hannah: Are you not preparing to wash the faces of your children so they can go to school? And six hours later she would say to her: Hannah, are you not preparing to receive your children who come home from school?²³

In this passage we are introduced to the injurious words that Peninnah allegedly spoke to Hannah to provoke her to despair. Clearly, this recreated monologue could not have survived for 1,900 years without entering the realm of legend. Like the first midrash from the Pesikta Rabbati, this midrash also seems to contain an anachronism. It is not likely that formal schools (בתי ספר *betei sefer*) even existed in pre-monarchic Israel. Scholars presuppose “the presence of schools for scribes linked to the crown by David’s time. By the seventh century literacy is assumed for the general populace.”²⁴ In other words, almost certainly schools for children would not have existed in Israel around 1,100 BCE. Louis Ginzberg aptly noted:

It has been held by some that the Haggadah²⁵ contains no popular legends, that it is wholly a factitious, academic product. A cursory glance at the pseudepigraphic literature of the Jews, which is older than the Haggadah literature by several centuries, shows how untenable this view is.²⁶

In other words, midrashim are ripe with legends and folklore, and these midrashim under study here are no different. All cultures, in fact, are infused with folkloric traditions, but rarely are these traditions believed to be historically true. For example, we are not expected to uncritically accept the historicity of Paul Bunyan or Robin Hood. These midrashim composed nearly 2,000 years after the fact are no different.

The Pesikta Rabbati contributes one final midrash to our story of Hannah and Peninnah:

Hannah would give birth to one child, and Peninnah would bury two; Hannah bore four, and Peninnah buried eight. When Hannah was pregnant with her fifth child, Peninnah feared that now she would bury her last two children. What did she do? She went to Hannah and told her: “I know that I have sinned against you. I beg you, pray for me, so that my

two remaining sons will live." Hannah prayed to God, and said: "Please, leave her the two sons and let them live." God responded: "By your life, they deserve to die, but since you have prayed that they live, I will call them by your name."²⁷

As a punishment for tormenting Hannah, every time that Hannah gave birth to a child two of Peninnah's children would die. When only two of Peninnah's ten children were left alive Hannah interceded for them. According to the midrash, God spared their lives and, taking them from Peninnah, gave them to Hannah. This midrash seems to provide a solution for a verse in Hannah's song: "They that were full have hired out themselves for bread; and they that were hungry ceased: so that the barren hath born seven; and she that hath many children is waxed feeble" (1 Samuel 2:5).

Again, how seriously should we take this midrash? Does it accurately represent an actual event, or is it more likely the imaginative deliberations of rabbis trying to make sense of the sacred text? Ginzberg again responded:

The teachers of the Haggadah, called Rabbanan d'Aggadta in the Talmud, were no folklorists, from whom a faithful reproduction of legendary material may be expected. Primarily they were homilists, who used legends for didactic purposes, and their main object was to establish a close connection between the Scripture and the creations of the popular fancy, to give the latter a firm basis and secure a long term of life for them.²⁸

Rashi — circa 1,100 CE, and approximately 2,200 years after Hannah and Peninnah

Shlomo Yitzchaki, commonly known as Rashi, was an eminent medieval rabbi who wrote extensively on the Hebrew Bible and the Talmud. Regarding Peninnah, Rashi primarily synthesized the writings of earlier rabbis. Below is his commentary for the verses from 1 Samuel 1:

Verse 6:

Her rival. Her husband's other wife, Peninnah.

Frequently anger. Anger after anger, i.e., always.' Therefore it is written 'also anger.' She would say to her, "Did you buy your older son a cloak today, or your younger son, a shirt?"

In order that she should complain. In order to make her

complain. Our Rabbis explain, ‘in order to make her storm,’ that she pray. Peninnah had good intentions.²⁹

Verse 7:

Year after year. He would give her a choice portion to demonstrate to her that he loved her; and her rival, according to the affection which her husband demonstrated to her, would anger her more and more.³⁰

Verse 8:

Than ten sons. That Peninnah has borne to me.³¹

Verse 16:

Do not deliver your maidservant. Because she had spoken harshly to him, she tried to appease him, so that he deliver her not, unprotected and disgraced, to her rival, the wicked woman.³²

By Rashi’s time the mold was set; even though she may have had good intentions, Peninnah was the “*rival, the wicked woman*,” and there would be no redeeming her from her misdirected motives. The question we need to ask is why Peninnah morphed from her passive role as the other wife of Elkanah to this active role as tormentor and adversary to Hannah? One possible answer can be found in the stories of the ancient matriarchs Sarah and Rachel. Like Hannah, both of these women were barren; both had to endure their infertility while their rivals — Hagar and Leah — had children; and both eventually gave birth to a special son. It is possible that the rabbis desired to elevate Hannah — the mother of Samuel, one of the greatest prophets in Israel — to a status on par with these ancient matriarchs. However, to truly belong in their company she needed an appropriate rival, and Peninnah was an easy, voiceless target.

Early Christian Writings and a Bridge to Christianity

These beliefs regarding Peninnah seem to have spread from the world of Rabbinic Judaism and into Christian belief, but how? As previously mentioned, Matthew Henry, the early 18th century Christian minister, lambasted Peninnah in his commentary on 1 Samuel. We also know that Henry was acutely aware of Jewish traditions concerning her. Referencing Hannah’s song, Henry wrote:

The barren hath borne seven, while, on the other hand, she that hath many children, has waxed feeble, and hath left bearing; she says no more, Peninnah is now mortified and crest-fallen.

The tradition of the Jews, is, that when Hannah bore one child Peninnah buried two.³³

Not only does Henry's comment about "the tradition of the Jews" show awareness of their beliefs about Peninnah, it also seems to endorse them. But, how did these rabbinic ideas about Peninnah spread to Christianity?

Cyprian

Writing in the middle of the 3rd century, one of the earliest church fathers to write about Peninnah was Cyprian. Like the LXX and Josephus, Cyprian casts her in a neutral light; Peninnah is present in Hannah's story, but nothing more:

And in the first of Kings it is said that Elkanah had two wives: Peninnah, with her sons; and Hannah, barren, from whom is born Samuel, not according to the order of generation, but according to the mercy and promise of God, when she had prayed in the temple; and Samuel being born, was a type of Christ.³⁴

Gregory Nazianzen

As the Archbishop of Constantinople during the latter part of the 4th century, Gregory Nazianzen wrote about Peninnah's and Hannah's children, but not about any conflict between the two women. As a pre-Latin Vulgate theologian, Nazianzen seems to be unaware of any adversarial relationship:

Peninnah who had "many" children is called Imperfect in her children, because Many is an indefinite word; where Hannah's one child Samuel was so perfect a man that he was as it were seven to his mother. For Seven is mystically, as Six or Ten is arithmetically, the perfect number.³⁵

Augustine

While Augustine makes no direct references to Peninnah, he does comment on Hannah's (Anna) barrenness on several occasions. For example:³⁶

Two women of the name of Anna are honourably named there — the one, Elkanah's wife, who was the mother of holy Samuel; the other, the widow who recognized the Most Holy

One when He was yet a babe. The former, though married, prayed with sorrow of mind and brokenness of heart because she had no sons; and she obtained Samuel, and dedicated him to the Lord, because she vowed to do so when she prayed for him.³⁷

Peninnah's absence in Augustine's commentary is significant. Not proficient in Greek, Augustine used various translations of the old Latin texts of the Bible — the *Vetus Latinae* — in his writing and preaching. Since these texts were translated from the LXX they undoubtedly portrayed Peninnah as a passive participant in Hannah's story. Even though he was a Latin church father, Augustine did not use or approve of Jerome's Latin Vulgate translation which relied on the Hebrew text for its source of translation for the Old Testament. In one of his letters to Jerome, Augustine wrote:

But I beseech you not to devote your labour to the work of translating into Latin the sacred canonical books, unless you follow the method in which you have translated Job, viz. with the addition of notes, to let it be seen plainly what differences there are between this version of yours and that of the LXX, whose authority is worthy of highest esteem. For my own part, I cannot sufficiently express my wonder that anything should at this date be found in the Hebrew mss. which escaped so many translators perfectly acquainted with the language.³⁸

Perhaps unaware that the Jerome's Latin Vulgate had recast Peninnah as Hannah's rival and adversary (see below) in accordance with rabbinic tradition, Augustine did not cast Peninnah in that role.

Jerome and the Latin Vulgate

Tasked with the responsibility of creating a new Latin translation of the Bible, Jerome relocated to Bethlehem in approximately 388 CE. Believing the Hebrew Bible to be superior to the various Latin texts of the Bible and to the Greek LXX, he began his new Latin translation — known as the Latin Vulgate — around 390 CE. While skilled in both Latin and Greek, Jerome lacked sufficient knowledge of Hebrew to adequately translate the text, so he surrounded himself with Hebrew teachers that assisted him. By 392 CE Jerome had finished his translation of the book of Samuel.³⁹ His translation of 1 Samuel 1:6 from Hebrew into Latin (with English below) reads:

Affligebat quoque eam æmula eius, et vehementer angebat, in tantum, ut exprobraret quod Dominus conclusisset vulvam eius.

Her *rival/enemy* [æmula] also *afflicted* [affligebat] her, and *troubled* [angebat] her exceedingly, insomuch that she *upbraided* [exprobraret] her, that the Lord had shut up her womb.

The key word in Jerome's Latin translation is *æmula*, a noun derived from *æmulus*. According to Harper's Latin dictionary, *æmulus* can be defined as "a rival," or as it applies specifically to 1 Samuel 1:6, "an enemy."⁴⁰ Rather than following the LXX translation of צרתה (*tsaratah*) as "her adversity," Jerome chose a different path and rendered the Hebrew word צרתה (*tsaratah*) as "her rival/enemy" in Latin. But why? What could have influenced Jerome to translate this one word in a way that so dramatically altered our understanding of the verse and of the dynamics related to Hannah and Peninnah? In short, rabbinic influence; Jerome's teachers instructed him in the Hebrew language and in the rabbinic exegesis of the biblical text. Dominik Markl observed:

Jerome not only attempted to engage with the towering teachers of the Bible past and present and to visit the most famous centres of learning, he also explored atypical paths of research. He frequently interacted with Jews, not only to study Hebrew, but also to benefit from their knowledge of the Rabbinic tradition of biblical interpretation.⁴¹

Jerome's teachers were proficient in biblical Hebrew and in the rabbinic interpretation of the text, and they passed along that interpretation to Jerome. Megan Hale Williams adds:

Jerome, alone among non-Jewish writers of Late Antiquity whose works survive intact, makes abundant and well-informed reference to Jews, to Jewish custom, and above all to Jewish biblical interpretation. He attributes this knowledge not to Jewish literary sources but to oral instruction from Jewish informants, whom he repeatedly describes as Jews recognized as authorities among their own people. Contrary to what has sometimes been claimed, Jerome's information about Jewish matters is generally good. Many of the interpretations he cites as Jewish are paralleled in Jewish literature from antiquity; others exhibit the distinctive traits of the Jewish exegesis we know from those literary sources. We have no reason not to

believe Jerome when he claims to have made strenuous efforts to learn as much as he could of Jewish biblical interpretation, nor to doubt his ultimate success.⁴²

According to Benjamin Kedar-Kopfstein, Jerome was often guided in his translation of the Hebrew text, and therefore in its exegesis, by his Hebrew guides:

The stock example is, of course, the verse in the denunciation of Shebna (Isa. 22.15–19) in which Jerome substitutes Latin *gallus gallinaceus*, ‘a poultry-cock’, for Hebrew גִּבּוֹר, ‘man’, because that is what his Hebrew teacher had instructed him to do (cf. Rashi and Kimchi) in accordance with postbiblical Hebrew.⁴³

A phrase that Jerome used quite frequently in his writings was *Hebraica veritas*. By the use of this term he appears to be describing the Hebrew text of the Bible coupled with the rabbinic interpretation of the text. Michael Graves commented:

Jerome seems to have used rabbinic traditions and the direct study of the Hebrew text (the two being closely associated in Jerome’s mind) as a means to interpret and correct his Greek sources, intending thereby to obtain a more accurate understanding of the *Hebraica veritas* than his Greek and Latin predecessors.⁴⁴

Kedar-Kopfstein noted that Jerome also appears to have referenced rabbinic midrashim while translating the Hebrew text into Latin:

When Jerome deems a phrase incomplete he may add some explanatory words; more often than not these reflect some midrash. The question אִיָּה שָׁקֵל, ‘where is he that weighs’ (Isaiah 33.18) sounds somewhat perplexing in its Hebrew terseness. The Vulgate has *ubi legis verba ponderans*, ‘where is he who weighs the words of the law’; this corresponds exactly to the Talmudic explanation שֶׁהֵיוּ שׁוֹקְלִין קִלְיָן וְהַמְרוֹיִן שֶׁבַתּוֹרָה (Hag. 15b.), ‘they used to weigh the easier matters as well as the grave ones in the Torah’.⁴⁵

Jerome himself provided a methodology of his translation in his commentary on the Book of Ecclesiastes:

In the preface to his commentary on the Book of Ecclesiastes, Jerome states that he first turned to the Hebrew text, and discerned its meaning. He then compared his results with

the Rabbinical interpretation. After, Jerome considered the Septuagint and used it whenever it did not stray from the original, consulted the later Greek translators, especially Symmachus, and finally tried to leave intact as much of the Old Latin version as possible.⁴⁶

So, Jerome placed rabbinic interpretation of the biblical text high on his list of translation methodologies, even above the LXX. Finally, Jerome considered the Hebrew text together with the rabbinic understanding of the text to be the “wellspring of truth.” On the other hand, he labeled the Greek and Latin translations and the Christian understanding of those texts to be merely the “rivulets of opinion:”

Access to the “wellspring of truth”—the Hebrew text and the learning of the Jews—was what distinguished Jerome’s scriptural learning from that of other Latin exegetes, who were limited to the “rivulets of opinion,” the Greek and Latin translations and the scholarly traditions that used them. For Jerome always associated the image of the source or spring with Jewish learning and the Hebrew text, even before the phrase *Hebraica veritas* became part of his vocabulary. In his later work, where it is common, the phrase itself almost always refers to the Hebrew text of the Bible as transmitted among the Jews. The image of the source, however, and the sphere of Jewish learning that Jerome considered authoritative had far wider implications. Nor have these entirely escaped notice. Adam Kamesar suggested that the phrase *Hebraica veritas* might include the full range of what he termed Jerome’s “*rabbinic-recentiores* philology.” Both conceptually and in practice, Jerome’s biblical scholarship brought together a disparate assortment of material, which he represented as the biblical learning of the Jews [emphasis original].⁴⁷

Jerome’s teachers were deeply indoctrinated in the rabbinic interpretation of the biblical text, and this resulted in Jerome being heavily influenced by this interpretation while creating the Latin Vulgate. Since language and culture are intimately connected with each other, it was inevitable that rabbinic influence spilled over into Jerome’s translation. Guessabi wrote:

A particular language points to the culture of a particular social group. Learning a language, therefore, is not only learning the alphabet, the meaning, the grammar rules and

the arrangement of words, but it is also learning the behavior of the society and its cultural customs. ... Language and culture have a complex, homologous relationship. Language is complexly intertwined with culture (they have evolved together, influencing one another in the process).⁴⁸

The great issue that Jerome faced, and one of which he does not appear to have considered, is that 1,500 years had transpired from the time of Hannah and Peninnah to Jerome's own time. Rabbinic Jewish culture was far removed from that of pre-monarchic Israel. Ancient Hebrew culture and 4th century rabbinic culture shared few linguistic or even religious commonalities.

Eberhard Werner argued that there are at least three cultures/languages involved in any translation: 1. the source text culture/language; 2. the translator's culture/language; and, 3. the recipient's culture/language. He added, "a successful meeting of these cultures only occurs when the translator as cultural mediator is informed as well as possible about its DNA, i.e. the crucial make-up of geography, social and political history."⁴⁹ In other words, unless the translator is well-entrenched in the culture/language of the source text, as well as the culture and language of the intended audience, the translation undoubtedly will be flawed. In Jerome's case, while he was instructed in the culture and language of late 4th century CE rabbinic Judaism, a large gap existed between that and the culture and language of ancient Israel, inevitably resulting in flawed interpretations of the text.

So, when Jerome translated 1 Samuel 1:6, he chose the rabbinic interpretation rather than that of the LXX. He naturally assumed that the Hebrew text in front of him, and the rabbinic interpretation of that text, were superior to the translation rendered in the LXX by its Jewish translators 600 years earlier. It probably never occurred to Jerome that the textual and exegetical traditions of the LXX translators were different from the rabbinical tradition during his time. Jerome, perhaps naively, seems to assume that the textual interpretation during his time, and even the Hebrew text itself, were unaltered over the centuries.⁵⁰

Even though the Bava Batra had not yet been recorded as part of the Babylonian Talmud during Jerome's lifetime, the rabbinic traditions behind these teachings were being disseminated through oral tradition. These oral traditions would have been well known by Jerome's Hebrew teachers. In turn, these teachers passed along this exegetical tradition to Jerome. The result of all this is that Hannah's *adversity* from the LXX morphed into Hannah's *adversary*, following rabbinic tradition. Graves

provides us with an encapsulation of these observations about Jerome's translation process:

Having studied the alphabet and sounds, Jerome seems to have learned to read the Hebrew Bible along standard lines: reading with a teacher, who translated for him, and also reading along with a translation (in Jerome's case, Greek). What was deficient in Jerome's Hebrew, by the standards of his time, was his lack of immersion in a culture of Hebrew language usage, as he had experienced with Greek. Such an immersion experience would only have been possible within the environment of Rabbinic Judaism. While reading with one of his Hebrew instructors, Jerome would have learned the meaning of the text as his teacher translated for him. In Jerome's mind, this was the most reliable source for the proper interpretation of the text.⁵¹

John Chrysostom

John Chrysostom served as the Archbishop of Constantinople at the close of the 4th century and beginning of the 5th. While serving in that position he preached many sermons, or homilies, which were written down by his parishioners sometime after his exile or death. His homilies on Ephesians were preached around 400 CE, or nearly a decade after Jerome had completed his translation of 1 Samuel.⁵² In one of these sermons, Chrysostom was the first early church father to adopt the rabbinic idea, first introduced by Jerome in his translation of the Vulgate, of Peninnah as Hannah's rival:

When therefore ye hear the Scripture saying, that "the Lord had shut up her womb" (verses 5, 6.), and that, "her rival provoked her sore"; consider that it is His intention to prove the woman's seriousness. For, mark, she had a husband devoted to her, for he said (verse 8.), "Am I not better to thee than ten sons?" "And her rival," it saith, "provoked her sore," that is, reproached her, insulted over her. And yet did she never once retaliate, nor utter imprecation against her, nor say, "Avenge me, for my rival reviles me." The other had children, but this woman had her husband's love to make amends. With this at least he even consoled her, saying, "Am not I better to thee than ten sons?"

But let us look, again, at the deep wisdom of this woman. “And Eli,” it says, “thought she had been drunken.” (verse 13.) Yet observe what she says to him also, “Nay, count not thine handmaid for a daughter of Belial, for out of the abundance of my complaint and my provocation have I spoken hitherto.” (verse 16.) Here is truly the proof of a contrite heart, when we are not angry with those that revile us, when we are not indignant against them, when we reply but in self-defense.⁵³

The Vulgate’s Influence on English Translations of the Bible

With the broader acceptance of Jerome’s Latin Vulgate translation of the Bible, this idea that Hannah had a rival or enemy, and that it must be Peninnah, became ubiquitous within the Christian church. When John Wycliffe produced his English Bible translation from the Latin Vulgate in 1395 he faithfully followed its translation, rendering 1 Samuel 1: 6 as follows:

And hir enemy turmentide hir, and angwischide greetly, in
so myche that sche vpbreidide, that the Lord hadde closid hir
wombe.

William Tyndale’s translation of 1 Samuel 1:6 — first printed in John Roger’s *Matthew Bible* in 1537 — was purported to be a translation from the Hebrew rather than from the Latin. However, Tyndale went beyond the Vulgate and even the Hebrew text by identifying Peninnah by name as Hannah’s enemy:

And thereto her enemy Phenennah vexed her a good in
casting her in the tethe how the Lord had made her barren.

Rather than a translation from the Hebrew, Tyndale’s rendering of this verse is actually a paraphrase, an exegesis based on neither the Hebrew nor the Latin texts. In addition, the phrase “casting her in the tethe” is not found in the Latin nor in the Hebrew. Unfortunately, Tyndale’s translation of this verse helped cement the idea among English speakers that Peninnah was Hannah’s tormentor and enemy. The Great Bible, published in 1540, in addition to naming Peninnah as the enemy, seems even to add a rabbinic element to Tyndale’s paraphrase:

And her enemy (Phenennah) vexed her sore contynually, to
move her, because the Lord had made her barren.

Like Tyndale, the Great Bible also names Peninnah as Hannah’s enemy, but parenthetically, acknowledging that her name is not actually

found in this verse in either the Hebrew or the Latin texts. In addition, the Great Bible's rendering seems to echo the Bava Batra. that Peninnah tormented Hannah "in order to motivate her to pray" when it used the phrase "to move her."

Summary and Conclusion

Nearly all English translations of the Bible, including the KJV, declare that Hannah had an *adversary* or *rival* who provoked her to tears. Some of these translations even name Peninnah as the one who tormented Hannah. This choice of *adversary* or *rival* is an unexpected and unparalleled interpretation of the Hebrew noun צרתה (*tsaratah*), derived from the word צרה (*tsarah*). Except for 1 Samuel 1:6, צרה (*tsarah*) is always translated as *trouble* or another close synonym in the KJV, which is why this passage stands out.

While the earliest Jewish writings on 1 Samuel 1:6 — LXX and Josephus — cast Peninnah in a passive familial role, later rabbinic interpretation seems to throw her under a bus, or under a chariot, by changing her into a spiteful and mean-spirited tormentor of Hannah. This may have been done in an attempt to elevate Hannah to the same status as the ancient matriarchs Sarah and Rachel.

This rabbinic interpretation about Hannah and Peninnah likely spread to Christianity through Jerome's Latin Vulgate translation. As many scholars have noted, Jerome was heavily influenced by rabbinic exegesis of the biblical text:

For Jerome, who had no access to any Hebraic exegetical tradition besides the rabbinic, scholarship on the Hebrew Bible required attention not only to the (unpointed) biblical text, but also to the tradition that accompanied it. Thus, Jerome used both contemporary Jewish traditions and the narratives of the Old Testament as *historia* within the framework of *grammatica*.⁵⁴

Once the rabbinic interpretation of 1 Samuel 1:6 was incorporated into the Vulgate — Hannah had an adversary, and that adversary was Peninnah — there was no stopping this idea from spreading throughout Christianity, and eventually showing up in English translations of the Bible. Lilian Klein observed:

Because the reader's sympathies are directed toward the childless Hannah, Peninnah comes across as a malicious woman. In fact, she is probably a literary convention, a foil for

the independence and goodness of Hannah, and should be regarded as such. The text does not suggest Peninnah has an independent personality in any way.⁵⁵

While I do not believe that Peninnah was only a “literary convention,” I do agree with Klein that the biblical text does not assign her “an independent personality in any way.” In the Hebrew text Peninnah is merely a side note, no one of consequence in Hannah’s melodrama. Peninnah and her children seem to play the role of counterweight to Hannah’s barrenness. Seeing Peninnah with her children every day must have been excruciating for Hannah in light of her inability to conceive. But, that is no reason to villainize Peninnah.

As explicated in the article, I believe that a better understanding of the Hebrew text of 1 Samuel 1:6 is that Hannah’s *adversity* (or *trouble*, *distress*, *affliction*, etc.) — her inability to bear children — caused her grief and depression. If we feel the need to point a finger of blame, then let us point at Hannah’s *closed womb*, her real source of depression and grief. And, just as this adversity caused her to grieve, it was news that she was going to bear a child that brought her eventual joy. It is time to rehabilitate Peninnah from the defamation to which she has been subjected for centuries!

Appendix: Augustine on Hannah’s Prayer

“They that were full of bread,” she says, “are diminished, and the hungry have gone beyond the earth.” Who are to be understood as full of bread except those same who were as if mighty, that is, the Israelites, to whom were committed the oracles of God? But among that people the children of the bond maid were diminished,—by which word *minus*, although it is Latin, the idea is well expressed that from being greater they were made less,—because, even in the very bread, that is, the divine oracles, which the Israelites alone of all nations have received, they savor earthly things. But the nations to whom that law was not given, after they have come through the New Testament to these oracles, by thirsting much have gone beyond the earth, because in them they have savored not earthly, but heavenly things. And the reason why this is done is as it were sought; “for the barren,” she says, “hath born seven, and she that hath many children is waxed feeble.” Here all that had been prophesied hath shone forth to those who understood the number seven, which signifies the perfection of the universal Church. For which reason also the Apostle John writes to the seven churches, showing in that way

that he writes to the totality of the one Church; and in the Proverbs of Solomon it is said aforetime, prefiguring this, "Wisdom hath builded her house, she hath strengthened her seven pillars." For the city of God was barren in all nations before that child arose whom we see. We also see that the temporal Jerusalem, who had many children, is now waxed feeble. Because, whoever in her were sons of the free woman were her strength; but now, forasmuch as the letter is there, and not the spirit, having lost her strength, she is waxed feeble.

"The Lord killeth and maketh alive:" He has killed her who had many children, and made this barren one alive, so that she has born seven. Although it may be more suitably understood that He has made those same alive whom He has killed. For she, as it were, repeats that by adding, "He bringeth down to hell, and bringeth up." To whom truly the apostle says, "If ye be dead with Christ, seek those things which are above, where Christ sitteth on the right hand of God." Therefore they are killed by the Lord in a salutary way, so that he adds, "Savor things which are above, not things on the earth;" so that these are they who, hungering, have passed beyond the earth. "For ye are dead," he says: behold how God savingly kills! Then there follows, "And your life is hid with Christ in God:" behold how God makes the same alive! But does He bring them down to hell and bring them up again? It is without controversy among believers that we best see both parts of this work fulfilled in Him, to wit our Head, with whom the apostle has said our life is hid in God. "For when He spared not His own Son, but delivered Him up for us all," in that way, certainly, He has killed Him. And forasmuch as He raised Him up again from the dead, He has made Him alive again. And since His voice is acknowledged in the prophecy, "Thou wilt not leave my soul in hell," He has brought Him down to hell and brought Him up again. By this poverty of His we are made rich; for "the Lord maketh poor and maketh rich." But that we may know what this is, let us hear what follows: "He bringeth low and lifteth up;" and truly He humbles the proud and exalts the humble. Which we also read elsewhere, "God resisteth the proud, but giveth grace to the humble." This is the burden of the entire song of this woman whose name is interpreted "His grace."⁵⁶

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Endnotes

- 1 Although from the tribe of Levi, Elkanah is identified as an Ephramite (אֶפְרַתִּי *Ephrati*) in 1 Samuel 1:1.
- 2 Bopoto Gwinyai, “The Spirit of Peninah,” *Times of Swaziland*, October 18, 2019, <http://www.times.co.sz/letters/125648-the-spirit-of-peninah.html>.
- 3 בַּת־בְּלִיעַל (*bat-bliyaal*), meaning *worthless daughter*. Ironically, Eli’s own sons, Hophni and Phinehas, are called “sons of Belial,” or *worthless sons* in 1 Samuel 2:12.
- 4 The Hebrew text does not say that “her countenance was no more sad.” Rather, it states that “her face was no more.” It is only inferred that she was not sad anymore.
- 5 Charles Ward Smith, *Smith’s Bible Commentary*, (2014), https://www.blueletterbible.org/Comm/smith_chuck/c2000_1Sa/1Sa_001.cfm.
- 6 Adam Clarke, “The Holy Bible Containing the Old and New Testaments with a Commentary and Critical Notes” Vol. II (Nashville, TN: Abingdon, 1977), 207.
- 7 Matthew Henry, *Exposition of the Old and New Testament* (New York: Robert Carter, 1853), 227, emphasis added.
- 8 Linda M. Campbell, “Hannah: Devoted Handmaid of the Lord,” *Ensign*, March 1998, <https://www.churchofjesuschrist.org/study/ensign/1998/03/hannah-devoted-handmaid-of-the-lord>.
- 9 “Lesson 82: 1 Samuel 1—2,” *Old Testament Seminary Student Material*, (2018), <https://www.churchofjesuschrist.org/manual/old-testament-seminary-student-material-2018/1-samuel/lesson-82>.
- 10 “to grieve sorely **1 Samuel 1₆**” and “to **grieve** (man) **1 Samuel 1₇**,” Ludwig Koehler, Walter Baumgartner, *The Hebrew and Aramaic Lexicon of the Old Testament*, s.v. “כָּעַס.” (Leiden, NDL: Brill, 1995) 2:491.
- 11 “General remarks: the hif. is either causative or internally transitive,... to make oppressed, bring low,... to incite to anger;...

- to appear depressed, show oneself oppressed.” *HALOT*, s.v. “רָעַם.” 3:1267.
- 12 As with Latin languages, Hebrew requires that pronouns agree with the gender of the noun that they represent. For example, consider the following question in Portuguese: *Onde está a mesa?* (Where is the table?). An appropriate answer would be: *Ela está na cozinha*. This can be translated into English as *she is in the kitchen*, but it would be more proper to render the pronoun *ela* as *it* since we are not referencing a person. So, *it is in the kitchen* would be more correct in English. The same rule applies to translation from Hebrew. The verb used in verse 7 — תַּכְעֲסֶנָּה (*takhisennah*), and rendered *she provoked her* in the KJV — should be reworked as *it grieved her* if we are to understand צָרָתָה (*tsaratah*) as *her adversity* rather than *her adversary*.
 - 13 Note: The total does not add up to 54 because in some cases a given translation uses more than one of the terms in Table 3. For example, the Wycliffe Bible uses both *Peninnah* and *her enemy*.
 - 14 Flavius Josephus, *The Antiquities of the Jews*, Book 5, Chapter 10.
 - 15 Camille Fronk Olson, *Women of the Old Testament* (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 2009), 134.
 - 16 The *Biblical Antiquities* of Pseudo-Philo recounts biblical stories from Adam up to the death of King Saul. The author is named Pseudo-Philo because it was originally assumed that Philo of Alexandria was the book's author, a theory that has now been abandoned.
 - 17 M. R. James, *The Biblical Antiquities of Philo* (London: Macmillan, 1917), 214–16.
 - 18 Babylonian Talmud, Seder Nezikin, Bava Batra 16a, https://www.sefaria.org/Bava_Batra.16a.
 - 19 Aggadah is a type of homily used by the rabbis to teach moral principles or to illustrate parts of the Torah.
 - 20 Pesikta Rabbati 43, https://www.sefaria.org/Pesikta_Rabbati.43.1.
 - 21 Mishnah Yevamot 6:6, https://www.sefaria.org/Mishnah_Yevamot.6.6.
 - 22 Some medieval Jewish scholars, like Rabbi David Kimhi (Radak), believed that Penninah's ten sons spoken of in the Pesikta Rabbati were metaphorical rather than literal.

- 23 Pesikta Rabbati 43, https://www.sefaria.org/Pesikta_Rabbati.43.1
- 24 David W. Jamieson-Drake, *Scribes and Schools in Monarchic Judah: A Socio-Archeological Approach* (Sheffield: Almond, 1991), 12.
- 25 “Folklore, fairy tales, legends, and all forms of story telling akin to these are comprehended, in the terminology of the post-Biblical literature of the Jews, under the inclusive description Haggadah, a name that can be explained by a circumlocution, but cannot be translated. Whatever it is applied to is thereby characterized first as being derived from the Holy Scriptures, and then as being of the nature of a story.” Louis Ginzberg, *Legends of the Jews* (Philadelphia: Jewish Publication Society, 2003), xxx.
- 26 Ibid.
- 27 Pesikta Rabbati 43, https://www.sefaria.org/Pesikta_Rabbati.43.1
- 28 Ginzberg, *Legends of the Jews*, xxxi.
- 29 Rashion1 Samuel 1:6, https://www.sefaria.org/Rashi_on_I_Samuel.1.6.
- 30 Rashion1 Samuel 1:7, https://www.sefaria.org/Rashi_on_I_Samuel.1.7.
- 31 Rashion1 Samuel 1:8, https://www.sefaria.org/Rashi_on_I_Samuel.1.8.
- 32 Rashi on 1 Samuel 1:16, https://www.sefaria.org/Rashi_on_I_Samuel.1.16.
- 33 Henry, *Exposition of the Old and New Testament*, 233.
- 34 *Fathers of the Third Century: Hippolytus, Cyprian, Caius, Novatian, Appendix*, ed. Philip Schaff, (Grand Rapids, MI: Christian Classics Ethereal Library, 2004), 898.
- 35 *Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers*, ed. Philip Schaff, series 2, vol. 7 (Grand Rapids, MI: Christian Classics Ethereal Library, 2007), 756.
- 36 For an interpretation of Hannah’s prayer by Augustine, see the Appendix.
- 37 *Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers*, series 1, 1008.
- 38 Marcus Dods, ed., *The Works of Aurelius Augustine, Bishop of Hippo: A New Translation* (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1872), 79–80.
- 39 “The first translations in the series, made in 391 and 392, included new versions of the Psalms and the book of Job, which Jerome had previously translated from the Septuagint, and of the Prophets

and the books of Samuel and Kings, which were fresh territory.” Megan Hale Williams, *The Monk and the Book: Jerome and the Making of Christian Scholarship* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2006), 66.

- 40 “**æmulus**, *Subst.*, a rival = rivalis: mihi es aemula, *you are my rival* (i. e. *You have the same desire as I*), Plaut. Rud. 1, 4, 20; Ter. Eun. 4, 1, 9; cf. id. ib. 2, 1, 8: si non tamquam virum, at tamquam aemulum removisset, Cic. Verr. 2, 5, 31: et si nulla subest aemula, languet amor, Ov. A. A. 2, 436. — By meton. [metonymy] (eccl. [Scriptores Ecclesiastie]), *an enemy*: videbis aemulum tuum in templo, Vulg. 1 Reg. 2, 32: affligebat eam aemula, ib. 1, 6.” Charlton T. Lewis, Charles Short, *Harpers’ Latin Dictionary: A New Latin Dictionary, Founded on the Translation of Freund’s Latin-German Lexicon* (New York: American Book, 1879), c.f., æmulus.
- 41 Dominik Markl, “What Biblical Scholars Can Learn From Jerome: Sixteen Centuries After His Demise,” *Vulgata in Dialogue* 4 (2020): 38.
- 42 Megan Hale Williams, “Lessons from Jerome’s Jewish Teachers: Exegesis and Cultural Interaction in Late Antique Palestine,” in Natalie B. Dohrmann, David Stern, eds., *Jewish Biblical Interpretation and Cultural Exchange: Comparative Exegesis in Context* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2008), 66.
- 43 Benjamin Kedar-Kopfstein, “Jewish Traditions in the Writings Of Jerome,” in D.R.G. Beattie, M.J. McNamara, eds., *The Aramaic Bible: Targums in their Historical Context* (Sheffield: JSOT Press, 1994), 427.
- 44 Michael Graves, *Jerome’s Hebrew Philology: A Study Based on his Commentary on Jeremiah* (Leiden, NDL: Brill, 2007), 9.
- 45 Benjamin Kedar-Kopfstein, “Jewish Traditions in the Writings Of Jerome,” in D.R.G. Beattie, M.J. McNamara, eds., *The Aramaic Bible: Targums in their Historical Context* (Sheffield: JSOT Press, 1994), 430.
- 46 Megan Hale Williams, *The Monk and the Book: Jerome and the Making of Christian Scholarship* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2006), 86n60.
- 47 *Ibid.*, 89–90.

- 48 Fatiha Guessabi, "Blurring the Line between Language and Culture," *Language Magazine*, <https://www.languagemagazine.com/blurring-the-line-between-language-and-culture/>.
- 49 Eberhard Werner, *The Mandate for Bible Translation: Models of Communication and Translation in Theory and Practice in regard to the Science of Bible Translation* (2013), 149–50, <https://www.sil.org/resources/archives/51438>. This is an English translation of Eberhard Werner, *Bibelübersetzung in Theorie und Praxis: Eine Darstellung ihrer Interdisziplinarität anhand der Ausbildungspraxis* (Hamburg, DEU: Kovač, 2011).
- 50 Donald Parry compared the Hannah story in 1 Samuel 1 in the LXX, the Masoretic Text (MT) and the Qumran text (4QSam^a) and observed that "each of the three texts has distinguishable ideological or theological elements that are demonstrative of parallel editions." Donald W. Parry, "Hannah in the Presence of the Lord," in Philippe Hugo and Adrian Schenker, eds., *Archaeology of the Books of Samuel: The Entangling of the Textual and Literary History* (Leiden, NDL: Brill, 2010), 54.
- 51 Graves, *Jerome's Hebrew Philology*, 126–27.
- 52 See general timeline at Christian History Timeline: John Chrysostom," *Christian History Institute*, <https://christianhistoryinstitute.org/magazine/article/john-chrysostom-timeline>.
- 53 *Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers*, series 1, 3:756.
- 54 Graves, *Jerome's Hebrew Philology*, 44.
- 55 Lillian Klein (Abensohn), "Peninnah: Bible," *The Shalvi/Hyman Encyclopedia of Jewish Women*, <https://jwa.org/encyclopedia/article/peninnah-bible>.
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EXAMINING THE ORIGINS OF TEMPLE WORSHIP

John Lynch

Review of Jeffrey M. Bradshaw, *Freemasonry and the Origins of Latter-day Saint Temple Ordinances* (Orem, UT: The Interpreter Foundation, 2022). 556 pages. \$39.99 (paperback).

Abstract: *With the precision of a renowned surgeon, the finesse of a master politician, the insights of an eminent theologian, and the artistic skill of an eloquent poet, Jeffrey M. Bradshaw masterfully examines the influence of Masonic rituals and symbolism on the most sacred rites of Latter-day Saints as found in our holy temples.*

Critics of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, as well as temple-going members familiar with Masonic symbolism, find it impossible to dismiss the many parallels that exist between temple rites and the rituals and symbolism found in Freemasonry. Those critical of the Church point to such parallels and decry the similarities as evidence that Joseph Smith simply copied the Masonic symbolism to create the temple rites familiar to millions of Latter-day Saints. Temple-going members, of course, faithfully believing the divine origins of what is considered the restoration of the original Church of Jesus Christ, recognize ancient origins in the rich symbolism found in temple worship. For the past few decades at least, these two views have competed to explain the similarities recognized by many between Masonry and “Mormon” temple worship. Proponents of each approach have, at times, become dogmatic in their dismissal of arguments that appear to contradict their favored view and have simultaneously become potentially blind to their own shortsightedness in recognizing the evidences supporting the opposing view. More recently, arguments favoring a mostly revelatory

source for key elements of temple rites have gained favor, apparently dismissing some or all arguments from both aforementioned camps.

What is one to do when faced with three competing and often compelling explanations? Some say that Joseph copied from Masonry, others say that Joseph restored ancient temple practices, while still others say the temple rites are based in modern revelation. There is much to consider in these three approaches, and it is understandable if the lay member feels caught in the crossfire, so to speak.

In the midst of this occasional “war of words and tumult of opinions,” Jeffrey Bradshaw takes an analytical approach that breaks down the similarities and differences between these two richly symbolic systems of rites, Masonic and temple, and offers an intricately insightful and sometimes nuanced explanation that carefully threads a woven link between all three explanatory approaches. He meticulously examines the key symbolism found in Latter-day Saint temple rites in light of the verifiable history of Masonic influences on Joseph Smith and carefully dissects the various parallels and differences between the two. He considers areas that appear to clearly indicate direct Masonic influence, those that indicate clear or likely connections to ancient Israelite practices and teachings, and those that appear to be new elements of worship.

My first initiation to the parallels between Masonry and temple worship came as a young missionary in Panama in early 1986. I was with another missionary walking the streets of a suburb outside Panama City when a man approached me. I put out my hand to greet him, and as he took hold, he said “No, that is not correct. Let me show you!” and he then proceeded to rearrange the grip of our handshake until it formed a gesture I knew only from the temple, one which I had promised through covenant to keep sacred. I was taken aback, and as I removed my hand from his, I asked, “Are you a Latter-day Saint?”

“No,” he replied, “I am a Mason.”

I was astonished to experience what was, for me, something so sacred being shared outside of a temple setting. What was the reason this man knew what had been revealed to me in the temple where its sacred nature demanded the greatest discretion?

Upon returning from my mission, I inquired with a good friend about what might be the reason for what I had experienced. His explanation was simple: Masonry had an apostate form of temple worship, and some elements I knew of from the temple were retained in the mostly secular Masonic rites. This satisfied me for a time until I met Nick Literski, a fellow ward member in a married student ward at BYU.

He and I struck up a quick friendship, and he introduced me to a host of material regarding temple worship that was new and foreign to me. We shared information, documents, photocopies of books, and we discussed insights that broadened my horizons regarding the significance and sacredness of temple rites. Years later, after helping to establish and form FAIR,¹ I began to familiarize myself with the arguments of the likes of Matt Brown and others who held to a mostly “ancient origins” view for temple rituals and symbolism. These arguments held sway for me but often felt somehow lacking.

Some years ago I acquired a large collection of Masonic titles from Nick, including several books dating back to the early 1800s and one from the late 1700s. At this point, my interest in Masonry and temple parallels took a dramatic leap forward.

My personal views at that time favored the ancient origins hypothesis, but I recognized that Masonic rites did not readily have verifiable connections to the ancient past as some claimed (the argument that Masons actually were of an ancient order maintained since the building of Solomon’s temple). This created questions in my mind until Jeff Bradshaw contacted me, requesting access to the collection of Masonic titles I had acquired.

As we arranged for Bradshaw to access my collection, and as he began to share chapters from his soon-to-be published book on the topic,² I began to reconcile what I knew, believed, and yet still did not have answers for. I found his analysis to have a degree of careful precision that I found refreshingly necessary. I was delighted to discover that he artfully finesses the sensitive nature of discussing sacred temple topics with a reverent openness that allows the initiated temple worshipper to easily recognize the points he discusses, without violating the norms of sacred decorum his temple covenants demand. As he does so, he poetically weaves in insights to temple worship that further broaden my understanding of temple symbolism and its meaning, and he further opens my understanding of the connections the temple has to the distant past. In all of this he reconciles, at least for me, the three predominant

1. FAIR is an organization that focuses on defending The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints. The organization name is an acronym for “Faithful Answers, Informed Response.” See <https://www.fairlatterdaysaints.org/> for more information.

2. Jeffrey M. Bradshaw, *Freemasonry and the Origins of Latter-day Saint Temple Ordinances* (Orem, UT: The Interpreter Foundation, 2022).

claims of temple symbolism origins in relation to Masonic rites, ancient practices, and new revelation.

His approach is one that, as discussed, assimilates the three explanatory approaches mentioned. Borrowing from Joe Steve Swick III, a Mason, historian, and endowed member of the Church, Bradshaw applies the old Victorian wedding gift custom of giving brides something old, something new, something borrowed, and something blue, but changes it for his discussion to “something old, something new, something borrowed, but all true!” For faithful Latter-day Saints, this approach provides a thematic backdrop that recognizes the significance of the three approaches and puts it all within the context of the temple rites having validity and divine influence in terms of our covenant progress and the role of the temple in that “covenant path.” It allows for connections to ancient practices and rites (something old), modern revelation (something new), and Masonic influence (something borrowed), within that faithful context of prophetic inspiration in the origins of Latter-day Saint temple rites.

Bradshaw’s book, like his analysis, is thorough and well organized. After providing proper context for Masonry in general, giving more specific relevance to its influence in the United States and its role in the lives of founding members of the Church, he provides a brief tutorial on the origins of temple worship and some of its recognized evolutions. Then he delves systematically into several areas of potential parallels between the temple and Masonic rites and explores also where they diverge. In doing so, he helps the reader see where the temple rites have strong Masonic connections, where they have stronger ties to ancient origins, and also where new revelation likely served as the source.

Beginning with broad comparisons between temple worship and Masonic systems, he compares Masonic symbolisms to key elements of temple initiatory ordinances, then examines ritual gestures and language patterns, which is where my first introduction to Masonry began as a young missionary in Panama. He then examines what is often referred to as “the endowment” and seeming similarities found in those rites. From there he examines the sealing power and discusses the highest ordinances in the temple referred to as “the fullness of the priesthood.” He concludes his analysis by looking at the architecture, layout, and furnishings of the Nauvoo Temple and two of the crowning adornments found on that historically significant temple.

Throughout his analysis, Bradshaw examines the specific rites of the temple—as much as can be done without stepping beyond propriety

in terms of his temple covenants to hold such things as sacred—and looks carefully at the ancient connections and parallels that exist. He then looks at the same analysis from the perspective of Freemasonry to determine where connections and influence may exist from that source. At the end of each section, he clearly outlines in table form where parallels exist between, for example, the Bible, ancient sources, Freemasonry, and inspiration to Joseph Smith. It is then left largely to the readers to draw their own conclusions about the origins.

Within this analytical context, Bradshaw offers tremendous insights into the many ancient connections our temple rites have with Israelite practices and stories. He demonstrates various connections to ancient traditions and biblical stories and research that connect modern temple practices with ancient ones, and carefully illustrates uncanny parallels that, for me at least, either makes Joseph Smith a genius or a prophet.

I've already intimated the biggest limitation to this wonderfully insightful book several times. As a faithful Latter-day Saint, Bradshaw is precluded from openly discussing some connections and areas of divergence simply because his temple covenants make doing so impossible.³ However, Bradshaw draws on ancient traditions and stories to contextualize comparisons that otherwise are inaccessible due to covenant restrictions. That said, his illustrations and examples are immediately recognizable to temple-endowed Latter-day Saints who can draw upon their own temple experiences to “fill in the blanks” and gain richer insights into his observations and analysis. For this reason, this work is likely to be most useful to faithful Saints who have frequented the temple. Those who are yet to be endowed or are less familiar will still find fascinating connections and insights but may miss some of the more nuanced arguments presented.

Overall, this is a book to read, re-read, then pore over again and again after repeated visits to the temple and expanded readings on temple subjects. It is rich with connections and insights that should be contemplated and studied carefully. Despite all this, Bradshaw's book left me wanting more. The depth and breadth of analysis and comparisons

3. “Impossible” may be the incorrect word here. Bradshaw obviously *could* openly discuss anything related to the temple. However, temple-going members make covenants to not discuss some aspects of temple worship outside of a temple. Bradshaw rightly feels that openly discussing *every* aspect of temple worship would violate those covenants. Some may see that as being academically (and conveniently) selective, but I see such an authorial choice as evidence that Bradshaw takes his temple covenants seriously.

will no doubt continue, and I fervently hope that he will follow this publication with updates and additions.

This book is a must read for anyone interested in the intersection of ancient practice, modern revelation, and Masonic traditions. My final thought after reading this book is that Joseph Smith, in connecting to old practices with new revelation and the influence of Masonic rites, has demonstrated his prophetic mantle, providing a covenant path that leads Latter-day Saints upward in their faithfulness to God through covenants and symbolism to help prepare them to become joint heirs with Christ. Bradshaw makes clear that Masonry provided Joseph Smith a framework and backdrop for integrating ancient, restoration practices with modern revelations held in reserve for this dispensation of the fullness of times. He artfully shares inspiring insights with finesse and precision to enrich our personal understanding of sacred temple rites and the influence of Masonry on the rich tapestry of the temple liturgy.

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“FOR THEIR GOOD HAVE I WRITTEN THEM”: THE ONOMASTIC ALLUSIVITY AND LITERARY FUNCTION OF 2 NEPHI 25:8

Matthew L. Bowen

Abstract: *Nephi’s writings exhibit a distinctive focus on “good” and divine “goodness,” reflecting the meaning of Nephi’s Egyptian name (derived from nfr) meaning “good,” “goodly,” “fine,” or “fair.” Beyond the inclusio playing on his own name in terms of “good” and “goodness” (1 Nephi 1:1; 2 Nephi 33:3–4, 10, 12), he uses a similar inclusio (2 Nephi 5:30–31; 25:7–8) to frame and demarcate a smaller portion of his personal record in which he incorporated a substantial portion of the prophecies of Isaiah (2 Nephi 6–24). This smaller inclusio frames the Isaianic material as having been incorporated into Nephi’s “good” writings on the small plates with an express purpose: the present and future “good” of his and his brothers’ descendants down to the latter days.*

The terms “good”¹ (or “goodly”)² and “goodness”³ recur with sufficient frequency within Nephi’s writings as to constitute a key term therein. While admittedly not all these instances bear the same thematic weight, some have clear, specific contextual connections to Nephi himself, his people, his writings, or to all three. Of these, several appear to have special significance because of their placement within the structure of Nephi’s writings.

The two books of Nephi on Nephi’s small plates begin and end with wordplay on the name *Nephi*⁴ (Egyptian *nfr*⁵ = “good, fine, goodly” in addition to “beautiful, fair”)⁶ in terms of “good” and God’s “goodness.” See 1 Nephi 1:1, which contains the terms “goodly” and “goodness,” and 2 Nephi 33:4, 10, 12, which contain the terms “good” and “goodness.” This onomastic wordplay creates an *inclusio* — a bracketing or bookending device — around the entirety of Nephi’s small plates writings.⁷ This *inclusio* frames the books of 1 and 2 Nephi (originally, both titled “the

Book of Nephi”⁸) as a single book — the book of God’s goodness — emphasizing God’s covenant “goodness,”⁹ Nephi’s good upbringing from “goodly” parents, and the “good” contained in the doctrine of Christ, all of which have their source in God as the supreme Good.

In this short study, I will propose an additional instance of wordplay on the name *Nephi*, both as a personal name and the gentilic eponym¹⁰ (or *demonym*)¹¹ of those who became Nephi’s people, the Nephites — the “good” or “fair ones”: “I know that they [the words of Isaiah] shall be of great worth unto them [Nephi’s people] in the last days, for in that day shall they understand them. Wherefore for their **good** have I written them” (2 Nephi 25:8).¹² Moreover, similar to the wordplay on Nephi in terms of God’s “goodness” that begins and concludes the former’s writings, this wordplay functions as a closing bracket for a smaller but crucially important literary unit consisting of Jacob’s Isaiah-based covenant sermon in 2 Nephi 6–10, Nephi’s witness statement in 2 Nephi 11, Nephi’s great Isaiah block in 2 Nephi 12–25, and Nephi’s keys to understanding Isaiah in 2 Nephi 25:1–7.¹³ The closing bracket of the *inclusio*, 2 Nephi 25:8, functions in tandem with the opening bracket, 2 Nephi 5:30–31 — “thou shalt engraven many things upon them **which are good** in my sight for the profit of thy people.” This unit envelopes the largest concentration of the words of Isaiah in the Book of Mormon and defines one of its major purposes: the “good” of Nephi’s and his brothers’ descendants in the last days.

“For Their Good”:

A Twofold Onomastic Allusion to Nephi and Nephites

The Book of Mormon name Nephi is best explained as the Egyptian word *nfr*,¹⁴ meaning “good,” “goodly,” “fine,” or “fair,”¹⁵ and pronounced nay-fee, neh-fee,¹⁶ or nou-fee.¹⁷ The complete shift in pronunciation of final *-r* to final *-y/i* in *nfr* is evident in the orthography of at least one Demotic papyrus document (P Berlin 6750, 5/7) where it is written as *nfy*, in the phrase *nfy ntr* (the “good god”).¹⁸ Egyptologist James Allen believes the masculine adjectival form came to be pronounced “something like **nafi*.”¹⁹ Regarding the pronunciation shifts in Egyptian words characteristic of *nfr* to *nfy*, Allen further notes that “[t]he hieroglyphic system had no regular way of indicating such vocalic endings. In writing these words, scribes could ignore the sound changes and use traditional spelling — in the same way that standard English still writes *light* even though the *gh* sound is no longer pronounced. Often, however, a scribe

would attempt to 'modernize' the spelling."²⁰ The spelling *nfy* constitutes an example of this phenomenon.

Nfr occurs as a common element in Egyptian personal names and as a personal name in its own right.²¹ John Gee has further shown that "Nephi is an attested Syro-Palestinian Semitic form of an attested Egyptian man's name dating from the Late Period in Egypt."²² Nephi makes several direct allusions to the meaning of his name throughout his small-plates writings, beginning with the autobiographical introduction that commences his record: "I **Nephi** having been born of **goodly** parents ... yea, having had a great knowledge of the **goodness** and the mysteries of God" (1 Nephi 1:1, see further below).²³ Concluding his adumbration of five "keys to understanding Isaiah's words,"²⁴ Nephi offers a statement of purpose for his large-scale incorporation of Isaiah's writings and Jacob's Isaiah-based covenant sermon:

But behold, I proceed with mine own prophecy according to my plainness, in the which I know that no man can err. Nevertheless in the days that the prophecies of Isaiah shall be fulfilled, men shall know of a surety at the times when they shall come to pass. Wherefore they are of worth unto the children of men. And he that supposeth that they are not, unto them will I speak particularly and confine the words unto mine own people, for I know that they shall be of great worth unto them in the last days, for in that day shall they understand them. Wherefore **for their good** have I written them. (2 Nephi 25:7–8)

Nephi's use of "good" (Egyptian *nfr* or Hebrew *tób*) here, as in other instances within his writings, has reference to his own name. It also has reference to his people, "the people Nephi," whose "good" or welfare he labored for all his days (cf. Jacob 1:10). Nephi's people had, in his own time, taken upon them the name of "Nephi" and bestowed that name on their land and capital: "And my people would that we should call the name of the place **Nephi**; wherefore we did call it **Nephi**. And all they which were with me did take upon them to call themselves the people of **Nephi**" (2 Nephi 5:8–9). "Likening" Zenos's allegory or parable to themselves, as Zenos invited his ancient Israelite audience to do,²⁵ the Nephites might have recognized themselves as the "good" people — or "that part of the tree which brought forth good fruit" living in the "good" place or the "good spot of ground" (see Jacob 5:25–26, 40, 43, 45–46), as Jacob (at the very least) seems to have done.²⁶ They were the "fair ones" (see 1 Nephi 13:15; Jacob 2:32 Mosiah 19:13–14; 3 Nephi 2:16;

8:25; 9:2; 4 Nephi 1:10; Mormon 6:17–19; 9:6; cf. 2 Nephi 5:21).²⁷ We should note here that *Nephites* as “*fair*” and “*fair ones*” might have no racial implications at all.²⁸ Further, if the range of meaning for “*fair*,” as representing Egyptian *nfr*, is wide enough to include “open; frank; honest; hence, equal; just; equitable”²⁹ as reflecting “lawful,”³⁰ the Lamanites and Nephites *becoming* “*fair*” would instead have direct reference to their righteousness and conformity to God’s law (see especially 2 Nephi 5:8–10; 25:24; Jarom 1:5, 11; Helaman 13:1; 15:5; 4 Nephi 1:10–12).

However, Nephi’s vision for the “good” of his people extended well beyond their welfare during his own time. Nephi’s writing of Isaiah’s words, in which his soul so greatly “delighte[d],”³¹ was calculated for the “good” of his descendants and those of his brethren — to help them become “good” again in the latter days.

Another “Good” *Inclusio*:
Nephi’s Framing of Two Isaiah Blocks

Nephi’s small plates record, which consists of two books both titled “the book of Nephi,”³² begins and ends with an emphasis on “good” and the “goodness of God”:

Opening Bracket: 1 Nephi 1:1	Closing Bracket: 2 Nephi 33:3–4, 10, 12
I Nephi [Egyptian <i>nfr</i> = good] having been born of goodly parents, therefore I was taught somewhat in all the learning of my father. And having seen many afflictions in the course of my days, nevertheless having been highly favored of the Lord in all my days, yea, having had a great knowledge of the goodness and the mysteries of God , therefore I make a record of my proceedings in my days.	But I Nephi have written what I have written, and I esteem it as of great worth, and especially unto my people. ... And the things [words] ³³ which I have written in weakness will he make strong unto them, for it persuadeth them to do good . It maketh known unto them of their fathers. And it speaketh of Jesus and persuadeth men to believe in him and to endure to the end, which is life eternal. ... And now my beloved brethren and also Jew and all ye ends of the earth, hearken unto these words and believe in Christ. And if ye believe not in these words, believe in Christ; and if ye shall believe in Christ, ye will believe in these words, for they are the words of Christ. And he hath given them unto me, and they teach all men that they should do good And you that will not partake of the goodness of God and respect the words of the Jews and also my words and the words which shall proceed forth out of the mouth of the Lamb of God, behold, I bid you an everlasting farewell, for these words shall condemn you at the last day.

By the conclusion of Nephi's writings on his small plates, readers have a thorough sense of his character, motivations, and commitment to God. In 2 Nephi 33:3–4, 10, Nephi recalls the wordplay that made his "good" name and character attributable to the teaching of his parents, with a statement that his writings "persuade ... to do good" and "teach all men that they should do good." These writings thus suit their "good" author and perpetuate a legacy of good among Nephi's and his brothers' descendants by inculcating good — especially obedience to the doctrine of Christ. Nephi's people, contemporary and latter-day, thereby become "good."

At the outset of his record, moreover, Nephi lists among his reasons for making his record the fact that he had acquired "a great knowledge of the goodness and the mysteries of God." Nephi returns to this concept a final time at the end of his record when he declares that those who are not willing to "partake of the goodness of God" will be condemned by three scriptural witnesses at the final judgment (meeting the requirements of the Deuteronomic law of witnesses for capital cases in Deuteronomy 17:6 and 19:15).³⁴ All of the foregoing constitutes an *inclusio*, clearly framing Nephi's entire small plates text (1–2 Nephi) and demarcating the unifying theme and purpose for all his writings: the promotion of the divine "good" and "goodness" available through Jesus Christ and his atonement.

Significantly, this unifying theme and purpose underlie Nephi's incorporation of the lengthiest quoted blocks of Isaiah writings within Nephi's writings. Nephi uses another *inclusio* centered upon divine "good" to frame Jacob's covenant sermon³⁵ with its quotation of Isaiah 49:22–52:2, Nephi's witness declaration in 2 Nephi 11, and Nephi's lengthy quotation of Isaiah 2–14. Thirty years after Lehi and his family had left Jerusalem and more than twenty years after they had arrived in the land of promise,³⁶ Nephi records the revelation in which the Lord commanded him to make a second set of plates beyond those that he had already made and upon which he been faithfully keeping a record.³⁷ A comparison of this revelation (2 Nephi 5:30–31) with Nephi's statement of purpose in 2 Nephi 25:8 helps us see how closely aligned Nephi's purposes in his incorporation of the prophecies of Isaiah were with the Lord's vision for the contents of Nephi's small plates:

Opening Bracket: 2 Nephi 5:30–31	Closing Bracket: 2 Nephi 25:7–8
And it came to pass that the Lord God said unto me: Make other plates; and thou shalt engraven many things upon them which are good in my sight for the profit of thy people. Wherefore I Nephi , to be obedient to the commandments of the Lord, went and made these plates upon which I have engraven these things.	But behold, I proceed with mine own prophecy according to my plainness, in the which I know that no man can err. Nevertheless in the days that the prophecies of Isaiah shall be fulfilled, men shall know of a surety at the times when they shall come to pass. Wherefore they are of worth unto the children of men. And he that supposeth that they are not, unto them will I speak particularly and confine the words unto mine own people, for I know that they shall be of great worth unto them in the last days, for in that day shall they understand them. Wherefore for their good have I written them.

In 2 Nephi 5:30–31, Nephi clearly delineates the Lord’s purpose in Nephi’s keeping the small plates: “And thou shalt engraven many things upon them which are good in my sight.” This statement appropriately alludes to Nephi’s personal name as the author of a second set of plates called “the plates of Nephi” or the “plates of *good*”:

And now as I have spoken concerning these plates, behold, they are not the plates upon which I make a full account of the history of my people, for the plates upon which I make a full account of my people I have given the name of Nephi; wherefore they are called the plates of Nephi after mine own name. And **these plates also are called the plates of Nephi.** (1 Nephi 9:2)

Nephi then, even in naming his record, hews closely to the Lord’s stated intent for the small plates when he avers regarding the prophecies of Isaiah that he has just written on the small plates, “wherefore for their [my own people’s] **good** have I written them.” The Lord’s former statement in 2 Nephi 5:30–31, which comes just prior to Jacob’s Isaiah 49:22–52:2-based sermon, acts in tandem with Nephi’s latter declaration in 2 Nephi 25:7–8 to form an *inclusio* around the largest body of Isaianic material in Nephi’s writings and in the Book of Mormon as a whole.

It is not difficult to hear the echoes of 2 Nephi 5:30–31 and 2 Nephi 25:7–8 in 2 Nephi 33:3–4:

But I Nephi have written what I have written, and I esteem it as of great worth and especially unto my people. ... And the things [words] which I have written in weakness will he make strong unto them, for it **persuadeth them to do good.** It maketh known unto them of their fathers. And it speaketh of

Jesus and persuadeth men to believe in him and to endure to the end, which is life eternal.

The things “good in [the Lord’s] sight” that Nephi has written and the “good” of his people for which he is writing them ultimately cannot be separated from the “good” that these writings persuade people to do — especially the doctrine of Christ (including believing in him and enduring to the end in faith, hope, and charity, which Noel Reynolds has demonstrated constitutes the equivalent of coming unto Christ).³⁸ Becoming good requires doing good. Becoming like Christ requires living the doctrine of Christ and helping others to do so.

“He Doeth That Which Is Good ... and He Inviteth Them All to Come unto Him and Partake of His Goodness”:

Nephi’s Use of Isaiah 55:1–2 as Evidence for His Framing

More evidence for Nephi’s seeing and framing the words of Isaiah in terms of the “good” of his people emerges in Nephi’s exegetical interpretation of Isaiah 55:1–2, which follows soon after the 2 Nephi 5:30–31 and 25:7–8 *inclusio*. This interpretation also roots this “good” in the “goodness” of God. In explaining the Lord’s perfect righteousness and the selfless motivation for doing all that he does, Nephi uses the language of Isaiah 55:1–2 to explain the following:

He doeth not any thing save it be for the benefit of the world, for he loveth the world, even that he layeth down his own life that he may draw all men unto him; wherefore he commandeth none that they shall not partake of his salvation. Behold, doth he cry unto any, saying: Depart from me! Behold, I say unto you: Nay. But he saith: Come unto me, all ye ends of the earth; buy milk and honey without money and without price. (2 Nephi 26:24–25)

In giving this explanation of the Lord’s love for humankind, Nephi clearly offers an interpretation of Isaiah 55:1–2 in terms of coming unto Christ, which he equates with the fifth principle of the doctrine of Christ:

Ho, every one that thirsteth, come ye to the waters, and he that hath no money; come ye, buy, and eat; yea, come, buy wine and milk without money and without price. Wherefore do ye spend money for that which is not bread? and your labour for that which satisfieth not? hearken diligently unto me, and **eat ye that which is good** [Hebrew *tôb*], and let your soul delight itself in fatness.

Interestingly, Nephi's interpretation changes "wine" (Hebrew *yayin*) to milk, perhaps in a deliberate allusion to the stereotyped description of the promised land as a "land flowing with milk and honey,"³⁹ emphasizing the covenant nature of the blessings enumerated in both his and Isaiah's texts. In any case, Nephi clearly understands the symbolic and spiritual character of the waters, wine/milk, honey, bread, and olive oil (or "fatness") as sustenance: it is that which is truly "good."

The KJV phrase "eat ye that which is good" (Hebrew *wə'iklû tōb*) from Isaiah 55:2 could just as well be translated "partake ye of that which is good." This phrase emerges in the English translation of Nephi's quotation of the phrase as "partake of ... goodness." Nephi continues to interpret Isaiah 55:2 as he asks, "Behold, hath the Lord commanded any that they should not **partake of his goodness**? Behold I say unto you: Nay. But all men are privileged the one like unto the other, and none are forbidden" (2 Nephi 26:28).

Then Nephi's exegesis of Isaiah 55:1–2 culminates in one of the great statements on the universal availability of God and the equality of all humankind before him in all of scripture. Nephi emphasizes the Lord's doing "good" and his "goodness." The source again is Isaiah's invitation to "come" and "eat that which is good":

For he doeth that which is good among the children of men. And he doeth nothing save it be plain unto the children of men. And he **inviteth them all to come unto him and partake of his goodness**. And he denieth none that come unto him, black and white, bond and free, male and female; and he remembereth the heathen. And all are alike unto God, both Jew and Gentile. (2 Nephi 26:33)

Nephi knew that partaking of the goodness of God and partaking of his salvation would enable his people — and all humankind — to become truly good.

Conclusion

Nephi's writings on the small plates exhibit a distinctive focus on "good" and divine "goodness." This focus appropriately reflects the meaning of Nephi's Egyptian name, which derives from Egyptian *nfr*, meaning "good," "goodly," "fine," or "fair." Nephi frames his writings on the front end (1 Nephi 1:1) and the back end (2 Nephi 33:3–4, 10, 12) with an *inclusio* involving wordplay on his own name in terms of "good" and "goodness," but he also uses a similar *inclusio* (2 Nephi 5:30–31;

25:7–8) to frame and demarcate a smaller portion of his personal record in which he incorporated a sizeable portion of the prophecies of Isaiah (2 Nephi 6–24). This smaller *inclusio* frames the Isaiah material as having been incorporated into Nephi's "good" writings on the small plates for the present and future "good" of his and his brothers' descendants down to the latter-days.

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Endnotes

- 1 See 1 Nephi 17:25; 18:4; 2 Nephi 2:5, 11, 18, 23, 26, 30; 3:24; 5:30; 9:29; 15:20; 17:15–16; 25:8; 26:33; 27:14; 28:16, 20; 33:4, 10.
- 2 See 1 Nephi 1:1.
- 3 See 1 Nephi 1:1; 14; 5:4; 2 Nephi 1:10; 4:17; 9:10; 26:28, 33; 33:14.
- 4 Matthew L. Bowen, "Nephi's Good Inclusio," *Interpreter: A Journal of Mormon Scripture* 17 (2016): 181–95; see also Matthew L. Bowen, *Name as Key-Word: Collected Essays on Onomastic Wordplay and the Temple in Mormon Scripture* (Salt Lake City and Orem, UT: Eborn Books and Interpreter Foundation, 2018), 1–15.
- 5 See John Gee, "A Note on the Name Nephi," *Journal of Book of Mormon Studies* 1, no. 1 (1992): 189–91.

- 6 Raymond O. Faulkner, *A Concise Dictionary of Middle Egyptian* (Oxford: Griffith Institute, 1999), 131–32. See also Adolf Erman and Hermann Grapow, *Wörterbuch der Aegyptischen Sprache* (Berlin: Akademie Verlag, 1971), 2:252–63.
- 7 Bowen, “Nephi’s Good Inclusio”; Bowen, *Name as Key-Word*, 1–15.
- 8 Royal Skousen, *The Critical Text of the Book of Mormon*, vol. 4, *Analysis of Textual Variants of the Book of Mormon*, Part One: *1 Nephi 1–2 Nephi 10* (Provo, UT: FARMS, 2004), 42–43.
- 9 Noel B. Reynolds, “The Goodness of God and His Children as a Fundamental Theological Concept in the Book of Mormon,” *Interpreter: A Journal of Latter-day Saint Faith and Scholarship* 46 (2021): 131–56, <https://journal.interpreterfoundation.org/the-goodness-of-god-and-his-children-as-a-fundamental-theological-concept-in-the-book-of-mormon/>.
- 10 An *eponym* (Greek *epi* + *onyma* [*onoma*], ‘name’) is a name derived from the name of a particular person or place. *Gentilic* (Latin *gentilis*, ‘nation,’ ‘tribe’) as an adjective relates to the name of a nation, tribe, or people.
- 11 A *demonym* (Greek *demos*, ‘people’ + *onyma* [*onoma*] ‘name’) is the name of a people, tribe, clan, etc.
- 12 Bolded emphasis in all scriptural citations is mine. Book of Mormon citations will generally follow Royal Skousen, ed., *The Book of Mormon: The Earliest Text* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2009).
- 13 On Nephi’s “keys” to understanding Isaiah, see Donald W. Parry, “Nephi’s Keys to Understanding Isaiah (2 Nephi 25:1–8),” in *Isaiah in the Book of Mormon*, ed. Donald W. Parry and John W. Welch (Provo, UT: FARMS, 1998), 47–65.
- 14 Gee, “A Note;” see also John Gee, “Four Suggestions on the Origin of the Name Nephi,” in *Pressing Forward with the Book of Mormon: The FARMS Updates of the 1990s*, ed. John W. Welch and Melvin J. Thorne (Provo, UT: FARMS, 1999), 1–5.
- 15 Faulkner, *Dictionary of Middle Egyptian*, 131–32.
- 16 Gee, “A Note,” 191.
- 17 Gee, “Four Suggestions,” 2.

- 18 See Janet H. Johnson, ed., *The Demotic Dictionary of the Oriental Institute of the University of Chicago*, vol. 11, *N* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2004), 74.
- 19 James P. Allen, *Middle Egyptian: An Introduction to the Language and Culture of Hieroglyphs*, 2nd rev. ed. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010), 223.
- 20 Ibid.
- 21 Hermann Ranke cites numerous examples of *nfr* as personal name in its own right. Hermann Ranke, *Die Ägyptischen Personennamen* (Glückstadt, J. J. Augustin, 1935), 1:194.
- 22 Gee, "A Note," 191.
- 23 Matthew L. Bowen, "Internal Textual Evidence for the Egyptian Origin of Nephi's Name," *Insights: A Window on the Ancient World* 22, no. 11 (2002): 2.
- 24 Parry, "Nephi's Keys."
- 25 Jacob 5:3. Nephi and Jacob may owe their concept of "likening" to Zenos himself (cf. 1 Nephi 19:23–24; 2 Nephi 11:2, 8).
- 26 The implications of Jacob 5:25–26, 40, 43, 45–46 for Nephite self-understanding will be the subject of a forthcoming study.
- 27 See Matthew L. Bowen, "'O Ye Fair Ones': An Additional Note on the Meaning of the Name Nephi," *Insights: A Window on the Ancient World* 23, no. 6 (2003): 2; Matthew L. Bowen, "'O Ye Fair Ones' — Revisited," *Interpreter: A Journal of Mormon Scripture* 20 (2016): 315–45, <https://journal.interpreterfoundation.org/o-ye-fair-ones-revisited/>. See also more recently Matthew L. Bowen, "Laman and Nephi as Key-Words: An Etymological, Narratological, and Rhetorical Approach to Understanding Lamanites and Nephites as Religious, Political, and Cultural Descriptors," FAIR Conference, FAIR, accessed August 26, 2022, <https://www.fairlatterdaysaints.org/conference/august-2019/laman-and-nephi-as-key-words>.
- 28 See, e.g., Amy Easton-Flake, "Lehi's Dream as a Template for Understanding Each Act of Nephi's Vision," in *The Things Which My Father Saw: Approaches to Lehi's Dream and Nephi's Vision*, ed. Daniel L. Belnap, Gaye Strathearn, and Stanley A. Johnson (Provo, UT: Religious Studies Center, Brigham Young University; Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 2011), 188–89; Brant A. Gardner, *Second Witness: Analytical and Contextual Commentary on the Book of*

- Mormon*, vol. 5, *Helaman through 3 Nephi* (Salt Lake City: Greg Kofford Books, 2007), 126–27; and Bowen, “Laman and Nephi as Key-Words.”
- 29 Noah Webster, *An American Dictionary of the English Language* (New York: S. Converse, 1828), s.v. “fair,” <https://webstersdictionary1828.com/Dictionary/fair>.
- 30 Faulkner, *Dictionary of Middle Egyptian*, 131.
- 31 2 Nephi 11:2–6; 25:4–5; cf. 2 Nephi 4:15–16; 25:13; 31:3.
- 32 Skousen, *Critical Text*, 4:1:42–43.
- 33 On the original reading “things” (vs. “words”), see Royal Skousen, *Critical Text*, vol. 4, *Analysis of Textual Variants of the Book of Mormon*, Part Two: 2 Nephi 11–Mosiah 16 (Provo, UT: FARMS, 2005), 924–25. In Hebrew and Egyptian, the word for “word” and “thing” are represented by a single lexeme — *dābār* and *mdw/md.t/mt.t*, respectively. Therefore, the translation would stand correct with either reading. Paul Hoskisson has pointed out that “word(s)” and “thing(s)” can be used interchangeably in numerous places in the Book of Mormon text. Paul Y. Hoskisson, “Straightening Things Out: The Use of ‘Strait’ and ‘Straight’ in the Book of Mormon,” *Journal of Book of Mormon Studies* 12, no. 2 (2003): 58–71, 114–17, <https://scholarsarchive.byu.edu/jbms/vol12/iss2/7/>.
- 34 On Nephi’s use of the law of witnesses in 2 Nephi, see Bruce A. Van Orden, “The Law of Witnesses in 2 Nephi,” in *The Book of Mormon: Second Nephi, The Doctrinal Structure*, ed. Monte S. Nyman and Charles D. Tate, Jr. (Provo, UT: Religious Studies Center, 1989), 307–21; Bruce A. Van Orden, “‘We Prophesy of Christ’: The Law of Witnesses in 2 Nephi,” *Ensign* 20, no. 2 (February 1990): 22–25.
- 35 On this covenant sermon, see John S. Thompson, “Isaiah 50–51, the Israelite Autumn Festivals, and the Covenant Speech of Jacob in 2 Nephi 6–10,” in *Isaiah in the Book of Mormon*, ed. Donald W. Parry and John W. Welch (Provo, UT: FARMS, 1998), 123–50.
- 36 2 Nephi 5:28: “And thirty years had passed away from the time we left Jerusalem.”
- 37 2 Nephi 5:29: “And I, Nephi, had kept the records upon my plates, which I had made, of my people thus far.”
- 38 Noel B. Reynolds, “‘Come unto Me’ as a Technical Gospel Term,” *Interpreter: A Journal of Latter-day Saint Faith and Scholarship*

- 31 (2019): 1–24, <https://journal.interpreterfoundation.org/come-unto-me-as-a-technical-gospel-term/>.
- 39 See, e.g., Exodus 3:8, 17; 13:5; 33:3; Numbers 13:27; 14:8; 16:13–14; Deuteronomy 26:9, 15; 27:3; 31:20; Joshua 5:6; Jeremiah 11:5; 32:22; Ezekiel 20:6, 15. Cf. D&C 38:18.

THE CONTINUING SAGA OF SAINTS

Craig L. Foster

Review of *Saints: The Story of the Church of Jesus Christ in the Latter Days: Volume 3: Boldly, Nobly, and Independent: 1893–1955* (Salt Lake City: The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, 2022). 757 pages. \$6.90 (paperback).

Abstract: *Volume 3 of Saints is a readable and engaging narrative discussing a dynamic and transitional period of the history of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints. As with the previous volumes in the series, it is approachable and enjoyable for almost all reading audiences.*

The *Saints* series has undertaken what, at face value, appears to be an almost impossible job — to tell the story of the restoration of the Gospel of Jesus Christ in a readable and engaging narrative. With each volume it naturally gets more difficult to achieve that goal because of the expanse of the unfolding chronicle.

Saints: The Story of the Church of Jesus Christ in the Latter Days: Volume 3: Boldly, Nobly, and Independent: 1893–1955 takes a number of disparate stories and deftly and delicately interweaves them into a smooth narrative discussing the history of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints in a dynamic and transitional period. The result is a beautifully interwoven fabric that includes not only corporate and elite history but also inspiring stories of common, everyday members of the church.

Among the numerous stories that help set the scene and move the history forward are those of Wilford Woodruff, Lorenzo Snow, Joseph F. Smith, Heber J. Grant, John and Leah Widtsoe, Susa Young Gates, Amy Brown Lyman, Clarissa Williams, and Zina Young. Of the common, everyday members of the church whose interesting stories also move the narrative along are Paul and Connie Bang of Cincinnati, Ohio;

Helga Birth of Germany; Jeanne Charrier of Valence, France; the Daniels family of South Africa; Len and Mary Hope, African-American Saints in Alabama; Anna Kullick and other German expatriates residing in Argentina; Rafael Monroy of San Marcos, Mexico; the Maori Whaanga family of New Zealand and Utah; Toshiko and Tokichi Yanagida of Nagoya, Japan; and a host of others. Furthermore, as women and people of various races and ethnicities have played an important role in church history, they also play an important role in this volume.

For the most part, this volume of *Saints* doesn't shy away from potentially difficult and uncomfortable topics. For example, the book discusses post-Manifesto plural marriages and the confusion this caused among some members (83–86, 106–108, 113–14); the forced resignations of apostles Matthias Cowley and John W. Taylor due to political pressure during the Reed Smoot hearings (115–16); Mexico's Third Convention movement and estrangement from church leadership (369–70, 373, 485–88); the excommunication of Helmuth Hübener in Germany before he was executed by the Nazis (439); and George Albert Smith's continued problems with anxiety and depression (517–19).

Despite the refreshing willingness to discuss difficult historical information, the authors still shied away from some topics. For instance, no mention is made of Fawn McKay Brodie, a niece of David O. McKay, at that time a counselor in the First Presidency, and her controversial book, *No Man Knows My History*.¹ Despite flaws and questionable analysis, Brodie's book is considered ground-breaking and caused a resurgence in researching and writing about Joseph Smith. Indeed, there are some who suggest her book encouraged a new approach that produced the new Latter-day Saint history which has had significant influence on historical research in the church.

Furthermore, while Richard R. Lyman is mentioned in the book, his 1943 excommunication is completely ignored. Lyman's excommunication for breaking the law of chastity sent shock waves through the Latter-day Saint community and should have been discussed in relation to media coverage as well as continuing attitudes and ambivalence regarding plural marriage. For that matter, there is absolutely no mention of the fundamentalist Latter-day Saint movement, which caused enough trouble for the church that the Grant administration felt the need to address it in what has come to be called the Third or Final Manifesto, which was read in General Conference in 1933 by J. Reuben Clark.

1. Fawn Brodie, *No Man Knows My History: The Life of Joseph Smith* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1945).

Notwithstanding these omissions, it should be remembered that *Saints* “is not a comprehensive history, nor is it the only possible telling of the Church’s sacred history” (610). The authors by necessity had to pick and choose what would be in the book and some important events and stories didn’t make the final cut. Nevertheless, the book is still an entertaining and inspiring read. But the entertainment factor should not make readers think it isn’t a scholarly work. “This volume is a work of narrative nonfiction based on hundreds of historical sources” (610). In fact, there are over 120 pages of endnotes and primary and secondary sources cited.

Ultimately, *Saints: The Story of the Church of Jesus Christ in the Latter Days: Volume 3: Boldly, Nobly, and Independent: 1893–1955* is approachable and enjoyable for almost all reading audiences. It is well worth the time and effort to read and is another wonderful addition to the planned four-volume series.

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THE LAST NEPHITE SCRIBES

Noel B. Reynolds

Abstract: *In an earlier paper, I concluded that Lehi and Nephi were highly trained Josephite scribes and were associated with an official Jerusalem scribal school that preserved ancient Manassite traditions. There they acquired advanced writing skills and classical Hebrew and Egyptian, which would become the scriptural languages of the Nephite peoples. These they maintained in the new promised land and passed on from generation to generation through the entire thousand-year Nephite dispensation, even though the Nephite language itself would naturally evolve. Evidence of how they did this surfaces repeatedly throughout the Book of Mormon. The following paper documents how both Mormon and his son Moroni abridged and concluded the religious, military, and political records of Book of Mormon peoples, thus preserving key elements of the vast Nephite records collection for a later dispensation. That scribal process parallels the roles and schools of other cultures of the ancient Near East.*

The picture of Moroni, the last Nephite prophet, and his activities after the final battle which seems to prevail with contemporary readers of the Book of Mormon is both simple and straightforward. Still a relatively young man, Moroni is usually described as being completely alone, hiding from still vengeful Lamanites while working to complete his father's abridgement of the Nephite records, which he would then hide up in the same hill where the great battle had occurred. But the ongoing accumulation of relevant scholarly discoveries about ancient scribalism and more careful readings of Moroni's own account now invite the construction of a significantly revised and enriched description of Moroni's last days.

As it turns out, the occasional references to the Nephite records in Mormon's abridgement and in Nephi's Small Plates do constitute a complete record of the transmission of the Nephite records from

one generation to another. When we read these accounts from the perspective of ancient Near Eastern (hereafter ANE) history and record keeping, it becomes obvious that the Nephites from Nephi to Mormon maintained an official scribal school that kept detailed records of the people, the prophecies and revelations given to the prophets, and the wars and contentions with the Lamanites.

Nephite society may have been tiny in comparison to the great empires of Assyria, Hatti, Egypt, and Babylon. Consequentially, its small governing elite seemed to share the leadership responsibilities of the government administration, the military, the priesthood, and the educational and record-keeping functions of scribes that would have belonged to more specialized peoples in those great ANE empires. In Nephite society, the scribal responsibilities passed back and forth among kings, judges, prophets, and military leaders, suggesting that they were also trained scribes (as will be discussed below). The scribal responsibility always centered in the same charge: to maintain and preserve the same sets of records and other sacred objects and to educate successor generations in high literacy and in the classic languages (Egyptian and Hebrew) of the Brass Plates, their “holy scriptures.” The Nephite experience with scribal training most likely followed the documented pattern of earlier ANE societies, in that students dropped out at different training levels. Many more students achieved minimal or functional literacy than persevered to the highest levels.

The larger scribal charge was always understood in the context of the same prophecy that had been given to Nephi, Lehi, and even to Abraham. These prophets had seen in vision that in the last days the records of the Nephites would become the key tool by which the descendants of Lehi, the Gentiles, and the house of Israel would be gathered in by the Lord as they received the knowledge of the gospel originally revealed to the first Nephite prophets and taught to the Nephites by Jesus Christ in person. Further, that official scribal school would maintain competency in ancient Hebrew and Egyptian, the languages of their scriptures in the Brass Plates and the Small Plates of Nephi, even while their own Nephite vernacular would evolve in normal ways, becoming unrecognizable to any other people.¹

1. See Mosiah 1:2 and Mormon 9:32–33.

A Nephite Scribal Tradition

The realization that Ammaron, Mormon, and Moroni were all key players in the Nephite scribal school that traced its origins and mission back to Lehi and Nephi, the prophetic founders of the Nephite dispensation, has influenced me the most in this undertaking. Students of literacy today have studied the rise and progress of a multitude of writing systems over the last five millennia. They agree generally that widespread literacy, defined as the ability to read and compose complex texts, never existed anywhere until after the invention of the printing press. While the general public could use rudimentary writing in practical ways in their lives, the reading and writing of complex texts was left to specially trained scribes — the products of family-based scribal schools — who are estimated to have constituted between one and five percent of the general population in ancient Mesopotamia, Egypt, Israel, Asia, Mesoamerica, and in Europe before Gutenberg.²

All ancient cultures were based in orality, and a high-level literacy was the province of small elites wherever it existed. Scribal training and jobs varied widely in the level of competence achieved or required. While some were only trained to manage limited repetitive tasks, others might receive up to fifteen years of formal training, with continuing collegial activity beyond that, which enabled them to interact with colleagues and texts in creative and thoughtful ways.

Renowned Hebrew epigrapher Christopher Rollston has responded strongly to a variety of arguments other scholars have advanced against the assumption that the culture of Israel included a system of elite scribal schools like those known for centuries in Mesopotamia and Egypt:

I am convinced that the Old Hebrew [preexilic] epigraphic evidence demonstrates that there was formal, standardized scribal education in ancient Israel. ... The Old Hebrew data are most consistent with the presence of a mechanism for the

2. For an in-depth exploration of the history of Israelite scribal schools from a Book of Mormon perspective, see Noel B. Reynolds, “Lehi and Nephi as Trained Manassite Scribes,” *Interpreter: A Journal of Latter-day Saint Faith and Scholarship* 50 (2022): 161–215. The undefended generalizations about scribal schools and families that will occur throughout this paper are explained and documented in that previous paper. Where it has been possible to examine the membership in those ANE schools in detail, it appears that about half of the scribes are clearly related. Because scribal families usually maintained other businesses, not all family members would necessarily be trained as scribes.

formal, standardized education of scribal elites in ancient Israel.³

John Gee has demonstrated that the use of *and now* in the Book of Mormon is borrowed and used correctly from Hebrew writing as taught in pre-exilic scribal schools. Citing Rollston, he concludes that

As an offshoot of the tradition of Biblical Hebrew, the Book of Mormon seems to have kept this pre-exilic scribal convention when the main line of Hebrew abandoned it. This may be a function of the scribal education of Book of Mormon authors.⁴

A Josephite Scribal Tradition

The Brass Plates of Lehi and Nephi are best explained as a late product of a Manassite scribal school that persisted from the time of ancient Joseph in Egypt down to the last decades before the destruction of Jerusalem when Lehi and Nephi were trained as scribes.⁵ That scribal school was defined by its preservation of an alternative Josephite history and prophetic record in the Egyptian language and of competency in that language and script for its scribes. By Lehi's time, these northerners were living as refugees in Jerusalem and were partially integrated into the Judahite scribal world.

The Judahite scribal practice in the late seventh century BCE featured writing in the relatively new Hebrew script (now known as Old Hebrew or paleo Hebrew) and the newly standardized Hebrew language. Scholars believe that these Judahite scribal schools produced the Hebrew Bible in the seventh and sixth centuries BCE. The hypothesized Josephite scribal school disappeared after Lehi, Nephi, and possibly others were driven out and after the Babylonians destroyed Jerusalem and took its remaining elites into captivity.⁶

3. Christopher A. Rollston, *Writing and Literacy in the World of Ancient Israel: Epigraphic Evidence from the Iron Age* (Atlanta: Society of Biblical Literature, 2010), 91–92.

4. John Gee, “Verbal Punctuation in the Book of Mormon I: (And) Now,” *Interpreter: A Journal of Latter-day Saint Faith and Scholarship* 50 (2022): 44.

5. See Noel B. Reynolds, “A Backstory for the Brass Plates,” *Interpreter: A Journal of Latter-day Saint Faith and Scholarship* (2022), forthcoming.

6. Intriguing potential corroborating evidence for this appears in the memoirs of a seventeenth-century British sea captain who worked the western coast of India for three decades. Alexander Hamilton wrote that in his many contacts with the ancient Jewish colony in Kerala, those people told him that they were descendants

Anyone from seventh-century Jerusalem who had written a book and explained that production, while saying he “had been taught somewhat in all the learning of [his] father” (1 Nephi 1:1), would have been readily identified as a highly trained scribe. That identification would be doubly confirmed when in reading the book, we find it has been carefully composed following the distinctive structuring principles of Hebrew rhetoric which reached their apogee of development in the scribal schools of late seventh-century Jerusalem — as has been argued by contemporary Bible scholars.⁷

A Nephite Scribal School

The strongest evidence for a scribal school that played a significant role in Nephite society throughout its thousand-year history is Mormon’s abridgment of the extensive Nephite records as displayed in the Book of Mormon itself. On the whole, Mormon’s text simply assumes scribal teaching and competencies. But the text offers other clues of a scribal-school tradition as well. For example, we are repeatedly reminded of the very large body of Nephite records that had been preserved, with which Mormon had to work in producing his abridgment. Mormon’s side comment, made in the middle of his abridgment, provides a valuable perspective:

And now there are many records kept of the proceedings of this people, by many of this people, which are particular and very large, concerning them. But behold, a hundredth part of the proceedings of this people, yea, the account of the Lamanites and of the Nephites, and their wars, and contentions, and dissensions, and their preaching, and their prophecies, and their shipping and their building of ships, and their building

of Manasseh who had been deported from Jerusalem by the Babylonians, taken to the east end of the Babylonian empire, and then released at some later point when they determined to migrate south to India. They settled in Kerala, and they brought their records with them, *written on brass plates*. See Captain Alexander Hamilton, *A New Account of the East Indies* (London: 1744), 1:323–24, https://www.google.com/books/edition/A_New_Account_of_the_East_Indies/-jNagGDT-PsChI=en&gbpv=1&pg=PA323&printsec=frontcover.

7. A summary of the work of several Bible scholars on this topic can be found in Noel B. Reynolds, “Chiastic Structuring of Large Texts: Second Nephi as a Case Study,” in *Chiasmus: The State of the Art*, ed. John W. Welch and Donald W. Parry (Provo, UT: BYU Studies, 2020), 177–92 and in Noel B. Reynolds, “Lehi’s Vision, Nephi’s Blueprint,” *Interpreter: A Journal of Latter-day Saint Faith and Scholarship* 52 (2022): 231–78.

of temples, and of synagogues and their sanctuaries, and their righteousness, and their wickedness, and their murders, and their robbings, and their plundering, and all manner of abominations and whoredoms, cannot be contained in this work. But behold, *there are many books and many records of every kind, and they have been kept chiefly by the Nephites. And they have been handed down from one generation to another by the Nephites*, even until they have fallen into transgression.⁸ (Helaman 3:13–16)

Across all those centuries, a continuing scribal school is the most viable explanation for the continuation of the mission to write and preserve such records, for the maintenance of fluency in two ancient languages of scripture and for the continuation of the knowledge of the necessary technology for manufacturing metal plates and inscribing a written record upon them.

While the evidence for an official scribal school with responsibility for maintaining the Large Plates of Nephi and preserving the Brass Plates and the Small Plates and other sacred materials or objects is quite clear, we cannot know how much additional schooling in literacy was provided in Nephite society. There may have been other scribal schools not mentioned in Mormon's abridgment. And functional literacy may have been more widespread than what today's scholars have found in similar ancient cultures. Cultural historians generally are convinced that before Gutenberg and the emergence of commercial markets for paper and other writing materials and the development of book distribution systems and libraries, all literate elites were based in oral cultures. While recognizing great literature that derives from ancient writers going back even into the third millennium BCE, no ancient cultures are believed to have enjoyed widespread literacy on more than a functional level. Trained scribes provided the services of literacy for large populations.

However, there are intriguing intimations in the Nephite record of high-level literacy outside the official scribal tradition. In the previous quotation from Mormon, he speaks of "many records kept ... by many of this people." On the one hand, Zarahemla's people, like the Lamanites and Ishmaelites, provide a stark example of how a people who once enjoyed the benefits of literacy could lose the ability to manage their

8. All quotations from the Book of Mormon, including spelling and punctuation, are taken from the Yale critical text. See Royal Skousen, *The Book of Mormon: The Earliest Text*, 2nd ed. (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2022). I have occasionally adjusted formatting and added italics for emphasis.

affairs with writing, record keeping, and education from one generation to another. But how do we account for educated outliers who show up almost randomly in the Nephite annals? Very early in Nephite history, Sherem came “among the people of Nephi” and tried to dissuade them from their belief in Christ by insisting on exclusive loyalty to the law of Moses (Jacob 7:1–23). Abinadi castigated the priests of King Noah for failure to understand the scriptures and failing to teach the people correctly (Mosiah 1:25). Amulon and the other apostate priests of King Noah were appointed by the Lamanite king to teach his people in the language of the Nephites. And they were taught to read, to write to one another, and to keep their records (Mosiah 24:4–6). The lawyers of Ammonihah were “learned in all the arts and cunning of the people” (Alma 10:14). And to demonstrate their rejection of the authority of the Nephite church, they ordered the burning of their copies of the holy scriptures — presumably extracts from the Brass Plates (Alma 14:8). In preaching to the Zoramite poor, Alma tells them they “ought to search the scriptures” and asks if they remember reading Zenos, Zenoch, and Moses (Alma 33:2–18). While these same passages reflect the kind of discourse that might be expected in oral cultures, these passages do seem to suggest some developed literacy and education outside the official Nephite scribal school. This paper will focus on the career of that official school.⁹

The Languages of the Scribes

The richness of the linguistic options available to Mormon and Moroni in their late Nephite writings is another strong indicator of their participation in a scribal school that had kept those options alive for a millennium, despite the inevitable changes and transformations of the Nephite vernacular language across so many centuries.¹⁰ Nephi stated

9. The case for widespread literacy in Nephite society has been argued in Deanna Draper Buck, “Internal Evidence of Widespread Literacy in the Book of Mormon,” *Religious Educator* 10, no. 3 (2009):59–74. In reply, Brant A. Gardner, “Literacy and Orality in the Book of Mormon,” *Interpreter: A Journal of Mormon Scripture* 9 (2014):29–85; advances a detailed explanation and documentation of the connections between orality and literacy in ancient Israel and Mesoamerican civilization, while arguing that the Nephites were a more typical oral culture.

10. For an excellent account of these changes and the apparent impact of ancient Near Eastern languages on the Uto-Aztecan family of languages in ancient Mesoamerica from the perspective of historical linguistics, see Brian D. Stubbs, *Changes in Languages from Nephi to Now*, 2nd ed. (Blanding, UT: Four Corners Digital Design, 2016). This volume applies the author’s findings as written for

plainly at the beginning that he was writing his Small Plates in the language of the Egyptians (1 Nephi 1:2) — a statement that illuminates the linguistic focus of his own Manassite scribal training. There is only fragmentary evidence of an Egyptian-language component in the training provided by seventh-century Judahite scribal schools.¹¹

Centuries after Nephi, King Benjamin taught his own sons about the importance of the Brass Plates and explained that Lehi could read them because he had been instructed in the Egyptian language — just as Nephite scribal families were instructing their descendants in that language down to Mosiah's day:

For it were not possible that our father Lehi could have remembered all these things, to have taught them to his children, except it were for the help of these plates; for he having been taught in the language of the Egyptians, therefore *he could read these engravings and teach them to his children, that thereby they could teach them to their children*, and so fulfilling the commandments of God, *even down to this present time.* (Mosiah 1:4)

The predominantly Egyptian language character of the Brass Plates helps explain Nephi's claim that these plates contained a more reliable version of Israelite scripture and history than did the newly transcribed Judahite texts,¹² because the Brass Plates were recorded and preserved in the original language and script (most likely hieratic) that was used by Moses, Lehi's ancestor Manasseh, Manasseh's father Joseph, and Joseph's great-great grandfather Abraham. In contrast, the Hebrew Bible that took shape after 700 BCE is thought by scholars to be derived from transcriptions of competing oral traditions using the early Hebrew

professional historical linguists to the Book of Mormon. For the technical report see Brian D. Stubbs, *Exploring the Explanatory Power of Semitic and Egyptian in Uto-Aztecan* (Provo, UT: Grover Publications, 2015).

Studies of the large numbers of Mayan dialects that developed in the relatively small Mesoamerican geographical area and of the ways in which these dialects affected Mayan epigraphy demonstrate how easy it may be to underestimate the complexity of development in vernacular languages, even in a relatively small area, and how scribal writing systems adjust to that complexity. See Sven Gronemeyer, "E pluribus unum: Embracing Vernacular Influences in Classic Mayan Scribal Tradition," in *A Celebration of the Life and Work of Pierre Robert Colas*, ed. C. Helmke and F. Sachse (Markt Schwaben: Verlag Anton Saurwein, 2014), 147–62.

11. The limited epigraphic evidence is summarized in Reynolds, "A Backstory."

12. See Nephi's comparison of the Brass Plates with a future Judahite Bible in 1 Nephi 13:20–32.

script that made its appearance around 800 BCE as a derivation from the ancient alphabetic West Semitic script.¹³ It was standardized only in the paleo-Hebrew script during the following century.

In his comprehensive review of all available inscriptions from ancient Egypt, Gordon Hamilton has concluded that this first alphabetic script was invented about 1940 BCE by a Semite from the Levant who drew on Egyptian hieroglyphic and hieratic signs for the consonantal signs that were used in the Egyptian delta and the Levant for over a thousand years before being adapted as specific national alphabets for writing Hebrew and the related languages of Israel's geographical neighbors.¹⁴ That early script was subsequently replaced by the Persian or square script after the exile in the sixth century but was still occasionally manifest in some Samaritan and Jewish manuscripts as late as the first century BCE, as attested in the Dead Sea Scrolls.¹⁵

Because of the centrality of the Brass Plates and Lehi and Nephi's early writings for the Nephite tradition, we learn that the ability to read and write in Egyptian language and script was preserved by these Nephites down to the time of Mormon and Moroni, and that they had also adapted the Egyptian script to the current version of their own language. They also claimed to have had the option to write their record in Hebrew (Mormon 9:33). The only Hebrew script that could have been known to them was the alphabetic paleo Hebrew of Lehi's day, which may have been easier to adapt to the vernacular Nephite in which their histories, prophecies, and preachings would most likely have been recorded.

And now behold, we have written this record, according to our knowledge, in the characters which are called among us the *reformed Egyptian*, being handed down and *altered by us according to our manner of speech*. And if our plates had been sufficiently large, we should have written in the Hebrew; but the Hebrew hath been altered by us also. And if we could have written in the Hebrew, behold, ye would have had none imperfection in our record. But the Lord knoweth the things which we have written and also that none other people knoweth our language. And because that *none other people*

13. See Gordon J. Hamilton, *The Origins of the West Semitic Alphabet in Egyptian Scripts*, The Catholic Biblical Quarterly Monograph Series 40 (Washington, DC: Catholic Biblical Association of America, 2006), 292.

14. Ibid.

15. See the discussion in Emanuel Tov, *Textual Criticism of the Hebrew Bible*, 2nd rev. ed. (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, 2001), 218–19.

knoweth our language, therefore he hath prepared means for the interpretation thereof. (Mormon 9:32–34)

Ammaron As Chief Nephite Scribe

From the beginning of the Nephite dispensation as described in the great orienting vision given to Lehi and Nephi, their prophets knew the day would come when the Nephite civilization would completely abandon the ways of the Lord and would finally be destroyed as a people.¹⁶ That prophesied dark night was evidently falling in the opening decades of the tenth Nephite century when Ammaron, the apparent custodian of the entire collection of official Nephite records and head of the official Nephite scribal school, was inspired to secrete that collection in a secure northern location and to arrange for a final completion and abridgment of the main record, the Large Plates of Nephi, which abridgment would eventually become the primary means of launching the last dispensation and bringing the remnant of Joseph, the Gentiles, and scattered Israel to the Lord (see Mormon 3:17–19 and 5:9–24).

And it came to pass that after three hundred and five years had passed away — and the people did still remain in wickedness — and Amos died, and his brother Ammaron did keep the record in his stead.

And it came to pass that when three hundred and twenty years had passed away, Ammaron, *being constrained by the Holy Ghost*, did hide up the records which were sacred, yea, even *all the sacred records which had been handed down from generation to generation*, which were sacred, even until the three hundred and twentieth year from the coming of Christ. And he did hide them up unto the Lord, that they might come again *unto the remnant of the house of Jacob*, according to the prophecies and the promises of the Lord. (4 Nephi 1:47–49)

And about the time that Ammaron hid up the records unto the Lord, he came unto me [Mormon], I being about ten years of age — and *I began to be learned somewhat after the manner of the learning of my people* — and Ammaron saith unto me: I perceive that thou art a sober child and art quick to observe. Therefore, when ye are about twenty and four years

16. See Reynolds, “Lehi’s Vision” and 1 Nephi 15:5.

old, I would that ye should remember the things that ye have observed concerning this people; and when ye are of that age, go to the land of Antum unto a hill which shall be called Shim; and there have I deposited unto the Lord all the sacred engravings concerning this people. And behold, *ye shall take the plates of Nephi unto yourself, and the remainder shall ye leave in the place where they are.* And *ye shall engrave upon the plates of Nephi* all the things that ye have observed concerning this people. And I Mormon *being a descendant of Nephi* — and my father's name was Mormon — and I remembered the things which Ammaron commanded me. (Mormon 1:1–5)

Mormon As Final Head Nephite Scribe and Custodian of the Nephite Records

In this transitional passage, Mormon provides an account of how at the tender age of ten he was chosen and charged to be the final custodian and abridger of the nine-century collection of Nephite records. So how, we might ask, is Ammaron, the distinguished apparent head of whatever remained of the Nephite scribal association, being made aware of one of their younger students who at age ten is only beginning “to be learned somewhat after the manner of the learning” of “his people” and that he is “a sober child” and “quick to observe?”¹⁷ We don't know whether Mormon here refers to the learning programs of his family scribal school or of the Nephites more generally. All ancient learning programs we know about were family-based. And that would be consistent with the details of the Nephite story as it unfolds in Mormon's abridgment.

Ammaron is clearly in survival mode when he approaches the young Mormon. He has already hidden the Nephite record collection in northern retreats, as far from the Lamanite borders as possible, and is on the lookout for a talented successor. While Mormon has not thought to inform us in so many words in which he was educated in a scribal school, anyone from an oral culture would have understood that implication immediately. And just as the scribal schools of the ancient Near East and Egypt were governed and supported by families over long periods of time, so does Mormon describe himself as “a pure descendant of Lehi” (3 Nephi 5:20) and as “a descendant of Nephi” (Mormon 1:5). Minimally, Mormon is telling his readers that he is not an Ishmaelite, a Zoramite,

17. Anciently, scribal training began around age five. If that were true for Mormon, it would explain why his personality and abilities were evident at age ten.

a Mulekite, or a Jaredite, or that he descended from any of the other human populations that may have been associated with the Nephites. But he also may be identifying himself with a scribal school established by Nephi and perpetuated down to the times of Ammaron and Mormon. It would seem likely that Mormon and his father Mormon were themselves associated with Ammaron's scribal school and would have come to his attention through that association.

A History of the Nephite Scribal School

The history of the Nephite scribal school is nowhere articulated explicitly, though clues do surface at multiple junctures in Nephi's and Mormon's accounts. Like so many other dimensions of ancient Nephite culture that we would love to know more about, Mormon seems to assume we will be able to fill in the blanks, not realizing how difficult that would be for modern peoples who have only experienced wide-spread literacy. Brant Gardner has published two articles which argue persuasively that Nephi was a trained scribe and that the Book of Mormon was written by similarly educated elites, to be read by literate elites. But he also shows numerous ways in which the text also indicates the influence of a predominantly oral Nephite culture.¹⁸

A Side Glance at Mesoamerican Scribal Cultures

Because Mesoamerica has been suggested by so many Book of Mormon scholars as the most likely geographical home of the ancient Nephites, some reviewers have suggested that scholarly estimates of literacy in ancient Mayan cultures might shed some light on contemporary Nephite literacy. Mayan literacy rates were a hot topic for scholars in the 1980s and 1990s. My brief survey of that literature suggests that the 1994 review by Stephen Houston provides an especially helpful perspective and summary of the work done on that question in that time. Houston found overall agreement "that literacy must have been limited at all periods." But significant disagreement on the more subtle underlying questions of

18. See Brant A. Gardner, "Nephi as Scribe," *Review of Books on the Book of Mormon* 23, no.1 (2011): 45–55; and "Literacy and Orality." See also Gardner's helpful discussion of the cultural challenges we face in reading and interpreting any ancient book like the Bible or the Book of Mormon. Brant A. Gardner, *Traditions of the Fathers: The Book of Mormon as History* (Salt Lake City: Greg Kofford Books, 2015), 25–40.

method and the identification of relevant facts continues.¹⁹ Whatever the influence of the Mayan culture may have been on the Nephites, it would not have been a force for widespread literacy.

It should also be noted that the social dynamics of scribalism in an oral culture seem to exhibit certain universal features which also show up in Nephite scribal culture as identified and described in this paper. Karel van der Toorn found that throughout the ANE across two millennia, scribal functions were organized and perpetuated in kinship-based schools.²⁰ These scribal schools managed training in multiple classical and vernacular languages, scripts, and literary traditions. They also provided specialized training to meet the needs of ordinary commerce, imperial and royal bureaucracies, temple priesthoods, and judiciaries. The scribes who provided these essential and high-level services could wield unofficial, but significant social and political power in these roles. And because they were often wealthy, they were engaged in their own profitable enterprises. Further, the scribal schools managed their own libraries and manufactured the unique tools and materials required for writing in their various cultural contexts.

The dramatic 2008 discoveries at Xultun, Guatemala, the large and previously unexcavated Classic Mayan (AD 550-900) urban center located 40 km northeast of Tikal, have been interpreted by archaeologist William Saturno and his associates to feature a group of buildings, Los Sabios, which suggests an elite family scribal complex including residential and work areas that are richly decorated with thematic murals and inscriptions that “are distinctly akin to those found in codex books” and provide thereby “the closest artifact we currently have to

19. Stephen Houston, “Literacy Among the Pre-Columbian Maya: A Comparative Perspective,” in *Writing Without Words: Alternative Literacies in Mesoamerica and the Andes*, ed. Elizabeth Hill Boone and Walter D. Mignolo (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 1994), 40.

20. Karel van der Toorn, *Scribal Culture and the Making of the Hebrew Bible* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2004). It should also be noted that the huge collection of actual scribal products found at Qumran in the twentieth century has enabled detailed studies of scribal practices and habits in Israel many centuries after Lehi left Jerusalem but has not taught us as much about the anonymous scribes themselves, as we have learned about the more ancient scribal schools of the ANE as reported by van der Toorn and others. See Emanuel Tov, *Scribal Practices and Approaches Reflected in the Texts Found in the Judean Desert* (Leiden: Brill, 2004), 7-12.

a Classic Period codex.”²¹ The building complex and the murals enabled their interpreters to extend and fill out an already-rich picture of Mayan scribalism before European contact. Without digressing to repeat the details of these new findings, it can be stated comfortably that Toorn’s description of ANE scribal schools could fit rather closely with what has been found in the Classical Mayan context. Without suggesting any connection between Mayan and Nephite cultures, it does seem possible that the Nephite scribal tradition described in this paper, based on the Book of Mormon text, exhibits most of the same features reported by Toorn and Saturno for scribalism in the ancient oral cultures they have studied.

Finally, it should be noted that important scholarly inquiry has focused on the broader issues of literacy that emerge when Mayan writing is compared to Aztec, Mixtec, and Nahuatl. These non-alphabetic modes of writing enabled different communication to upper and lower classes of a society and were somewhat effective in supporting communication among different cultural and language groups.²² While this paper is not the place to pursue the distinctive features of indigenous Mesoamerican literacy in more detail, one prominent strain in the stories preserved in these ancient texts will resonate loudly for readers of the Book of Mormon. For example, “the cartographic histories of the Nahuatl” commemorated “how their ancestors took possession of certain places.” In this way, “these ancient written texts were created and used to legitimize the presence and right of different groups to the territory they occupied.”²³

21. See Franco D. Rossi, William A Saturno, and Heather Hurst, “Maya Codex Book Production and the Politics of Expertise: Archaeology of a Classic Period Household at Xultun, Guatemala,” *American Anthropology* 117, no. 1 (2015): 117; and William Saturno, et al., “A Maya *Curia Regis*: Evidence for a Hierarchical Specialist Order at Xultun, Guatemala,” *Ancient America* 28, no. 2 (Fall 2017): 423–40.

22. One excellent explanation of how Mesoamerican literacy systems compare to those of Europe and the ANE can be found in Robert T. Jimenez and Patrick H. Smith, “Mesoamerican Literacies: Indigenous Writing Systems and Contemporary Possibilities,” *Reading Research Quarterly* 43, no. 1 (2008): 28–46.

23. *Ibid.*, 32.

Tracking Scribal Responsibility for Maintaining and Preserving the Nephite Records

I have been able to find only one other attempt to track the continuity of scribal training throughout the Nephite dispensation.²⁴ Earlier efforts to track Nephite record keepers and their contributions as mentioned in the text itself took shape before the recent flowering of studies of ancient scribalism and so do not incorporate the understandings of scribal schools that are known today.²⁵ When he produced his comprehensive analysis of hereditary offices in the Nephite government, military, and priesthood, John Tvedtnes was able to conclude “that the most important offices in Nephite society — including military positions ... —were de facto hereditary.”²⁶ From the perspective of these newer studies on ancient scribalism, it becomes evident that one line of the descendants of Nephi likely maintained an official scribal school that prepared the men who served as the Nephite leaders in all these areas of responsibility from the time of Nephi down to Mormon and Moroni. This echoes the recent scholarly discovery that “many members of the elite in the social, religious, and military classes appear to have had” some scribal training, as indicated by the inclusion of the title “scribe” on their official seals.²⁷

24. Brant A. Gardner, “Labor Diligently to Write: The Ancient Making of a Modern Scripture,” *Interpreter: A Journal of Latter-day Saint Faith and Scripture* 35 (2020), 1–46.

25. See Sidney B. Sperry, *Book of Mormon Compendium* (Salt Lake City: Bookcraft, 1968), 13–24; and John L. Sorenson, *Mormon’s Codex: An Ancient American Book* (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 2013), 184–218; both of which bring together the decades of research and writing by these two path-breaking scholars in their respective approaches to Book of Mormon research. John A. Tvedtnes provided a minimalist summary in his essay “Book of Mormon Tribal Affiliation and Military Castes,” in *Warfare in the Book of Mormon*, ed. Stephen D. Ricks and William J. Hamblin (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 1990), 315–16. More recently, Anita Wells has reviewed Nephite record keeping from the perspective of a trained librarian and archivist. She notes how so many scholarly interpreters are impressed by the frequent and repeated references to Nephite records and to their authors, which establish a keen concern with provenance and textual relationships that would not have been a concern in early 19th century American culture. See Anita Wells, “Bare Record: The Nephite Archivist, the Record of Records, and the Book of Mormon Provenance,” *Interpreter: A Journal of Latter-day Saint Faith and Scholarship* 24 (2017): 103–104.

26. Tvedtnes, “Book of Mormon Tribal Affiliation,” 317.

27. Shai Gordin, *Hittite Scribal Circles: Scholarly Tradition and Writing Habits* (Wiesbaden, DE: Harrassowitz Verlag, 2015), 5.

As will be shown below, Mormon's abridgment reflects the perspective of a trained scribe as it carefully documents every transfer of responsibility for the Nephite records through the entire Nephite dispensation. By comparison, the narrators in the Hebrew Bible are anonymous, omniscient, reticent, and unobtrusive. They speak from no particular time or place, reporting words, actions and secret thoughts. ... They rarely comment on the story, offer judgments, mention themselves, refer to their own editing, or address their audience directly.²⁸

But, as Grant Hardy goes on to explain in his excellent "reader's guide,"

Without exception, Book of Mormon narrators operate very differently. They reveal their identities from the beginning and exercise strict control over their material. They write from limited, human perspectives — that is, they give us their personal view of what happened and why it is important. ... They do not hesitate to address readers directly to explain their intentions, their writing processes, their editorial decisions, and their emotional responses to the events they recount. They demarcate textual units for our consideration. They interrupt the narrative to offer explicit judgments. They even admit the possibility of human error and ask indulgence for "their weakness in writing."²⁹

When the Nephite text refers to scribal activity, a family genealogical context is frequently invoked. That is one of the main features scholars have identified in scribal traditions in ancient Mesopotamian cultures and Egypt. One recent study of scribal circles in ancient Hittite traditions emphasizes this point:

Hittite scribes, much like their Mesopotamian counterparts, traced their patronyms back through the generations in their text colophons. ... It seems that the attested long patronymic lists actually had a firm basis in reality. They were not simply used to enhance a particular scribe's prestige by constructing a fictive scholarly pedigree. ... Such lineages ... represent the

28. Readers interested in this point will benefit from the full discussion in Grant Hardy, *Understanding the Book of Mormon: A Reader's Guide* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010), 15.

29. *Ibid.*, 16.

families of the Hittite *literati* and their awareness of their membership in a larger scholarly society.³⁰

Further, “these professionals did not think of themselves as mere scribes. Rather, they saw themselves as scholars with a keen awareness of the Babylonian heritage of their script and its versatile nature.”³¹

The track of responsibility for the Nephite scribal school is clear. As in ancient Mesopotamia, Egypt, and Israel, it was the scribal schools that bore the responsibility for maintaining the libraries of earlier and current records and other sacred objects. While the Nephite record does not use the terminology of scribal schools that characterizes modern scholarly discourse, it clearly documents the passing of the responsibility for the records archives from one period to another. Unstated, but almost certainly included, was the responsibility of these schools to perpetuate education in the languages and scripts of their records, including specifically Egyptian and Hebrew. As the Nephite language evolved over the centuries, these arcane language skills were in danger of disappearing with each new generation of the Nephites, as had happened earlier for the Mulekites and the Lamanites.³²

Lehi and Nephi

Lehi and Nephi provide us with a strong starting point as trained scribes coming out of Jerusalem at the end of the seventh century BCE. I have argued elsewhere that Nephi’s literate attainments exceed almost all examples that have survived in the Hebrew Bible.³³ But the story gets murky very quickly. Nephi produced two separate records written on metal plates — described respectively as his “Large Plates” and his “Small Plates” — each of which he gives the same title: *the plates of Nephi*. These are the two sets of plates that Mormon would later take from the hill Shim.

Mormon’s abridgment that we know as the Book of Mormon was derived originally from Nephi’s Large Plates.³⁴ But he also discovered Nephi’s Small Plates, was deeply impressed, and attached them whole

30. Gordin, *Hittite Scribal Circles*, 3.

31. *Ibid.*, 4.

32. These inferences are consistent with the history and dynamics of scribal schools in the ANE as understood by current scholars and as helpfully explained by van der Toorn in *Scribal Culture*.

33. See Reynolds, “Lehi and Nephi as Trained Manassite Scribes,” and “Lehi’s Vision.”

34. See Mormon’s explanation in Words of Mormon 1:3–11.

to his abridgment. Joseph Smith would later use his translation of these Small Plates to replace the lost 116 pages of translation of Mormon's abridgment of the Large Plates.³⁵ After the abridgment was completed, Mormon returned Nephi's Large Plates to the buried Nephite records archive.

Before his death, Nephi gave the "Large Plates," which contained a detailed account of the proceedings of his people, to the kings, to be maintained as an ongoing record and to be preserved *in futuro*.³⁶ But he gave the "Small Plates" to his younger brother Jacob. Born after Lehi's departure from Jerusalem, Jacob was undoubtedly taught to read and write either by Nephi or by his father Lehi. Jacob added some valuable material to the Small Plates, and then passed it on to his own posterity, who found little to add and who, after several generations, gave up on it entirely by turning it over to the monarchy to become part of the royal archive — where it was discovered by Mormon centuries later (Omni 1:25 and Words of Mormon 1:3–7). Mormon then attached it whole to the abridgment which he was making of the Large Plates.³⁷

Transmitting the Small Plates of Nephi

Jacob reports how Nephi acceded to the request of his people to give them a king before he died.³⁸ Like most other readers, I have assumed

35. For a detailed and thoughtful analysis of that sequence of events and their implications for the resulting text, see Don Bradley, *The Lost 116 Pages: Reconstructing the Book of Mormon's Missing Stories* (Salt Lake City: Greg Kofford Books, 2019), 3–119. Bradley shows convincingly that the actual number of pages lost likely far exceeded 116 — which is the number of manuscript pages for the new material that replaced them.

36. Against his own better judgment, Nephi had initiated a reign of kings to replace him as ruler over the Nephite people. His younger brother Jacob explains this in Jacob 1:9–14, but gives no names for these kings, only their royal titles as first and second Nephi, etc. That line emerges a few centuries later as the Book of Mormon picks up again with Mormon's abridgment with the last-named kings — Mosiah, Benjamin, and Mosiah. As will be shown below, these last kings were clearly aware of their responsibility to maintain the records and convey to the next generation that they had trained for the task.

37. For a comprehensive literary and content analysis of the seven passages in which the respective profiles of the large and small plates are discussed by Nephi or Jacob, see Noel B. Reynolds, "Nephi's Small Plates: A Rhetorical Analysis," *Interpreter: A Journal of Latter-day Saint Faith and Scholarship* 50 (2022): 99–122.

38. I have reviewed this political history in detail and have advanced my reasons for doubting that Nephi ever accepted the office of king for himself: see Noel B. Reynolds, "Nephite Kingship Reconsidered," in *Mormons, Scripture, and*

that the kings were descendants of Nephi. Because the first section of the translation of Mormon's gold plates was lost by Martin Harris, we do not have a record that names the early kings or their scribes until the time of king Mosiah. They can only be treated as an unnamed group in a study of how the Nephite records were kept and transmitted through those first four centuries. But at the end of that period, it is evident that the kings have faithfully followed the direction given by Nephi to maintain his Large Plates as a record of the Nephite people (Mosiah 1:2–7, 15–16). One late descendant of Jacob excuses his own decision not to extend the Small Plates of Nephi that have come into his keeping by referring to the record being kept by the kings on the Large Plates:

And behold, the record of this people is engraven upon plates, which is had by the kings according to the generations. And I know of no revelation save that which has been written, neither prophecy. Wherefore that which is sufficient is written. And I make an end. (Omni 1:11)

The kings themselves may even have retained the responsibility of leading the royal scribal school that kept and preserved the records and the languages of the scriptures. None of that is evident in the record kept by Jacob's descendants.

The last of Jacob's line with responsibility for the Small Plates was Amaleki, who turned them over to king Benjamin about four and a half centuries after Lehi's departure from Jerusalem. It would appear that Amaleki, and possibly some of his predecessors, had let their tradition of family literacy deteriorate and depended on trained scribes to record their very brief comments on the Small Plates. His grandfather Chemish and great uncle Amaron were the last contributors to the Small Plates who explicitly wrote their own words. Chemish records that he saw his brother Amaron write it "with his own hand" (Omni 1:9). Amaleki explicitly shifts to the language of orality and concludes the record by saying that he "would *speak*" about one more historical development, after which he concludes: "I make an end of my speaking" (see Omni 1:27 and 30). He may have been dictating his last words to a scribe — unlike Nephi, who made it clear that he was making this record "with mine own hand" (1 Nephi 1:3).

Amaleki also tells us about the very important merger of the Nephites with the illiterate descendants of Zedekiah, the last king of

Judah (see Omni 1:14–22). These people, having brought no records with them from Jerusalem, rejoiced to learn that the Nephites had such a record in the Brass Plates. Their language had been corrupted over the intervening centuries, and so “they were taught in the language of Mosiah” (Omni 1:18). It would seem that the high literacy of the Nephites and their possession of the Brass Plates trumped Zarahemla’s claims of Jewish royalty as the Mulekites and Nephites united their peoples and appointed Mosiah to be their king. John Tvedtnes has argued persuasively that this outcome may have provided the basis for the recurring rebellions of the king-men in coming decades that attempted to replace the Nephite government with a monarchy composed of those who “were ... of high birth” (Alma 51:8).³⁹

Kings and Scribes

That assumption would explain the fact that the kings, the chief judges, the prophets, and their relatives who succeeded them seem to have been the custodians of the growing collection of Nephite records and, by implication, leaders or sponsors of the principal Nephite scribal school. We have already noted that Jacob’s descendants eventually took the Small Plates of Nephi to King Benjamin, who presumably was a descendant of Nephi, thereby joining them with the archive that contained Nephi’s Large Plates and all other Nephite records (Omni 1:25). That royal archive is next mentioned when Benjamin’s son, Mosiah, puts Alma in charge of it, just before he moves to replace the monarchy with an administration of judges. Mormon’s abridgment provides a clear summary of the formal bestowal of the responsibility for the records on the successor to a king:

[Mosiah] took the plates of brass and all the things which he had kept and conferred them upon Alma, which was the son of Alma — yea, all the records and also the interpreters — and conferred them upon him, and commanding him that he should keep and preserve them *and also keep a record of the people*, handing them down from one generation to another, even as they had been handed down from the time that Lehi left Jerusalem. (Mosiah 28:20)

Mormon first introduced Alma the Elder as a descendant of Nephi (Mosiah 17:2), and his descendants bore primary responsibility for maintaining the records for the rest of Nephite history down to Mormon, who also declares himself to be a descendant of Nephi. This first Alma

39. Tvedtnes, “Tribal Affiliation,” 298–301.

was one of the priests of King Noah who served the small colony of Nephites that had returned to the original city of Nephi as vassals to the Lamanite kings. We might speculate that those who took the risks involved in that return may have felt strong family connections to the area originally settled by Nephi, Jacob, and their followers.

Before the establishment of the reign of the judges, the spiritual, political, scribal, and military authority of the Nephites was lodged in the office of the king. From that point on, the offices of chief high priest and of chief judge were distinguished. Though Alma's son Alma was appointed to hold both positions, he later gave the judgeship to another so that he could focus on the church. In the wars that would come, the generals acknowledged the authority of the chief judges over them. Alma was also a prophet, and the chief high priests and prophets following him were all his descendants.

After the Monarchy

Although Alma would soon become the chief judge and head of state, he would later also turn that responsibility over to another and dedicate himself to the work of the church as its chief high priest. The conjunction of multiple roles in the Nephite monarchy was passed on to Alma as chief judge, but when he determined to separate the governing and priestly roles, it was not clear how the chief scribal role should be assigned. Apparently, Alma's intention was to leave that function with the head of government, but Nephiah, the new chief judge declined to accept it:

Nevertheless [Nephiah] had refused Alma to take possession of those records and those things which were esteemed by Alma and his fathers to be most sacred. Therefore, when it came time for Alma to pass these responsibilities on to a successor, he conferred them upon his son Helaman. (Alma 50:38)

Because of Nephiah's refusal, the record-keeping role continued with Alma and became a patrilineal charge that he passed on to his son Helaman at some point prior to the close of his own prophetic career. Mormon's record of the final instructions Alma gives to each of his three sons are specific to their needs, and half of the instruction to Helaman focuses on the records and "sacred things" that he must maintain as both the custodian and as the continuing recorder.

And now my son Helaman, I command you that ye take the records which have been entrusted with me. And I also

command you that ye shall keep a record of this people, according as I have done, upon the plates of Nephi and keep all these things sacred which I have kept, even as I have kept them—for it is for a wise purpose that they are kept. (Alma 37:1–2)

The “Holy Scriptures” and the Brass Plates

It is also important to note that here, at the midpoint of the Nephite dispensation, Nephite discourse refers to the Brass Plates as “the holy scriptures” (Alma 37:3). They contain “the genealogy of our forefathers, even from the beginning,” and they will “be kept and preserved by the hand of the Lord until they should go forth unto every nation, kindred, tongue, and people, that they shall know of the mysteries contained thereon” (Alma 37:3–4). The same prophesied future applies as well to “all the plates which do contain that which is holy writ” (Alma 37:5)—likely a reference to the Large and Small Plates of Nephi initiated at the very beginning of the Nephite dispensation, which are included in the collection being passed on to Helaman. But in its prophetic mode, Alma’s statement may also be intended to include the plates of Mormon that would eventually come forth as the Book of Mormon and provide the key to the fulfillment of the ancient prophecy that the remnant of Joseph would become a blessing to all nations.⁴⁰

Three other passages in the Book of Alma refer to the Brass Plates as “the holy scriptures” in contexts that assume that paper copies of all or part of those scriptures, rather than the plates themselves, are the immediate referent. The horrendous scene in Ammonihah describing the burning of the believers specifies that “they also brought forth their records, which contained the holy scriptures, and cast them into the fire also, that they might be burned and destroyed by fire” (Alma 14:8). From the perspective of our modern literate society when individual members of a family might have personal printed copies of the scriptures, we might interpret this passage as an official attempt to get rid of those private libraries. But reading this passage in the context of an ancient oral culture, it would make more sense to read “they also brought forth their records” as the scribal class publicly repudiating the scriptures

40. For the full development of this theme, see Noel B. Reynolds, “Understanding the Abrahamic Covenant through the Book of Mormon,” *BYU Studies Quarterly* 57, no. 3 (2018): 39–74.

(their paper copies of the Brass Plates), which in an earlier and more faithful day they had used to teach the people.

When Ammon teaches the Lamanite king Lamoni about the creation and the plan of redemption, he uses “the holy scriptures” in a context that can only refer to a copy that he and his fellow missionaries as members of the Nephite scribal class had brought with them or had memorized.⁴¹ When Amulek stood to teach the Zoramite poor, he referred repeatedly to prophets and teachings identified with the Brass Plates and observed “that it is impossible that ye should be ignorant” of the prophecies of Christ, because “these things were taught unto you bountifully before your dissension from among us” (Alma 34:1–2) — presumably taught by priests and scribes who had access to copies of the written word at the local level. We have one direct reference in the text to such copying: “All those engravings which were in the possession of Helaman were written and sent forth among the children of men throughout all the land, save it were those parts which had been commanded by Alma should not go forth” (Alma 63:12).

Scribes and Calendars

Like their contemporary Mayan scribes, Nephite scribes were tasked with the responsibility to keep track of the calendar.⁴² The Book of Mormon tracks three successive calendar systems based on different start dates — the year that Lehi fled Jerusalem, the year the new system of judges replaced the monarchy, and the year the sign was given of the birth of Christ.⁴³ The calendrical responsibility of the Nephite scribes rose to the surface of Mormon’s abridgment at the time the prophecy of Christ’s death was due for fulfillment:

And now it came to pass that according to our record — and we know our record to be true, for behold, it was a just man which did keep the record; for he truly did many miracles in the name of Jesus, and there was not any man which could do a miracle in the name of Jesus save he were cleansed every

41. Alma 18:33–40.

42. The calendrical responsibilities of Mayan scribes are described in Michael D. Coe and Stephen Houston, *The Maya*, 9th ed. (New York: Thames and Hudson, 2015), 259–62.

43. For a thorough explanation of how the Nephite calendar shifted between these three starting events, see David Rolfe Seely, s.v., “Chronology, Book of Mormon,” in *Book of Mormon Reference Companion*, ed. Dennis R. Largey (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 2003), 197–98.

whit from his iniquity — and now it came to pass, if there was no mistake made by this man in the reckoning of our time, the thirty and third year had passed away. (3 Nephi 8:1–2)

The Nephites and the Small Plates

It is possible that Nephi's Small Plates were not well known or even used by the Nephites. They were not part of the official record archive during the first three Nephite centuries while in possession of Jacob's descendants and before they transferred possession to King Mosiah. And Mormon's scribal training did not seem to have made him aware of their existence before he found them in the large deposit of records made by Ammaron. Only in one place in Mormon's record does a later prophet quote from the Small Plates, but that quotation could almost certainly have been derived originally from Nephi's Large Plates, and so would have been available there to Alma. When Alma told Helaman of his vision when he thought that like Father Lehi he saw "God sitting upon his throne, surrounded with numberless concourses of angels in the attitude of singing and praising their God," he was quoting Nephi's description of Lehi's vision exactly.⁴⁴ But again, the most likely source for Alma would have been Nephi's Large Plates, from which, he states, "I have taken all the account which I have written" (Helaman 2:14).

Nephi may well have understood that the target audience of the Small Plates would be the peoples of the last days — not only Lehi's descendants, but also the Gentiles and the house of Israel. Presumably, all the prophecies and revelations he included in the Small Plates had already been recorded in the Large Plates. And the Isaiah selections would have been taken from the Brass Plates. From Nephi's perspective, the Small Plates would have been a highly selective and carefully structured package aimed at these latter-day readers.

The reader of the Small Plates is told three times that this second record was made by Nephi at the Lord's command "for a wise purpose." "Wherefore the Lord hath commanded me to make these plates for a wise purpose in him, which purpose I know not" (1 Nephi 9:5).⁴⁵ That wise purpose became evident when Martin Harris lost the first major portion of the translation, and Joseph was directed to translate the Small Plates as a replacement.⁴⁶

44. Compare Alma 36:22 and 1 Nephi 1:8.

45. Compare 1 Nephi 19:3 and Words of Mormon 1:7.

46. See D&C 10. Also see the historical commentary in Bradley, *116 Lost Pages*, 81–82.

Paper Copies of Scripture

Because access to the carefully guarded single copies of metallic records, such as the plates of Nephi and the Brass Plates, would necessarily have been severely limited in a growing Nephite population, the priests and teachers in the rapidly multiplying towns and cities would have needed minimally their own copies of excerpts of the Brass Plates for their own training and for teaching the people.

It is clearly established that ancient Mesoamericans had a fairly easy way of making paper, which could have been learned and used by the Nephites. As John Sorenson has summarized,

Maya books were most often manufactured of long strips of bark paper folded back and forth in accordion fashion to form multiple pages. To make long sheets of paper, bark was stripped off fig trees, soaked, then pounded together with a wooden club. A thin coating of lime plaster was spread on dried strips cut from these sheets. The plaster stiffened the paper and provided a smooth, clean surface on which characters were painted. Such paper was relatively easy to manufacture.⁴⁷

Early sixteenth-century Spanish observers of Aztec tribute practices noted numerous bundles of paper being brought from distant communities. They also saw that paper was used for many purposes beyond writing.⁴⁸ “Because of the close relation between fig trees and paper, the words for these two objects became identical. The Aztec word *amatl* designated both paper and fig tree. The Tarascan word *siranda* is said to have the same two meanings.”⁴⁹

Alma’s Scribal School Updated the Large Plates with Annual Reports

It seems that as Alma took charge of the main Nephite record — the Large Plates of Nephi — that he and his scribal school organized updates

47. Sorenson, *Mormon’s Codex*, 230. A more detailed description of the process and ingredients the Maya used to manufacture paper can be found in Coe and Houston, *The Maya*, 239. Though most ancient Mayan books have been destroyed, the Dresden Codex survives today in the Saxon State Library as the most perfect example of this kind of paper and writing.

48. See Victor Wolfgang von Hagen, *The Aztec and Maya Papermakers* (New York: J. J. Augustin, 1944), 14–22.

49. Paul C. Standley, “The American Fig Tree,” in von Hagen, *The Aztec and Maya Papermakers*, 99.

in the form of annual reports. Beginning with his abridgment of Alma's record, Mormon's record repeatedly notes the beginning and ending of years and summarizes what happened in specific years or groupings of years. The book of Alma explicitly notes over thirty of these transitions from one annual report to the next, depending on how one counts these, and some later passages emphasize them even more.⁵⁰

The official transition from Alma to Helaman as chief scribe and custodian of the Nephi records is recorded in Alma chapter 37. But Mormon also makes it clear that these chapters containing the final instructions of Alma to his three sons were taken from Alma's record: "And we have an account of his commandments which he gave unto them according to his own record" (Alma 35:16). But the record of Alma did not end there. Mormon goes on to mention briefly that Alma and his sons "did go forth among the people to declare the word unto them" (Alma 43:1) before returning "to an account of the wars between the Nephites and the Lamanites in the eighteenth year of the reign of the judges" (Alma 43:3), focusing on the confrontations of Zerahemnah and Moroni as a conclusion to the record of Alma and of the eighteenth year. Mormon's abridgment of the book of Helaman begins with a record of the nineteenth year. Helaman's record begins with an account of Alma's instructions on what to include and exclude from the record — just as Jacob began his section of Nephi's Small Plates with a summary of the instructions Nephi had given him about what to include.⁵¹

Scribal Specializations

The book of Mosiah does name the last three Nephite kings who had stewardship over the record-keeping process. But the accumulating records never mention the names of the scribes who may have managed these responsibilities for the kings on a daily basis. Upon discontinuing the monarchical government structure, Mosiah passed these responsibilities to Alma; and Alma soon separated off the responsibility of the chief judge and retained the scribal responsibilities under the office of chief high priest, as explained above. This may suggest that this responsibility

50. The annual reports surface already in Alma's first verses and provide the principal structure for his closing chapter 63. The continuation of the pattern in Mormon's subsequent book abridgments can be easily seen, for example, in Helaman 2:12–3:3 and 4 Nephi 1, which bounces rapidly through the yearly reports from the 34th year all the way down to Mormon's time in the 320th year.

51. See Jacob 1:1–8 and the discussion in Reynolds, "Nephi's Small Plates," 105–8.

for a continuing record of the Nephite people was viewed as a priestly responsibility — a record that would feature the religious or prophetic perspective more than the political or military perspectives.

Scribal schools in the ancient Near East functioned under a variety of patrons. Kings and emperors typically maintained their own palace schools to provide them with wise and learned men who could advise them, manage administrative activity, support official correspondence in multiple languages, and formulate official proclamations and statutes of law.⁵² Temples also were usually supported by scribal schools that educated new generations of priests and scribes in the literature, hymnology, and religious rites and mythology of their culture, as well as the arts of magic, divinization, and healing and the relevant arcane and foreign languages required for these traditional materials. The world of commerce generated much of the need for scribes who could read and write contracts and manage inventories and communications with distant businesses. This kind of training could sometimes be obtained in more specialized scribal schools that may also have trained men with relevant skills for service on the staffs of military leaders. Nephite society may well have required scribes in all these areas. The degree of specialization that characterized scribal schools would likely have depended on the population sizes they served.

As already demonstrated, Mormon's account derives from a tradition of official scribes who maintained a history of the Nephite people as a whole. We also have some indication of an educated lawyer class that Alma and Amulek had to deal with in Ammonihah (see Alma 10:13–15 and 10:24–11:3). Commercial activity facilitated by some minimal level of literacy is suggested in the account of the apostate priests led by Amulon, who at the request of the Lamanite king taught some of the Lamanites in the language of the Nephites and in reading and writing to the extent that they could “keep their record” and “write one to another. And thus the Lamanites began to increase in riches and began to trade one with another and wax great and began to be a cunning and a wise people as to the wisdom of the world” (Mosiah 24:6–7).

Local priestly scribal schools may have been at the core of scribal education for all these elements of Nephite society, and, as is evident in several stories, they were expected to have expert knowledge of the scriptures and the prophecies and religious laws and regulations included therein. They may also have been involved in maintaining the Nephite competence in Egyptian and Hebrew language and scripts that Mormon

52. See generally Toorn, *Scribal Culture*.

and Moroni claimed to have at the end of the Nephite dispensation.⁵³ They would have been teaching Nephite and Lamanite peoples in their own languages while drawing on Egyptian- and Hebrew-language scriptures in the process.

Military Leadership and the Nephite Scribal Schools

From the beginning to the end, the Book of Mormon seems to include the military arts with the training received in the principal Nephite scribal school. It all starts with Nephi, himself a highly trained scribe in the Josephite tradition, who becomes the ruler and teacher over his people. On the one hand, he makes very clear that he has begun an important history of his people, including the revelations received by their prophets and the wars and contentions with the Lamanites which he leaves with the kings that succeed him to maintain and preserve.

Almost a millennium later, Mormon abridges that record to produce the Book of Mormon. But the first Nephi may also have been the military leader of his people. Knowing of the hatred the Lamanites had toward him and his children, Nephi, as their ruler, armed his people with swords and prepared them to be able to defend themselves. And by the time forty years had passed away they “had already had wars and contentions” with the Lamanites (2 Nephi 5:14, 34; cf. 1 Nephi 9:4).

Over the course of Nephite history, the people who clearly bear responsibility for maintaining the plates of Nephi are also called upon for major roles in military leadership. We don’t know the names or the stories of any of the early kings until we get to the time of king Mosiah and his son king Benjamin, in whose days there was “a serious war and much bloodshed between the Nephites and the Lamanites.”

We don’t know the extent to which the kings would have been involved as combatants or only as ceremonial leaders. The text indicates that Benjamin was a combatant. But the Nephites prevailed, and “king Benjamin did drive them out of the land of Zarahemla” (Omni 1:24). In a second telling, Mormon describes how the Lamanites “came down ... to battle against his people. But behold, king Benjamin gathered together his armies, and he did stand against them, and he did fight with the strength of his own arm with the sword of Laban” (Words of Mormon 1:13). The original sword of Laban was traditionally kept with

53. Compare Mosiah 1:2–4 and Mormon 9:32–34.

the Brass Plates and the Plates of Nephi and was wielded in battle by Nephite leaders.⁵⁴

Mormon's account of this same king Benjamin goes on to describe how he led the prophets in teaching the people and establishing "peace in the land" (The Words of Mormon 1:17–18). Mormon then focuses at some length on Benjamin's causing his sons to be taught "in all the language of his fathers, that thereby they might become men of understanding and that they might know concerning the prophecies which had been spoken by the mouths of their fathers, which was delivered them by the hand of the Lord" (Mosiah 1:2). This sounds as if Benjamin assigned this teaching to his scribal school, that they might be able to read, understand, and teach from the Brass Plates and the Nephite records — witnessing to his sons that all these records "are true" (Mosiah 1:3–8). The military arts and the scribal arts seemed to be co-located in the same hands.

A generation later, the monarchy was replaced by the reign of the judges with Alma as chief judge — he also being a highly trained scribe, as is evident in his writings.⁵⁵ And he has become the custodian of all the records Benjamin had entrusted to his sons. But he is also the top military authority, as is made clear in the Amlicite rebellion: "Now Alma, he being the chief judge and the governor of the people of Nephi, therefore he went up with his people, yea, with his captains and chief captains, yea, at the head of his armies, against the Amlicites to battle" (Alma 2:16). Then, in the second battle, Alma fought Amlici face to face and "slew Amlici with the sword" (Alma 2:29–31).

Scribes and Priests

By the next generation, the Nephites have spread their growing population into several new cities. The roles of military, government, and priestly leadership have been separated, but all seem to pass from father to son. Nephihah was replaced by his son Parhoron as chief judge.⁵⁶ Helaman replaces Alma as leader of the high priests and prophets and carries on

54. These same men served as teachers, scribes, rulers, and military leaders. Compare 2 Nephi 5:14, Jacob 1:10, Words of Mormon 1:13, and Mosiah 1:16.

55. See Reynolds, "Rethinking Alma 36," in which it is shown that Alma can employ the most intricate techniques of seventh-century Hebrew rhetoric in his speaking and writing.

56. Alma 50:40. Skousen documents the variation of spellings of this original *Parhoron* that Oliver Cowdery introduced into the original manuscript and then in the printer's copy that led to the current official spelling *Pahoran*. See Royal Skousen, *Analysis of Textual Variants of the Book of Mormon: Part 4* (Provo, UT: Neal A. Maxwell Institute for Religious Scholarship, 2007), 2737–39.

with the scribal responsibilities for the records (Alma 45:21–22). And Moroni is appointed chief captain of the Nephite armies by the chief judges and the voice of the people (Mormon 2:1–2).⁵⁷

After Alma, the scribal responsibility for the Nephite records continues to be included with the priestly duties. But it also seems likely that all these lines of responsibility (ruler and teacher, military leader, religious leader, and records keeper) assume scribal training and high literacy for the occupants of these offices. This is never stated explicitly but seems to be Mormon's assumption. There is repeated evidence of close personal friendship between them, and Mormon includes highly literate exchanges of letters across these lines of responsibility in his abridgment. All have good familiarity with the scriptures, and the military leaders particularly display deep understanding of the ideological grounding of the Nephite polity.

As previously noted, Mormon never makes the Nephite scribal school or its history an explicit topic in his abridgment. What would be obvious to people from his oral culture is far less obvious to modern readers, who tend to assume universal literacy. But his text does include details that make the reconstruction of that scribal history possible.

Alma as Father of the Scribes

Alma the Elder was a descendant of Nephi and a scribe trained in the priestly tradition that accompanied the colony of Nephites that returned from Zarahemla to their homeland near the city of Nephi. His son Alma and his successors had that same scribal training, which enabled them to draw heavily on the Brass Plates in their training and teaching. From Alma down to Ammaron, a four-century chain of Alma's descendants served as chief of the Nephite scribal school and as chief high priests and prophets in the Nephite church first organized by Alma the Elder under the authorization of the last Nephite king, Mosiah.

Mormon's abridgment omits major elements of the Nephite history, but faithfully preserves textual accounts of all the transitions between chief scribes and prophets. In passing that responsibility to his eldest son Helaman, Alma provides unparalleled detail about the records and sacred things, the sacred nature of the responsibility to preserve them and to extend the records. He also emphasizes the attendant responsibility to teach the people and call them to repentance and

57. While Mormon never mentions how Captain Moroni might fit into the family, he obviously admires him greatly as a predecessor, and he does name his own son after him, suggesting at least the possibility of a blood relationship.

obedience (see Alma 37:1–47). Readers should assume that this package of responsibilities was passed in similar manner all the way down to Ammaron. Two decades later, Helaman died, and his brother “Shiblon took possession of those sacred things” (Alma 63:1). Four years later, Shiblon passed them back to Helaman’s son Helaman, Alma’s third son Corianton having emigrated previously to the north (Alma 63:11–13).

After the murder of the chief judge, the people chose this same Helaman to also take on the office of chief judge, bringing the responsibilities of the government, the scribal school, and the leadership of the church back into the hands of a single person (Helaman 2:1–2). About 13 years later, Helaman died, and without further textual explanation, we learn that “his eldest son Nephi *began to reign* in his stead” (Helaman 3:37). That Nephi had inherited the full combination of roles held by his father becomes clear about eight years later when “Nephi delivered up the judgment seat to a man whose name was Cezoram,” taking it upon himself “to preach the word of God all the remainder of his days” (Helaman 5:1,4) — choosing to follow the example of Alma, who had done the same thing when the growing corruption of the people required his full attention as their spiritual leader.

Three decades later, continuation of the office of chief scribe is emphasized in Mormon’s description of the passing of Nephi’s responsibilities to his son Nephi:

And Nephi the son of Helaman had departed out of the land of Zarahemla, *giving charge unto his son Nephi*, which was his eldest son, *concerning the plates of brass and all the records* which had been kept, and all those things which had been kept sacred, from the departure of Lehi out of Jerusalem. Then he departed out of the land; and whither he went no man knoweth. And *his son Nephi did keep the record in his stead, yea, the record of this people.* (3 Nephi 1:2–3)

This last Nephi, who kept the records during the first century after the birth of Christ, finally passed the record keeping to his son Amos, who kept the records for another 84 years during the peaceful period, before turning them over to his son, the last Amos.

And it came to pass that Nephi, he that kept this last record — and he kept it upon the plates of Nephi — died, and his son Amos kept it in his stead. And he kept it upon the plates of Nephi also; and he kept it eighty and four years. . . . And it came to pass that Amos died also. And it was an hundred

and ninety and four years from the coming of Christ, and his son Amos kept the record in his stead. And he also kept it upon the plates of Nephi; and it was also written in the book of Nephi, which is this book. (4 Nephi 19–21)

After this second Amos died, his brother Ammaron stepped up as heir of the Nephite scribal duties for fifteen years before being directed by the Holy Ghost to hide up all the accumulated sacred records before going to the ten-year old Mormon to arrange for their final disposition:

And it came to pass that after three hundred and five years had passed away ... Amos died, and his brother Ammaron did keep the record in his stead. And it came to pass that when three hundred and twenty years had passed away, Ammaron *being constrained by the Holy Ghost* did hide up the records which were sacred, yea, even *all the sacred records which had been handed down from generation to generation*, which were sacred, even until the three hundred and twentieth year from the coming of Christ. And he did hide them up unto the Lord, that they might come again unto the remnant of the house of Jacob, according to the prophecies and the promises of the Lord. And thus is the end of the record of Ammaron. (4 Nephi 1:47–49)

Accumulated Nephite Records

While Mormon made it clear that he used the Large Plates of Nephi as his primary source for the abridgment we have in the Book of Mormon, some descriptions of the accumulating Nephite records archive seem to indicate that the collection deposited by Ammaron was vast. The clearest of these descriptions was reported by Mormon in Helaman 3:13–16 and is quoted above. But one sentence merits repetition here: “there are many books and many records of every kind, and they have been kept chiefly by the Nephites.”

Mormon as Chief Nephite Scribe and Military Leader

Before Mormon’s day, the ancient social, religious, and political structures that had defined the Nephite nation for centuries were in disarray. The national agreements that made the reign of judges possible had evaporated as people turned to tribal government for support and protection. The church established by Christ was reduced to isolated tiny groups with no significant social influence (see 3 Nephi 7:2–4). And

the scribal school that had maintained a vast system of records and had educated the Nephite kings, prophets, judges, and military leaders for over nine centuries had also reached its end. Ammaron, the brother of the last prophet and chief scribe Amos, had been left to deal with the Nephite records collection after Amos died.

Ammaron's first move was to find a hiding place for the records as far from Lamanite territory as possible. We don't know if it was Ammaron or Mormon's own father, also named Mormon, who was teaching the young Mormon "after the manner of [his] people." But the precocious youngster caught Ammaron's attention: "I perceive that thou art a sober child and art quick to observe" (Mormon 1:2). Ammaron was inspired to charge this ten-year old student to observe the events of his days and to make a final addition to the Large Plates of Nephi after about fifteen years (Mormon 1:3–4).

Before the time when Mormon would take up his charge to extend the records, the great wars of the Lamanites and Nephites broke out, and at the age of 16, Mormon, like Captain Moroni some centuries earlier, was chosen to be the leader of the Nephite armies (see Mormon 2:1–2). Unlike most Nephites of his day, Mormon was a devout Christian. But he "was large in stature," educated, and likely a standout member of the military caste. The ensuing wars appear to have occupied Mormon for almost another 20 years. But at that point in the saga, the Nephite retreat had carried them to the land of Jashon, which "was near the land where Ammaron had deposited the records unto the Lord" (Mormon 2:17).

Either previously, or at this point in Mormon's life, he discharged the obligation that Ammaron had placed upon him as a young boy to extend the record on the Large Plates of Nephi with his own observations on the last days of the Nephites: "I had gone according to the words of Ammaron and taken the plates of Nephi and did make a record. . . . And upon the plates of Nephi did I make a full account of all the wickedness and abominations" (Mormon 2:17–18). Although Mormon will later move those plates, along with all the records in Ammaron's depository, to their final hiding place in the hill Cumorah, Mormon does not refer again to his own writing on those plates. Rather, at this point his full attention seems to have turned to his own great project — the abridgment of those Large Plates of Nephi.

Mormon's Last Project — the Plates of Mormon

As it turned out, Ammaron's assignment to complete the Large Plates of Nephi was only the beginning for Mormon. From the time of Lehi

and Nephi, the prophets had foreseen that in the last days the Nephite record would become the means by which the remnant of Joseph would become a great blessing to all nations according to the blessing given anciently to Abraham.⁵⁸ But this was not to be the full record begun by Nephi centuries earlier. At some point not specified in the text, Mormon received a commandment from the Lord to make a smaller record by abridging the Large Plates of Nephi, an abridgment that could become the direct means by which that promise to Abraham would be fulfilled:

But I knowing that these things must surely be made known and that all things which are hid must be revealed upon the housetops and also that a knowledge of these things must come unto *the remnant of these people* and also unto the Gentiles, which the Lord hath said should scatter this people — and this people should be counted as naught among them — therefore *I write a small abridgment*, daring not to give a full account of the things which I have seen because of *the commandment which I have received*. ... And now behold, this I speak unto their seed and also to the Gentiles which hath care for the house of Israel, that realize and know from whence their blessings come. For I know that such will sorrow for the calamity of the house of Israel; yea, they will sorrow for the destruction of this people. They will sorrow that this people had not repented, that they might have been clasped in the arms of Jesus. Now these things are written unto *the remnant of the house of Jacob*. ... And they are to be hid up unto the Lord, that they may come forth in his own due time. And *this is the commandment which I have received*. And behold, they shall come forth according to the commandment of the Lord when he shall see fit in his wisdom. (Mormon 5:8–13)

The abridgment of a thousand years of Nephite records would have been an enormous task. Mormon does mention some spaces in his adult life when he might have been able to accomplish that. But we can only speculate on that. After leading the Nephites in war for two decades, Mormon took up the Large Plates of Nephi for the purpose of extending

58. See Reynolds, “Understanding the Abrahamic Covenant.” The first clear reference to this prophecy in the Book of Mormon comes from Nephi’s description of the great vision given to him and Lehi. See 1 Nephi 13:33–41. That the Nephites saw themselves as “the remnant of Joseph” is documented and explained in Reynolds, “A Backstory.”

and completing that record. Within a few years, his forces were able to retake their lands and establish a boundary by treaty between the two peoples — a treaty that held for a full decade (see Mormon 2:27–3:1).

When the Lamanites restarted their invasion, Mormon served as the military leader for two or three years, but because his own people had descended to such depths of wickedness, he gave up his role as leader and “utterly refused to go up against [his] enemies,” choosing instead to “stand as an idle witness” (Mormon 3:16). It would be another 13 years at least before he would accept once again the leadership of his people. As Mormon explains:

And it came to pass that I did go forth among the Nephites and did repent of the oath which I had made, that I would no more assist them. And they gave me command again of their armies, for they looked upon me as though I could deliver them from their afflictions. But behold, I was without hopes, for I knew the judgments of the Lord which should come upon them. (Mormon 5:1–2)

This sequence leaves over twenty years that Mormon could have focused on his completion of the Large Plates of Nephi and then of his abridgment of that same Nephite record. It would also seem to have been a period in which he could have access to the materials and even to whatever limited assistance these projects may have required.⁵⁹

Both of those large scribal efforts may have been essentially completed by the time Mormon returned to war. He would add another three chapters (Mormon 5, 6, and 7 as packaged in our modern edition of the Book of Mormon) before turning things over to his son Moroni. He knew the end was coming, so he “went to the hill Shim and did take up all the records which Ammaron had hid up unto the Lord” (Mormon 4:23). A few years later, as the Nephites awaited the coming of the Lamanites for what they expected to be their final battle, Mormon “hid up in the hill Cumorah all the records which had been entrusted to [him] by the hand of the Lord.” That would be the entire collection of Nephite records that Ammaron had hidden originally in the hill Shim, including the Large Plates of Nephi. But *it did not include his abridgment* of those records that was to become our modern Book of Mormon.

59. See Brant A. Gardner, “Mormon the Writer,” in *Labor Diligently to Write: The Ancient Making of a Modern Scripture* 35 (2020), 6–12, for a careful and detailed analysis of Mormon’s possible writing timeline that offers a somewhat different interpretation.

And when three hundred and eighty and four years had passed away, we had gathered in all the remainder of our people unto the land Cumorah. And it came to pass that when we had gathered in all our people in one to the land of Cumorah, behold, I Mormon began to be old. And knowing it to be the last struggle of my people and having been commanded of the Lord that I should not suffer that the records which had been handed down by our fathers, which were sacred, to fall into the hands of the Lamanites — for the Lamanites would destroy them — therefore I made this record out of the plates of Nephi and *hid up in the hill Cumorah all the records which had been entrusted to me by the hand of the Lord, save it were these few plates which I gave unto my son Moroni.* (Mormon 6:5–6)

Later, having survived the great battle, Mormon was able to extend his own record to include a summary of his own final actions (Mormon 6:1–15), a mournful farewell to his own fallen people (Mormon 6:16–22), and an invitation to “*the remnant of this people* which are spared,” that they might receive the gospel of Jesus Christ and be saved (Mormon 7:1–10). What that final account makes clear is that almost all the Nephite records previously hidden up by Ammaron in the hill Shim had now been hidden up by Mormon in the hill Cumorah before the great battle. However, Mormon’s abridgment was never buried in the Nephite hill Cumorah, but was given to Moroni for protection, further additions, and an eventual transmission to Joseph Smith. Generations of readers have assumed that Mormon’s gold plates were deposited in the Nephite hill Cumorah. But after Mormon deposited all the inherited records into that hill, he says he gave the gold plates, now including the Small Plates of Nephi, to Moroni to protect. We also know that Moroni would add considerably to Mormon’s abridgment over the next 35 years when he had those plates in his possession.

The great battle took place 385 years after the coming of Christ. Fifteen years later, Moroni makes his first entry on Mormon’s plates, updating the reader on the fates of the last of the Nephites and adding his own impassioned plea to future readers that they repent and receive the gospel of Jesus Christ, that they may be blessed forever (Mormon 8:1–9:37). Twenty years after that, Moroni has added the books of Ether and Moroni and the sealed portion to Mormon’s plates. Only then, 35 years after the great battle, does Moroni “seal up these records,” without giving any hint about where that would be. But 1400 years later he would direct Joseph Smith to find them in a stone box buried near

the top of a small glacial hill near the Smith home. In the decades that followed, the Latter-day Saints would begin referring to that hill by the name *Cumorah* (Joseph Smith History 1:27–54).

Nephi's Small Plates

As noted earlier, there was one important exception to this account that Mormon did not mention here. But it had major impact on the text of the Book of Mormon that we have today. During the period when Mormon had access to all the Nephite records, he came across Nephi's Small Plates, which discovery pleased him, "because of the prophecies of the coming of Christ" (Words of Mormon 1:4).

But behold, I shall take these plates which contain these prophesyings and revelations and put them with the remainder of my record, for they are choice unto me; and I know they will be choice unto my brethren. And I do this for a wise purpose, for thus it whispereth me according to the workings of the Spirit of the Lord which is in me. And now I do not know all things, but the Lord knoweth all things which is to come; wherefore he worketh in me to do according to his will. (Words of Mormon 1:6–7)

The Last Nephite Scribe

Some fifteen years after the last battle, Moroni undertook to "finish the record of [his] father Mormon," saying that he had "but few things to write," as Mormon had instructed him (Mormon 8:1–3).

And my father also was killed by them. And I, even I, remaineth alone to write the sad tale of the destruction of my people. But behold, they are gone, and I fulfill the commandment of my father. And whether they will slay me, I know not. Therefore *I will write and hide up the records in the earth*. And whither I go, it mattereth not. Behold, my father hath made this record, and he hath written the intent thereof. And behold, I would write it also if I had room upon the plates, but I have not. And *ore I have none, for I am alone*. My father hath been slain in battle, and all my kinsfolks. And I have not friends nor whither to go. And how long that the Lord will suffer that I may live, I know not. Behold, *four hundred years have passed away* since the coming of our Lord and Savior. (Mormon 8:3–6)

Before inscribing his own farewell to his future readers, Moroni gives us a little more information about his circumstances. He still has access to some kind of news network. He knows to tell us that “the Nephites which had escaped into the country southward were hunted by the Lamanites until they were all destroyed” and that his “father also was killed by them” (Mormon 8:2–3). He also knows that

the Lamanites have hunted my people the Nephites down from city to city and from place to place, even until they are no more. ... And behold also, the Lamanites are at war one with another; and the whole face of this land is one continual round of murder and bloodshed, and *no one knoweth* the end of the war. And now behold, I say no more concerning them, for there are none save it be Lamanites and robbers that do exist upon the face of the land. (Mormon 8:7–9)

Moroni never mentions how he was able to provide for his own needs for food, clothing, and shelter across those 35 years between the last battle and the time he finally deposited the plates of Mormon near the future home of Joseph Smith. No doubt he may have been able to survive in the short term by scavenging from the enormous camp established by the Nephites during the months and years they had been preparing for the final battle. Knowing he would survive to fulfil the Lord’s purposes with the plates, he may even have hidden some supplies away for his own future needs. But 35 years is a long time in a semi-tropical climate or anywhere else for a single person to survive. The land northward from Cumorah was populated, but not by peoples who are described in the text of the Book of Mormon. Without textual evidence, we can only speculate that Moroni might have found friendly faces here and there that would accommodate him in some way during those years. He only tells us: “I wander whithersoever I can for the safety of mine own life” (Moroni 1:3).

One happy note Moroni shares with his readers is that the three disciples of Jesus “which did tarry in the land” had visited Moroni and Mormon, “and they have ministered unto us” (Mormon 8:10–11). He also anchors his own testimony of Christ and his gospel with the reassurance “that I have seen Jesus and that he hath talked with me face to face and that he told me in plain humility, even as a man telleth another *in mine own language* concerning these things” (Ether 12:39).⁶⁰

60. It may be worth noting that both here and in his appearances to the Nephite people centuries earlier, Jesus seems to have spoken to people in their current

But Moroni did not give Mormon's record a final burial at that time. He would survive another twenty years before taking that final step. In the meantime, he was able to produce many additional metal plates and add extensively to the plates, including his own abridgment of the record of Ether, his own book of Moroni, and the sealed portion containing the full account of the great vision given to the brother of Jared at the beginning of the Jaredite dispensation. We don't know whether he did find the ore needed to manufacture additional plates or if he was able to repurpose unused or lower priority leaves from the vast collection of records Mormon had buried in the hill Cumorah.

The Jaredite Record

The book of Ether written by Moroni and appended to Mormon's abridgement bears witness to a much older scribal tradition among the Jaredites which derived from their own Mesopotamian origins at the time of "the great tower" and persisting successfully down to the time of Ether himself. While that scribal tradition and the sources it used do not play a central role in this paper, some significant attention given to Ether's gold plates by the Nephite scribes does require some mention here.

The historical background and sources of the book of Ether are much too complex to be reviewed in a paper about Nephite scribalism.⁶¹ I agree with John Welch and others who have concluded that Moroni was using Mosiah's translation ... of Ether's record into the Nephite language, including the great vision recorded by the brother of Jared, although Moroni's language in Mosiah 28: 11–19 and Ether 3:21–4:7, is open to other interpretations. Here, as in other passages, the Nephite prophets address their readers as if they were present, looking at the records being described, in which case their intended meanings would doubtless be perfectly clear.

Given the occurrence of some Jaredite names and cultural patterns in the Nephite record, and despite Ether's claim that all the Jaredites were killed in the final war, we should keep open the possibility that some of those people escaped their final cataclysm and had descendants that

version of the Nephite language.

61. There are several published analyses and summaries available, but I find John W. Welch's online "Notes" on Ether 5 to be as comprehensive and reasonable as any available. See Welch, "Ether 1–5," in *John W. Welch Notes* (Springville, UT: Book of Mormon Central, 2020), 1087–112, <https://archive.bookofmormoncentral.org/content/ether-1-5>.

gradually became part of the Mulekites and then the Nephite people. If that did happen, there is no evidence in Mormon's abridgment that they ever identified themselves as a separate people or played a significant role in the Nephite saga.⁶²

However, we do have Moroni's highly condensed abridgment of Ether's record as translated by Mosiah, which he interspersed generously with his own commentary. Moroni also included, apparently without abridgment, Mosiah's translation of the great vision given to the brother of Jared at the very beginning of the Jaredite dispensation:

And when the Lord had said these words, the Lord shewed unto the brother of Jared all the inhabitants of the earth which had been and also all that would be. And the Lord withheld them not from his sight, even unto the ends of the earth. For the Lord had said unto him in times before that if he would believe in him that he could shew unto him all things, it should be shewn unto him. Therefore the Lord could not withhold any thing from him, for he knew that the Lord could shew him all things. And the Lord said unto him: Write these things and seal them up, and I will shew them in mine own due time unto the children of men. And it came to pass that the Lord commanded him that he should seal up the two stones which he had received and shew them not until the Lord should shew them unto the children of men. And the Lord commanded the brother of Jared to go down out of the mount from the presence of the Lord and write the things which he had seen. (Ether 3:25–4:1)

Moroni goes on to explain:

Behold, I have written upon these plates the very things which the brother of Jared saw. And there never was greater things made manifest than that which was made manifest unto the brother of Jared. Wherefore the Lord hath commanded me to write them and I have wrote them. And he commanded me that I should seal them up. And he also hath commanded that I should seal up the interpretation thereof; wherefore I have

62. John Sorenson has also presented a view that sees surviving Jaredites merging with the Mulekites before their later merger with the Nephites. See John L. Sorenson, "The Mulekites," *BYU Studies Quarterly* 30, no. 3 (1990): 13–14; and Sorenson, *Mormon's Codex*, 228–29.

sealed up the interpreters according to the commandment of the Lord. (Ether 4:4–5)

Presumably, that sealed portion of the plates of Mormon was manufactured by Moroni, who used the translation into Nephite that had been made centuries earlier by Mosiah (see Mosiah 28:10–19).

Late Additions

Moroni makes it sound as if the collection of brief texts included in his book of Moroni were appended near the time when he finally deposited the plates where they would be accessible to the first prophet of the last dispensation, fourteen centuries into the future. He had not planned to write any more after completing his project of “abridging the account of the people of Jared.” But he still has time on his hands and has thought of “a few more things” that “may be of worth unto my brethren the Lamanites in some future day, according to the will of the Lord” (Moroni 1:1, 4). These last additions may have required access to the Nephite records in Cumorah or at least his own memory of church ordinances and practices.

His first additions explained certain practices and ordinances, including set wordings, as observed in the Nephite church of Christ. Collected and recorded in one place, these were incorporated into the practices of the Restoration church from its beginning.⁶³ Moroni also added a sermon and two letters he had received from his father Mormon years earlier. In these we learn that Mormon had also served as a leader and teacher in the Nephite church (Moroni 7–9). All three of these items reveal the greatness of Mormon, his deep knowledge of scripture and his grasp of human life both at the level of individuals and of the nation, and his unwavering commitment to Jesus Christ in the face of a most discouraging deterioration of Nephite and Lamanite society. Through the eyes of his son, we can appreciate in much richer detail how Mormon stood out in his generation as one of the most accomplished of the Nephite scribes, military leaders, and church leaders.

Moroni’s Spiritual Message

For the third time, Moroni comes to an expected end of his writing. Invoking letters received years earlier from his father Mormon, he pens an impassioned plea to his readers to turn to Jesus Christ and his gospel, that the covenants of the Father may be fulfilled. For those who will accept

63. Compare Moroni 1–6 with D&C 20.

his gospel and endure to the end, the Holy Ghost will fill them “with hope and perfect love” (Moroni 8:26). They will be “sanctified in Christ by the grace of God” and “become holy, without spot” (Moroni 10:33). For as Mormon had taught the believers, the whole point of the gospel and the plan of salvation is to help men and women in this world become like Jesus Christ and the Father, that they may be prepared to live with them in the next:

Wherefore, my beloved brethren, pray unto the Father with all the energy of heart that ye may be filled with this love which he hath bestowed upon all who are true followers of his Son Jesus Christ, that ye may become the sons of God, that when he shall appear, we shall be like him for we shall see him as he is — that we may have this hope, that we may be purified even as he is pure. Amen. (Moroni 7:48)

Conclusions

This paper leverages the insights of modern scholars on the scribal schools of the ancient Near East to identify and track the Nephite scribal school across the ten centuries of the Nephite dispensation. Mormon tells us his abridgment includes only a hundredth part of the Nephite history available to him on the Large Plates of Nephi and other records. That being the case, it is especially impressive that his abridgment tracks the responsibility for maintaining and preserving the Nephite record and other sacred objects — the responsibility of the scribes — across that millennium without gaps.

Mormon and his son Moroni were themselves trained scribes who could create not only a highly literate text, but also the physical materials necessary to inscribe their writings on metal plates that would endure to modern times. Like their predecessors, they were also military and religious leaders — a combination of roles that characterized the chief scribes from the beginning with Nephi down to the end. Because their “holy scriptures,” the Brass Plates, were written in Egyptian and Hebrew, the Nephite scribal tradition must have maintained a significant level of fluency in those classical languages and scripts throughout their dispensation. And perhaps most impressively, they were still guided and motivated by the same prophecies and gospel teachings that had been given to their original prophets — Lehi and Nephi.

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UNDERSTANDING HOW THE SCRIPTURES CAME TO BE

Jennifer Roach

Review of Michael R. Ash, *Rethinking Revelation and the Human Element in Scripture: The Prophet's Role as Creative Co-Author* (Redding, CA: FAIRLatterDaySaints.org, 2021). 770 pages. \$34.95 (paperback).

Abstract: *A new book by Mike Ash examines to what degree the human mind is involved in receiving revelation. Ash sums up his view by saying, "prophets have a special calling, but not a special brain." He then spends 700+ pages describing what that means and how it works. In essence, prophets do not go into a trance-like state, put a pen in their hand, and engage in a process of automatic writing only to wake from the trance and read what has been given. Instead, Ash helps us see how God uses the brains and personality of any particular prophet to bring His word forth. God does not bypass the prophet's humanness; rather, He relies on it to contextualize His words for a particular people in a particular time.*

One might think that an author as prolific as Michael Ash might have run out of things to say by now. After all, he has produced ten books, over 160 articles in such periodicals as the *Ensign*, *Sunstone*, the *FARMS Review*, and *Dialogue: A Journal of Mormon Thought*. He has also been featured on almost 100 podcast episodes and in 30 videos. And yet his latest work, *Rethinking Revelation and the Human Element in Scripture: The Prophet's Role as Creative Co-Author*, weighs in at a whopping 750+ pages. It is an impressive (and heavy) tome.

Ash's thesis is deceptively simple: God and the prophet work together to produce scripture. He uses that thesis to thread the very tiny needle of understanding how humans have a place in God's revelatory work without asserting that they alone create the reality. In a phone interview

Ash was quick to say that his thesis is not to be taken as supporting the position that says, “Joseph Smith made up the Book of Mormon,” but it’s also not to be taken in support of the idea that a prophet acts like a human dictation machine either.

Why Is This Book Important?

In some ways, Ash’s book is the more academic version of his earlier work, *Shaken Faith Syndrome*,¹ and he references that book frequently. But where *Shaken Faith Syndrome* attempts to catalog all the difficult issues that cause members to leave the church or investigators to be wary, this book specifically addresses those concerns that come about where human will meets God’s agenda. Ash is seeking to help believers and skeptics embrace the intersection of inspiration and intellect.

Scholars in many other parts of the Christian world have been playing with this idea for decades, but it’s a particularly tricky idea for many Latter-day Saints. It might be fine to think of the Bible as having an element of “creativity” in it because Latter-day Saints already hold some suspicion toward the Bible — it is only worthwhile as it is translated correctly. Ash demonstrates that there are two extremes which should be avoided. One is believing that since the Prophets had a role in creation of scripture that it is therefore all fiction. But the other is believing that Prophets go into some trance-like state and practice some kind of automatic writing where they channel the mind of God without those thoughts needing to be processed through their own brain and language. So, when Ash says that the Prophet has a role in co-creating scripture, he is using the word “create” to mean, “to bring into existence,” and not to mean “creative writing,” a form of fiction writing.

Literalists, Mythicalists, and Extensibilists

Ash observes that faithful members of the Church generally fall into three categories when thinking about these issues: literalists, mythicalists, and extensibilists. In sorting members into these three groups, Ash is not trying to ascribe goodness to one and not another. What he seems to be doing is identifying the thinking patterns of each group, which in turn reveals where they may be most likely to have a faith crisis.

Literalists might be described as being extremely skeptical of science that contradicts their view. They tend to believe in young-Earth

1. Michael R. Ash, *Shaken Faith Syndrome: Strengthening One’s Testimony in the Face of Criticism and Doubt* (Redding, CA: The Foundation for Apologetic Information and Research, 2013).

creationism and that every word in the scriptures describes historical events as accurately as a photograph. Ash's observation is that this group is far more likely to be upset by learning information that contradicts their literalist views or that goes against a traditional telling of church history.

Mythicalists think in exactly the opposite direction. They see the Book of Mormon as some kind of "inspired fiction." They probably do not believe there were a people called the Nephites, but they still say, "the Church is true." What they mean by that is that truths can be learned in the Church, which bring people closer to Heavenly Father, and that worrying about the pesky historical details isn't really the point. The danger for this group is that they could hold the same belief about any church. A congregation of Methodists or Catholics or Hindus can also help people be closer to God. Once it doesn't matter which specific church one is in, it's not a far jump to, "I don't need to go to church at all anymore; I find God in nature."

Extensibilists are in the middle of these two groups. They are attempting to be elastic thinkers who can fully accept the scriptures as being records of a real people and real events while also understanding that scripture is not written like a story book and that science can shed light on issues in ways that faith cannot. While Ash doesn't say it outright, the biggest danger for this group is probably that people on all sides will misunderstand them — the radical middle is never an easy place to be.

Uncovering Truth

Ash goes on to explain the intricate system through which humans make meaning. For Him, inspiration and intellect are two sides of the same coin. Latter-day Saints believe God still communicates with His children but, as Ash points out, neither side of the coin provides infallible data. The information that both inspiration and intellect produce has to be interpreted correctly, by faith.

This applies to prophets, too. Ash's point is that prophets have special responsibilities, not special brains. He rehearses the basic elements of cognitive function in humans and makes the case that prophets are helpful to us specifically because they have normal brains that must take in information, interpret it, and produce new thoughts exactly as the rest of us do.

Uncovering truth becomes especially dicey when science and scripture appear to be in conflict. Ash lays out a paradigm wherein scripture and science can be understood as part of one great whole,

not two conflicting data points. God uses both sides of the coin to inspire His children to contextualize their faith in their circumstances. This is very similar to what the apostle Paul is doing in the epistles of the New Testament. Paul is writing to churches in very different socioeconomic structures, in different parts of the known world, and living under different conditions. He is not creating a new Gospel for each church, even though he seems to give conflicting advice to different churches. He is simply contextualizing the gospel into the Church's circumstances. Ash makes the point that modern prophets must do this too – contextualize the scriptures for us today “after the manner of their language.” In order to do this, the prophet must be one of us; he must understand the times in such a way that he knows how to make gospel issues make sense today.

Truth is truth, rather it be discovered through science or scripture. And somehow all truths work into a grand unifying theory of everything, one great whole. Ash is passionate about helping people find a humble place to stand in the midst of living at a time where we have more information than ever before.

Sometimes a Comforter, Sometimes a Trouble-Maker

In this book Ash is doing his level best to model what it's like to walk a middle line, to thread a very tiny needle. Openness, humility, eagerness to learn, and a willingness to hold faith and questions at the same time are all required for a person to be successful in this endeavor. Ash is deeply concerned about those who are susceptible to a faith crisis and longs to give them not just comfort, but room to belong. And, at many points in the book, Ash seems delighted to invite trouble to believers who are a little too smug in their tidy beliefs. It is said that a good preacher learns to comfort the troubled and trouble the comfortable, and Ash hits the mark here.

The biggest downside of this book, as Ash himself will tell you, is the length. A book coming in at over 750 pages will limit the readership, and that's unfortunate because his ideas need to be read.

A Psychological Critique

The picture that Ash paints of the believer who understands the human element in scripture (and in any aspect of following God) is beautiful. I love to be around people who can hold tension between two things and still continue to learn and grow, and the Church needs more of the kind of people Ash paints.

Ash says up front that his goal in this book is to address intellectual concerns, not emotional ones. He does; the work is good. This is a solid addition to any thinking person's library. But when he describes the idea of an extensibilist, a person with flexible thinking, he is also describing a highly emotionally mature person. He is not wrong in the case he paints, but for this mental health therapist, it feels a bit like only working one pedal of a bicycle. The other pedal — the emotional maturity required to not be emotionally triggered by these issues — deserves no less attention.

I recommend this book. Don't let the length intimidate you into passing it by. Ash has important things to say, and his passion to help those who struggle with the intellectual issues of a faith crisis is inspiring. The kind of flexible thinking he espouses would increase any believer's faith and would help any skeptic or person with questions.

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“UNTO THE TAKING AWAY OF THEIR STUMBLING BLOCKS”: THE TAKING AWAY AND KEEPING BACK OF PLAIN AND PRECIOUS THINGS AND THEIR RESTORATION IN 1 NEPHI 13–15

Matthew L. Bowen

ABSTRACT: *In the latter part (1 Nephi 13–14) of his vision of the tree of life (1 Nephi 11–14), Nephi is shown the unauthorized human diminution of scripture and the gospel by the Gentile “great and abominable church” — that plain and precious things/words, teachings, and covenants were “taken away” or otherwise “kept back” from the texts that became the Bible and how people lived out its teachings. He also saw how the Lord would act to restore those lost words, teachings, and covenants among the Gentiles “unto the taking away of their stumbling blocks” (1 Nephi 14:1). The iterative language of 1 Nephi 13 describing the “taking away” and “keeping back” of scripture bears a strong resemblance to the prohibitions of the Deuteronomic canon-formula texts (Deuteronomy 4:2; 12:31 [MT 13:1]). It also echoes the etiological meanings attached to the name Joseph in Genesis 30:23–24 in terms of “taking away” and “adding.” Nephi’s prophecies of scripture and gospel restoration on account of which “[the Gentiles] shall be no more [cf. Hebrew lō’ yôšîpû ... ‘ôd] brought down into captivity, and the house of Israel shall no more [wělō’ yôšîpû ... ‘ôd] be confounded” (1 Nephi 14:2) and “after that they were restored, they should no more be confounded [(wě)lō’ yôšîpû ... ‘ôd], neither should they be scattered again [wělō’ yôšîpû ... ‘ôd]” (1 Nephi 15:20) depend on the language of Isaiah. Like other Isaiah-based prophecies of Nephi (e.g., 2 Nephi 25:17, 21; 29:1–2), they echo the name of the prophet through whom lost scripture and gospel covenants would be restored — i.e., through a “Joseph.”*

As has already been widely noted,¹ the Genesis narrative etiologizes the name Joseph in terms of two homonymous, yet somewhat antonymous, roots: *ʾāsap* (“gather,” “bring in,” “withdraw,” “take away”)² and *yāsap* (“add,” “continue to do, carry on doing,” “increase,” “do again, more”);³ “And she conceived, and bare a son; and said, God **hath taken away** [*ʾāsap*] my reproach: and she called his name **Joseph** [*yôšēp*]; and said, The Lord **shall add** [*yôšēp*] to me another son” (Genesis 30:23–24; emphasis in all scriptural citations is mine). I have elsewhere suggested that the antonymous meanings attached to the name Joseph are important to Nephi’s prophetic view of the Lord “**set[ting]** his hand **again** [*yôšîp*]⁴ to gather Israel (Isaiah 11:11–12) and “proceeding” (*yôšîp/ yôšip*) to bring forth the sealed book (Isaiah 29:14) that “the promise may be fulfilled unto Joseph,” the son of Jacob (2 Nephi 25:17, 21; cf. 29:1–2),⁵ and the prophetic role of a future raised up seer eponymously named “Joseph.”⁶

The occurrence of this antonymous double-etiology for Joseph in terms of “taking away”/“gathering” and “adding” in a work attributable to the “authority”⁷ if not the direct “authorship”⁸ of Moses has implications for the Lord’s words to Moses:

And in a day when the children of men shall esteem my words as naught and **take** [i.e., take away] many of them **from the book** which thou shalt write, behold, I will raise up another like unto thee; And **they shall** be had **again** [cf. Hebrew *yôšîpû*] among the children of men — among as many as shall believe. (Moses 1:41; 2 Nephi 3:7–11)⁹

This latter text should be understood in connection with the Deuteronomic “canon-formula” texts (in my use of this term, I somewhat follow Bernard Levinson who describes canon formulas as warnings against adding to or taking away from a particular work “to preclude both literary and doctrinal innovation by safeguarding the textual status quo”).¹⁰ The Deuteronomic canon formula texts — also a part of the body of texts traditionally ascribed to Moses — include Deuteronomy 4:2 (“**Ye shall not add** [*lō’ tōšîpû*] unto the word which I command you, **neither shall ye diminish ought** [*wēlō’ tigrē’û*] from it, that ye may keep the commandments of the Lord your God which I command you”) and Deuteronomy 12:32 [MT 13:1] (“What thing soever I command you, observe to do it: **thou shalt not add** [*lō’ tōšēp*] thereto, **nor diminish** [*wēlō’ tigrā’*] from it”). The Hebrew verb *gāra’* constitutes a synonym of Hebrew *ʾāsap* and the direct antonym¹¹ of the Hebrew verb *yāsap*

(whence the name *yôšēp* derives) in the Deuteronomistic canon-formula texts.¹²

In this study, I wish to apply these observations to that part of Nephi's vision of the tree of life in which an angel shows Nephi "the formation of that great and abominable church" among the Gentiles that corresponds to "the great and spacious building"¹³ in his father's dream. The angel shows Nephi that this church "take[s] away" from the gospel and from scriptural records, including from what would eventually constitute the version¹⁴ of "the book" that would go forth from the Jews to the Gentiles (i.e., the Bible — Old and New Testaments), many "plain and precious things [words]"¹⁵ and even "covenants" (1 Nephi 13:26–29, 32–34).

Nephi understood that the prophetic work to which a latter-day seer bearing the name "Joseph" would be called, would constitute a divinely aided work to restore these losses (see 2 Nephi 3:6–15). Accordingly, Nephi's final use of the canon-formula-influenced "take away" motif in 1 Nephi 14:1 ("in that day ... [the Lord] shall manifest himself unto [the Gentiles] in word, and also in power, in very deed, unto **the taking away** of their stumbling blocks") describes the reversal of the "taking away" of scriptural words, gospel truths, and divine covenants. Additional explanatory wordplay in 1 Nephi 14:2 ("[the Gentiles] **shall be no more** [cf. Hebrew *lō' yôšîpû* ... '*ôd*] brought down into captivity, and the house of Israel **shall no more** [*lō' yôšîpû* ... '*ôd*] be confounded") and 1 Nephi 15:20 ("and after that they were **restored, they should no more be confounded, neither should they be scattered again**") further suggests that Nephi had the meaning of the name Joseph (with its double-etymology) and the fulfillment of the Abrahamic covenant in mind.

"Taking Away" or "Keeping Back": The Integrity of the Divine Word and Its Human Diminution

As a literary phenomenon, biblical texts employing the so-called "canon formula" have direct relevance for 1 Nephi 13–14 and the deliberate "taking away" or "keeping back" of "plain and precious" words, concepts, and truths from sacred texts and covenants — e.g., Deuteronomy 4:2; 5:22 [MT 5:18]; 12:31 [MT 13:1]; Proverbs 30:6; and Revelation 22:18–19.

The most famous of the biblical canon-formula texts, Revelation 22:18–19, declares that the acts of "adding" and "taking away" from the text of the *biblion* (single "book") of John's revelation will activate "adding" and "taking away" as curses: "If any man **shall add** [*epithē*] unto these things, **God shall add** [*epithēsei ho theos*] unto him the plagues that are written in this book [*gegrammenas en tō bibliō toutō*]:

and if any man **shall take away** [*aphelē*] from the words of the book of this prophecy, God **shall take away** [*aphelei*] his part out of the [tree] of life, and out of the holy city, and from the things which are written in this book [*gegrammenōn en tō bibliō toutō*].” It seems significant, then, that Nephi’s vision had the original, whole, untampered-with autograph of John’s Revelation in view:

[T]he things which he shall write are just and true. And behold, they are written in the book [i.e., the Bible] ... And at the time the book proceeded out of the mouth of the Jew, the things which were written were plain and pure and most precious and easy to the understanding of all men. (1 Nephi 14:23)

This description strongly suggests that John’s text, despite its canon formula and attendant warnings, would suffer from unauthorized additions and deletions in its dissemination and transmission. It may be that the Revelation 22:18–19 canon formula itself constitutes the Lord’s or John’s effort to safeguard the text of Revelation, but it is also possible that these verses constitute a later addition to the text of Revelation intended to stabilize a text tradition that had already suffered the diminution of its divinely inspired contents. In any case, 1 Nephi 13–14 appears to have in view such unauthorized additions to and, more particularly, subtractions from divine covenants and law and the holy texts in which divine covenants and law are inscribed, just as do the Deuteronomic canon formula texts.

Jeremiah, a contemporary of Lehi and Nephi,¹⁶ received instructions from the Lord in the language of the Deuteronomic canon formulas, not to “diminish” or “take away” even a word from the divine message the Lord intended him to give his fellow Judahites:

Thus saith the LORD; Stand in the court of the LORD’s house, and speak unto all the cities of Judah, which come to worship in the LORD’s house, all the words that I command thee to speak unto them; **diminish not** [*’al-tigra’*] a word [*dābār*]. (Jeremiah 26:2)

Taken together, the foregoing examples help us appreciate how seriously the Lord regards the integrity of his words and his works.¹⁷

**“Many of the Covenants of the Lord Have They Taken Away”:
The Great Apostasy and the Gentiles’ Doctrinal Diminution
of the Savior’s Gospel**

After seeing in vision the fall of his own people (1 Nephi 12:13–21; cf. 1 Nephi 15:4–5)¹⁸ and the dwindling of the Lamanites “in unbelief” (1 Nephi 12:22–23), Nephi describes seeing the latter-day nations of the Gentiles who would populate the land of promise and their origin (see 1 Nephi 13:1–19), including the Great Apostasy. John W. Welch observes that “the longest scriptural prophecy about the apostasy and the years between the first and nineteenth centuries is found in Nephi’s vision in 1 Nephi 13.”¹⁹

In 1 Nephi 13:20, Nephi states that he “beheld a book” among these gentiles and that “it was carried forth among them.” When Nephi’s angelic guide asks if Nephi understands “the meaning of the book,” Nephi responds that he does not know the meaning of what he was seeing (1 Nephi 13:21–22). The angel then explains that the book “proceedeth out of the mouth of a Jew” and that it constituted “a record of the Jews, which contain the covenants of the Lord which he hath made unto the house of Israel,” a record that “containeth many of the prophecies of the holy prophets,” and a “record like unto the engravings ... upon the plates of brass, save they are not so many” (1 Nephi 13:23). Regarding the contents of the brass plates, Robert J. Matthews offered the following:

The plates of brass contained a record beginning with the five books of Moses down to Jeremiah — only a portion of the time period of the Old Testament and none of the New — yet the reduced version of the whole Bible—the Bible with which we are acquainted, containing both the Old and New Testaments — is ‘not so many’ as the record on the plates of brass.²⁰

If this is the case, the angel’s statement “gives us a clue as to just how much has been ‘taken away’ and lost to our present Bible.”²¹ Thus, these writings with their prophecies and covenants were “of great worth unto the Gentiles” (1 Nephi 13:23). The angel’s statements readily identify the “book” as the writings that came to constitute the canonical Bible (the English term ultimately deriving from Greek *biblia*, “books”), both Old and New Testaments.

The angel then informs Nephi that these writings, in their original, pre-canonical form and meaning, had gone forth from their Jewish authors “in purity” long before these writings had come to comprise the

canonical “book” previously described. As Matthews suggests, “That this reduction was deliberate and not simply caused by carelessness or by the difficulties encountered by transcription and translation is further emphasized by the angel.”²² The angel continues thus:

Wherefore these things [words] go forth from the Jews in purity unto the Gentiles, according to the truth which is in God. And **after that they go forth by the hand of the twelve apostles** of the Lamb from the Jews unto the Gentiles, behold, after this **thou seest the formation of that great and abominable church**, which is most abominable of all other churches. For behold, **they have taken away from the gospel of the Lamb many parts which are plain and most precious; and also many covenants of the Lord have they taken away.** And all this have they done that they might pervert the right ways of the Lord, that they might blind the eyes and harden the hearts of the children of men. (1 Nephi 13:25–27; cf. 1 Nephi 14:23)

Nevertheless, Nephi is shown that writings and teachings would not remain as they “came from the pen of the original writers”²³ — writings and teachings that would be subject to a transmission process resulting in their deliberate alteration, both in terms of actual textual loss and a loss of the texts’ original intended *meaning*. Welch writes, “This stage possibly could have occurred more by altering the meaning or understanding of the concepts taught by the Lord than by changing the words themselves.”²⁴ Moreover, we should understand the twofold expression “they have taken away”/“have they taken away” in terms of the language of the Deuteronomic canon-formula texts (e.g., Deuteronomy 4:2; 12:31 [MT 13:1]), with which Nephi would plausibly have been familiar. In other words, “these things” would undergo what the canon formulae warn against: the “taking away” from or “diminishing” their essential content, not just the words themselves. The process of “taking away” covenants was likely similar. As Welch further indicates, covenants “could be taken without deleting any words from the Bible as such. The knowledge and benefit of the covenants of God could become lost simply by neglecting the performance of ordinances, or priesthood functions, or individual covenants as the Lord had taught them.”²⁵

Nephi’s angelic guide further ascribes a twofold motive to the “great and abominable” Gentile church’s “taking away” of “plain and most precious” parts and “covenants” from these ancient Jewish texts and the gospel. First, this church intended to “pervert” the Lord’s “right ways”²⁶

or "way[s] of truth."²⁷ Webster's 1828 dictionary defines the transitive verb *pervert* as denoting "to turn from truth, propriety, or from its proper purpose; to distort from its true use or end."²⁸ Second, through these textual and doctrinal alterations, the adherents of this church intended to "blind the eyes and harden the hearts" of the entire human family. Matthews concludes, "If the foregoing words say anything, they say that the alteration of the text was *deliberate* and intentional and extensive and for unholy and wicked purposes. It is plain also that the corruption of the text was not simply a matter of interpretation, or an awkward rendering of a few passages. It was not simply 'lost in the translation.'"²⁹ The diminution of the inspired gospel — texts and covenants — was wide-ranging and thoroughgoing.

"There Are Many Plain and Precious Things Taken Away from the Book": The Gentiles' Diminution of What Became the Bible

Nephi's angelic guide then offers a further clarification and interpretation of what Nephi has seen: "Wherefore thou seest that after the book hath gone forth through the hands of the great and abominable church that **there are many plain and precious things** [words] **taken away from the book**, which is the book of the Lamb of God" (1 Nephi 13:28). Lori Driggs suggests that the expression "through the hands" as used in this passage "seems to imply a passage of time, through the hands of many people and influences."³⁰ In other words, the phrase "through the hands" seems to describe a diachronic textual transmission process of some length. However, this statement additionally may have some bearing on the later, post-scriptural canonization process.

The angel's and Nephi's description of the biblical writings as collectively "the book of the Lamb of God" (v. 28, 38) suggests God's regard for these writings as divinely inspired witnesses of Jesus Christ, even in their later, diminished state. Nephi asserts that in a later revelation to him, the Lord chided the Gentiles for their lack of gratitude for these sacred writings as the "book [that] proceedeth forth from the mouth of a Jew"³¹ — a Jew whom we might identify as those who wrote, copied, preserved, and handed-down the biblical texts, but also a Jew whom we might also identify as the Lord himself. Nephi records:

[A]nd because my words shall hiss forth, many of the Gentiles shall say: A Bible, a Bible, we have got a Bible! And there cannot be any more Bible! But thus saith the Lord God: O fools, they shall have a Bible, and it shall proceed forth from the Jews,

mine ancient covenant people. And what thank they the Jews for the Bible which they receive from them? Yea, what do the Gentiles mean? Do they remember the travails and the labors and the pains of the Jews, and their diligence unto me, in bringing forth salvation unto the Gentiles? (2 Nephi 29:3–4)

As a collective description, “Jews” or *yěhûdīm* describe those who are to be “praised” or “thanked,”³² not least the Lord himself. We are fortunate to have the writings of the Bible in the condition that we have them, and we should thank the Jews of ages past for the writing and preservation of these texts. The Lord’s description of “the travails and the labors and the pains of the Jews and their diligence unto me in bringing forth salvation unto the Gentiles” in the preservation of the biblical texts stands in stark contrast to the efforts of Gentiles belonging to “the great and abominable church” to “take away,” “keep back,” and otherwise diminish from them described throughout 1 Nephi 13. Clearly, The Lord views the former much more favorably than the latter. Welch further notes that “[a]lthough these records in the hands of the Gentiles will not be perfect, they will still be of great worth and will be amenable to corroboration.”³³

“An Exceedingly Great Many Do Stumble”: The Spiritual Costs of the Diminution of Scripture

Notwithstanding the Jews’ painstaking, diligent labors to preserve the biblical texts, they have suffered significant losses over time. It is important to acknowledge the reality of these losses and their cost in terms of how they have affected the ability of the honest in heart to fully draw near unto God — or, to “come unto Christ and be perfected in him” (Moroni 10:32) — to fully make and keep covenants with God, and to receive all that God offers his children in mortality. The reality is that the deliberate, unauthorized human diminution of God’s laws, covenants, and scripture through “taking away” words and the obscuring of their meaning (intentionally or not) has negatively impacted the ability of God’s children to understand and live them and has caused many to stumble in their faith. Nephi’s angelic guide showed him the degree to which these losses had caused individuals to stumble and had put them within the power of the Adversary:

And after that these plain and precious things were taken away, it goeth forth unto all the nations of the Gentiles. And after it goeth forth unto all the nations of the Gentiles, yea,

even across the many waters — which thou hast seen — with the Gentiles which have gone forth out of captivity, and thou seest **because of the many plain and precious things which have been taken out of the book**, which were plain unto the understanding of the children of men according to the plainness which is in the Lamb of God — and **because of these things which are taken away out of the gospel of the Lamb**, an exceeding great many **do stumble**, yea, insomuch that Satan hath great power over them. (1 Nephi 13:29)

The angel helped Nephi see that the unauthorized human diminution of scripture by the Gentile “great and abominable church” would have a devastating impact on the faith and religious praxis of the Gentiles themselves. The “book,” even without “many of the plain and precious things ... taken out of the book” would enable widespread religiosity of a type later described by the Lord to Joseph Smith as “teach[ing] for doctrines the commandments of men, having a form of godliness, but they deny the power thereof” (Joseph Smith — History 1:19).³⁴

Nephi would later describe the prevalence of these religious conditions such that even “the humble followers of Christ” would be “led that in many instances they do err because they are taught by the precepts of men” (2 Nephi 28:14). In other words, many would “stumble,” and we are reminded of Lehi’s description “they which had commenced in the path did lose their way, that they wandered off and were lost” (1 Nephi 8:23). Driggs asks, “After seeing this happen to the Bible [i.e., the human diminution of scripture] and after being taught the significance of the restoration of plain and precious truth, is it any wonder that Nephi’s soul ‘delighteth in plainness’? (2 Nephi 31:3).”³⁵ Indeed, Nephi’s entire statement in 2 Nephi 31:3 appears to reflect on the stumbling that occurred on account of the deliberate taking away plain and precious words that were “plain unto the understanding of the children of men according to the plainness which is in the Lamb of God”: “For my soul delighteth in plainness, for after this manner doth the Lord God work among the children of men. For the Lord God giveth light unto the understanding, for he speaketh unto men according to their language unto their understanding.”

The Hebrew term for “stumble” — and likely the one used by Nephi’s angelic guide — is the verb *kāšal*. The image of stumbling given here is akin to Isaiah’s description of those in ancient Israel and Judah for whom the Lord would become “a stone of stumbling” that would cause “many among them” to “stumble”: “And he shall be for a sanctuary; but

for a stone of stumbling [*ʿeben negep*] and for a **rock of offence** [*šûr mikšôl*, literally rock of stumbling] to both the houses of Israel, for a gin and for a snare to the inhabitants of Jerusalem. And many among them **shall stumble** [*wĕkāšĕlû*], and fall, and be broken, and be snared, and be taken” (Isaiah 8:14–15). This stumbling of the Gentiles also resembles another Isaianic description of Israelite-Judahite stumbling: “But the word of the Lord was unto them precept upon precept, precept upon precept; line upon line, line upon line; here a little, and there a little; that they might go, and **fall backward** [stumble, *wĕkāšĕlû*], and be broken, and snared, and taken” (Isaiah 28:13).

Furthermore, the image of numerous Gentiles stumbling on account of plain and precious things that have been unauthoritatively “taken away” from or “taken out” of the biblical texts and the gospel also recalls the results of the Lord’s *authoritative* withdrawal of “his plainness” from the ancient Judahites: “Wherefore because of their [the ancient Judahites’] blindness, which blindness came by looking beyond the mark, they must needs fall; for **God hath taken away his plainness** from them and delivered unto them many things [words] which they cannot understand because they desired it. And because they desired it, God hath done it **that they may stumble** [cf. Hebrew *wĕkāšĕlû*]” (Jacob 4:14). Notably, the language of the subsequent verses (“stone,” “reject the stone,” “stumbling,” “safe foundation”/“sure foundation,” “build,” “head of the[ir] corner” in vv. 15–18) connects Jacob 4:14 with Isaiah 8:14–15; 28:16; and Psalm 118:22, terms that help us see these texts as messianic. Although the causes of the stumbling of the Gentiles and the Jews/Judahites differ (cf. 1 Corinthians 1:23),³⁶ the results are painfully similar: a loss of Christ as the covenant foundation stone. In neither case does the collective stumbling of these groups represent the Lord’s ideal or desire, and the stumbling of both groups requires a common solution.

“The Plain and Most Precious Parts of the Gospel of the Lamb Which Have Been Kept Back”: The Semantic Range of Hebrew *gāra* ‘

Nephi’s angelic guide again intimates that the unauthorized human diminution of scripture is not limited to losses of physical text. The gospel itself, as generally understood among the human family, suffered such losses as to leave the Gentiles in “an awful state of wickedness”:³⁷

Nevertheless thou beholdest that the Gentiles which have gone forth out of captivity and have been lifted up by the power of God above all other nations upon the face of the land which is

choice above all other lands, which is the land which the Lord God hath covenanted with thy father that his seed should have for the land of their inheritance, wherefore thou seest that the Lord God will not suffer that the Gentiles will utterly destroy the mixture of thy seed which is among thy brethren. Neither will he suffer that the Gentiles shall destroy the seed of thy brethren. Neither will the Lord God suffer that the Gentiles shall forever remain in that awful state of wickedness which thou beholdest they are in because of **the plain and most precious parts of the gospel of the Lamb which have been kept back by that abominable church**, whose formation thou hast seen. Wherefore, saith the Lamb of God, I will be merciful unto the Gentiles, unto the visiting of the remnant of the house of Israel in great judgment. And it came to pass that the angel of the Lord spake unto me, saying: Behold, saith the Lamb of God, after I have visited the remnant of the house of Israel — and this remnant of which I speak is the seed of thy father — wherefore after that I have visited them in judgment and smitten them by the hand of the Gentiles, and **after the Gentiles do stumble exceedingly** because of the **most plain and precious parts of the gospel of the Lamb which have been kept back** by that abominable church, which is the mother of harlots, saith the Lamb, wherefore I will be merciful unto the Gentiles in that day, saith the Lamb, insomuch that I will bring forth unto them in mine own power much of my gospel, which shall be **plain and precious**, saith the Lamb. For behold, saith the Lamb, I will manifest myself unto thy seed that **they shall write many things which I shall minister unto them, which shall be plain and precious**. And after thy seed shall be destroyed and dwindle in unbelief, and also the seed of thy brethren, behold, these things shall be hid up to come forth unto the Gentiles by the gift and power of the Lamb. And in them shall be written my gospel, saith the Lamb, and my rock and my salvation. (1 Nephi 13:30–36)

The Hebrew verb *gāra*¹, the verb employed in the Deuteronomic canon formula texts (Deuteronomy 4:2; 12:31 [MT 13:1]) and rendered “diminish” (KJV), “take,”³⁸ or “take away,” in the Niphal stem also denotes to be “taken away” or “kept back”³⁹ as illustrated in Numbers 9:7: “And those men said unto him, We are defiled by the dead body of a man: wherefore are we **kept back** [*niggāra*], that we may not offer an

offering of the LORD in his appointed season among the children of Israel?” The expressions “take away” and “keep back” — similar, if not synonymous, in English — likely have the same Hebrew term ultimately underlying them. The repetition of “take away”/“keep back” throughout 1 Nephi 13 underscores the deep conceptual connection between what the Deuteronomic canon-formulas warn against and the unauthorized diminution of scripture foreseen and described in Nephi’s vision.

“These Last Records”: The Functions of Additional Scriptural Witnesses in Offsetting Textual and Doctrinal Diminution

Nephi’s angelic guide reveals to Nephi that the Lord had a longstanding plan to remedy the human diminution of scripture. This plan involved the coming forth of additional scripture to redress conditions of apostasy among the Jews, the Gentiles, and the “remnant” of the seed of Lehi’s children (i.e., the “Lamanites”):

And after it had come forth unto them, I beheld other books which came forth by the power of the Lamb from the Gentiles unto them, unto the convincing of the Gentiles and **the remnant** of the seed of my brethren — and also the Jews, which were scattered upon all the face of the earth — that the records of the prophets and of the twelve apostles of the Lamb are true. And the angel spake unto me, saying: These last records which thou hast seen among the Gentiles shall **establish** the truth of the first, which is of the twelve apostles of the Lamb, **and shall make known the plain and precious things which have been taken away from them** and shall make known to all kindreds, tongues, and people that the Lamb of God is the Eternal Father and the Savior of the world and that all men must come unto him or they cannot be saved. And they must come according to **the words which shall be established by the mouth of the Lamb**. And the words of the Lamb shall be made known in the records of thy seed as well as in the records of the twelve apostles of the Lamb. Wherefore **they both shall be established in one**, for there is one God and one Shepherd over all the earth. And the time cometh that he shall manifest himself unto all nations, both unto the Jews and also unto the Gentiles. And after that he hath manifested himself unto the Jews and also unto the Gentiles, then he shall manifest himself unto the Gentiles and

also unto the Jews. And the last shall be first and the first shall be last. (1 Nephi 13:39–42)

Regarding the identity of the three groups described in Nephi's account of his vision and elsewhere, including Moroni's title page to the Book of Mormon, Shon D. Hopkin writes,

What did the titles "Jew" and "Gentile" signify for the Book of Mormon authors? Although the Book of Mormon was written "to the convincing of the Jew and Gentile," elsewhere on the title page and in the Book of Mormon the text broadens this dual designation to include three distinct groups: Jews, Gentiles, and descendants of Lehi (known in the latter days by the title 'Lamanites'; see title page; 1 Nephi 13:39). Together these three groups constitute "all men" (1 Nephi 6:4).⁴⁰

The common solution to apostasy among "all men" is Jesus Christ himself, his atonement, and his doctrine. The angel's statement that "all men must come unto him, or they cannot be saved" constitutes what Noel B. Reynolds has described as a *meristic* invocation of the doctrine of Christ (*merismus* is a rhetorical device whereby a whole is invoked or referred to by two or more of its constituent parts).⁴¹ In other words, all six points of the doctrine of Christ are here invoked by the mention of two: enduring to the end in faith, hope, and charity and receiving salvation or eternal life. Accordingly, Reynolds has convincingly shown that the concept of "coming unto Christ"⁴² is identical to enduring to the end in faith, hope, and charity (as detailed in 2 Nephi 31:20) as the fifth principle⁴³ in the doctrine of Christ. Regarding the angel's teaching in 1 Nephi 13:40, Reynolds further observes,

Clarifying the same teaching to his questioning brothers, Nephi explains that men must gain a knowledge of "the very points" (the elements) of the Redeemer's doctrine, "that they may know how to come unto him and be saved" (1 Nephi 15:14).⁴⁴

Clearly, in order for one to embrace Christ and his doctrine and to fully live the latter, one must be "convinced" that the ancient "records of the prophets and of the twelve apostles of the Lamb are true," especially their testimony that "Jesus is the Christ" (Book of Mormon title page; 2 Nephi 26:12; Mormon 5:14).⁴⁵ The testimony of multiple distinct scriptural witnesses in cooperation with the convincing power of the Holy Ghost would serve to accomplish this.

Indeed, in declaring that “these last records ... **shall establish** [yāqîmû] the truth of the first,” Nephi’s angelic guide invokes the Deuteronomic law of witnesses governing potential capital cases, as codified in Deuteronomy 17:6 (“At the mouth of two witnesses, or three witnesses, shall he that is worthy of death be put to death”) and 19:5 (“at the mouth of two witnesses, or at the mouth of three witnesses, shall **the matter** [dābār, literally, **word**] **be established** [yāqûm]”). The angel cites the Lord himself as a confirming scriptural witness, when he foretells regarding “**the words** [Hebrew *haddēbārîm*] **which shall be established** [yāqûmû, i.e., “rise up or stand up” as a witness “in a lawsuit”⁴⁶] **by** [or, in] **the mouth of the Lamb**. And the words of the Lamb shall be made known in the records of thy seed” (1 Nephi 13:41). This promise, conforming to the literal sense of Deuteronomy 19:15 with respect to words being established or “standing up,” has direct reference to the Savior’s post-resurrection ministry among the descendants of Lehi, as would be recorded and preserved in 3 Nephi, and the words which he would teach — words that frequently quoted ancient prophets, including Isaiah, Nephi, and his successors.

Bruce Van Orden has observed that the “law of witnesses” constitutes a dominant motif in Nephi’s second book.⁴⁷ I would go even further in proposing that Nephi’s vision regarding scriptural witnesses — witnesses that include the Lord himself — and the Deuteronomic law of witnesses, together constitute the source for the declaration with which Nephi concludes his small plates record:

And you that will not partake of the goodness of God and respect the words of the Jews and also my words and the words which shall proceed forth out of the mouth of the Lamb of God, behold, I bid you an everlasting farewell, for these words shall condemn you at the last day. (2 Nephi 33:14)

Nephi’s account of his vision uses a word translated “establish” (cf. Hebrew *qûm/yāqîm*) for a third time with the angel’s promise that the records of Nephi’s posterity and the records that originated with the twelve apostles “**both shall be established in one**.” A later revelation given to Nephi seems to equate these records being “established in one” with the Lord’s restorative effort to have all his word “gathered in one” and his people “gathered home”: “And it shall come to pass that **my people** which are of the house of Israel shall be **gathered home** unto the lands of their possessions. And **my word** also **shall be gathered in one**, and I will show unto them that fight against my word and against my people which are of the house of Israel that I am God and that I covenanted

with Abraham that I would remember his seed forever" (2 Nephi 29:14). Thus, the restoration of plain and precious words, doctrinal truths, and covenants that had been "taken away" by the gentile "great and abominable church," as part of the "establishing in one" or "gather[ing] in one" of the Lord's "word" and his people, represents a significant part of the Lord's final fulfillment of the Abrahamic Covenant.

"Unto the Taking Away of Their Stumbling Blocks": The Spiritual Blessings of Scriptural and Doctrinal Restoration

Although the Gentiles themselves have "taken away" from, diminished, and otherwise "kept back" the divine word, Nephi holds forth prophetic hope that these same Gentiles can have their stumbling blocks "taken away":

And it shall come to pass that if the Gentiles shall hearken unto the Lamb of God **in that day, that he shall manifest himself unto them in word and also in power, in very deed, unto the taking away of their stumbling blocks**, if it so be that they harden not their hearts against the Lamb. And if it so be that they harden not their hearts against the Lamb of God, they shall be numbered among the seed of thy father; yea, they shall be numbered among the house of Israel. And they shall be a blessed people upon the promised land forever. **They shall be no more brought down into captivity, and the house of Israel shall no more be confounded.** (1 Nephi 14:1-2)

Just as the Gentiles' "taking away" from or "keeping back" the divine word, divine covenants, and the Savior's gospel has resulted in "an exceedingly great many ... stumbl[ing]" (1 Nephi 13:29), the Lord will "be merciful unto the Gentiles in that day" in "bring[ing] forth unto them ... much of my gospel, which shall be plain and precious" (1 Nephi 13:34) and thus amply provide for the "taking away" of the Gentiles' stumbling blocks. The ultimate result is that the faithful Gentiles "**shall be no more brought down into captivity**, and the house of Israel **shall no more be confounded.**" In Hebrew, the idea "he/they shall no more [do/be something]" is frequently expressed with the idiom *wēlō' yôšîp/yôšîpû*. The Gentiles and the house of Israel will thus receive interrelated and interdependent restorative blessings described in terms of this idiom. Nephi may derive these promises, at least in part, from an Isaianic oracle that foretells the final end of Jerusalem's (Zion's) captivity: "Awake, awake; put on thy strength, O Zion; put on thy beautiful garments, O

Jerusalem, the holy city: for henceforth there **shall no more** [*lō' yôšîp* ... '*ôd*] come into thee the uncircumcised and the unclean" (Isaiah 52:1; more on this below). Nephi here appears use to the words of Isaiah to create a wordplay on or onomastic reference to the name Joseph similar to the one that he creates at the end of his longest quotation of Isaiah's writings: "[T]he Lord **will set** his hand **again** [*yôšîp*] the second time to restore his people from their lost and fallen state. Wherefore **he will proceed** [*yôšîp/yôšîp*] to do a marvelous work and a wonder among the children of men ... that the promise may be fulfilled unto **Joseph** [*yôšêp*] that his seed should never perish as long as the earth should stand" (see 2 Nephi 25:17, 21; see also 2 Nephi 29:1–2).

Many years later, Moroni draws directly on Nephi's *Joseph*-wordplay here in 1 Nephi 14:1–2 (and later in 15:20), when he creates an even more transparent wordplay on Joseph in terms of the Hebrew idiom *wēlō' yôšîpû*: "Wherefore the remnant of the house of **Joseph** [*yôšêp*] shall be built upon this land, and it shall be a land of their inheritance. And they shall build up a holy city unto the Lord like unto the Jerusalem of old. And **they shall no more** [*wēlō' yôšîpû*] **be confounded**, until the end come, when the earth shall pass away" (Ether 13:8).⁴⁸ Like Nephi's *Joseph*-wordplay, Moroni's *Joseph*-wordplay is ultimately rooted in the language of Isaiah.

Nephi's description of the Lord "manifesting himself" unto the Gentiles in word, power, and deed "unto the taking away of their stumbling blocks" nicely matches Zenos's description of the Lord of the vineyard and his servants "prepar[ing] the way" or clearing the way for the growth of the covenant tree branches (Jacob 5:61, 64) by "clear[ing] away" the branches bringing forth "bitter" or "bad" fruit (Jacob 5:65–66). Both constitute apt metaphors for the spiritual and doctrinal restoration that enables integration or reintegration into the Lord's covenant people.

"They Shall Be Numbered Again Among the House of Israel": Reintegration into the Covenant Family

A connection between Nephi's vision and Zenos's allegory of the olive trees is already signaled at the end of 1 Nephi 13 with the prophetic promise:

And the time cometh that he shall manifest himself unto all nations, both unto the Jews and also unto the Gentiles. And after that he hath manifested himself unto the Jews and also unto the Gentiles, then he shall manifest himself unto the

Gentiles and also unto the Jews. And the last shall be first and the first shall be last. (1 Nephi 13:42)

This promise directly corresponds to the instructions given by the Lord of the Vineyard in Zenos's allegory to his servants: "Graft in the branches — begin at the last, that they may be first and that the first may be last — and dig about the trees, both old and young — the first and the last, and the last and the first — **that all may be nourished once again** [cf. Hebrew *yôšîpû/yôsîpû*] for the last time" (Jacob 5:63). An even stronger connection emerges in Nephi's explanation of his father's dream-vision to his brothers: "Behold, I say unto you: Yea; **they shall be numbered again** [cf. Hebrew *yôšîpû/yôsîpû*] among the house of Israel; they shall be **grafted in**, being a natural branch of the olive tree, into the true olive tree" (1 Nephi 15:16).

Firstly, we should note here with Royal Skousen that "they shall be numbered again" constitutes the correct reading versus "they shall be remembered again" as currently printed in the Book of Mormon.⁴⁹ The idiom "numbered among" occurs in Numbers 1:47; 2:33; 26:62, rendering the Hebrew words *hotpāqēdû* ("be mustered, be counted")⁵⁰ and *bētōk* ("among," literally "in the midst of"). In the latter two instances, the biblical text specifically describes how the Levites were "not numbered among the children of Israel" or "enrolled" (NRSV) with the other tribes when censuses of the house of Israel were taken. The collocation "remembered among" occurs only in Ezekiel 25:10. In the Book of Mormon, the idiom "numbered among" frequently recurs,⁵¹ whereas "remembered among" occurs nowhere. Thus, the phrase "numbered again among" makes much better sense description of reintegration into the Lord's covenant family than the odd and uncertain phrase "remembered again among."

Secondly, Nephi's term use of a passive verb rendered "grafted in" and the phrases "natural branch of the olive tree" and "into the true olive tree" gives his statement away as a direct allusion to the writings of Zenos on the small plates. Noel Reynolds observes that "Nephi joins two metaphors together when, on the one hand, he speaks of being grafted 'into the true olive-tree' (1 Nephi 15:16) and speaks of coming 'unto the true fold' (1 Nephi 15:15). It may be that Zenos referred to Israel also as sheep that were scattered and needed to be gathered into the true fold (1 Nephi 22:25; Helaman 15:13), as [other prophets described Israel] (see Ezekiel 34 and Jeremiah 23, 31, and 50)."⁵²

Thirdly, Nephi's use of the Hebraistic "they shall ... again" (Hebrew *yôšîpû*) in the phrase "they shall be numbered again" recalls Zenos's

similar use of this idiom⁵³ in his allegory in describing the “grafting in” of the branches into their “mother tree” or the “natural tree”:

I have grafted in the natural branches again into their mother tree and have preserved the roots of their mother tree, that perhaps the trees of my vineyard **may bring forth again** good fruit, and **that I may have joy again** in the fruit of my vineyard, and perhaps that I may rejoice exceedingly that I have preserved the roots and the branches of the first fruit. (Jacob 5:60)

And the branches of the natural tree **will I graft in again** into the natural tree, and the branches of the natural tree will I graft into the natural branches of the tree. And **thus will I bring them together again**, that they shall bring forth the natural fruit, and they shall be one. (Jacob 5:67–68)

“They Should No More Be Confounded, Neither Should They Be Scattered Again”: The Restoration and Final Gathering of Israel in Fulfillment of Divine Covenant

Nephi’s first explicit mention of the prophet Isaiah occurs in his explanation of “the things which [his] father saw” in 1 Nephi 15. In explaining how the Lord would fulfill the Abrahamic covenant (1 Nephi 15:18), including “the restoration of the Jews in the latter days” (1 Nephi 15:19), Nephi states,

And I did rehearse unto them the words of Isaiah, which spake concerning the restoration of the Jews or of the house of Israel. And after that they were **restored, they should no more be confounded, neither should they be scattered again** [cf. Hebrew *wēlō’ yôšîpû*]. (1 Nephi 15:20–21)

Like 1 Nephi 14:1–2 and 1 Nephi 15:16, 1 Nephi 15:20–21 is textually dependent upon Isaiah. Although Nephi does not directly specify which of “the words of Isaiah” he rehearsed or quoted, his periphrasis suggests that he may have cited, in addition to Isaiah 11:11–12, Isaiah 52:1 and 54:4: “Awake, awake; put on thy strength, O Zion; put on thy beautiful garments, O Jerusalem, the holy city: for henceforth **there shall no more** [*lō’ yôšîp ... ‘ôd*] come into thee the uncircumcised and the unclean” (Isaiah 52:1); “Fear not; for thou shalt not be ashamed: **neither be thou confounded**; for thou shalt not be put to shame: for thou shalt forget the shame of thy youth, and shalt not remember the reproach of thy

widowhood any more" (Isaiah 54:4). Significantly, Moroni concludes the entire Book of Mormon with a prophetic juxtaposition of these two same passages:

And awake and arise from the dust, O Jerusalem! Yea, and put on thy beautiful garments, O daughter of Zion, and strengthen thy stakes and enlarge thy borders forever, **that thou mayest no more** [(wē)lō' tōsīp ... 'ōd] **be confounded**, that the covenants of the Eternal Father which he hath made unto thee, O house of Israel, may be fulfilled. (Moroni 10:31)⁵⁴

Moroni's replication and repetition of Nephi's wordplay in Ether 13:8 and here in Moroni 10:31 indicates that he knew what Nephi and Joseph in Egypt knew: aside from the Lord himself, the servant who would play the most crucial role in bringing to pass Israel's restoration through the adding of scripture and plain and precious words, concepts, law, and covenants that had been "taken away" and kept back, would be a "Joseph."

Summary and Conclusion

Near the end of his tree-of-life vision (1 Nephi 11–14), an angelic guide shows Nephi the unauthorized human diminution of scripture and the gospel by the Gentile "great and abominable church" (1 Nephi 13). Nephi witnesses that plain and precious things/words, teachings, and covenants were "taken away" and "kept back" from originally Israelite/Jewish texts that eventually became the canonical Bible with which we are familiar. These textual and conceptual losses drastically affected the ability of the Gentiles to live out the teachings contained within the Bible. Moreover, Nephi saw the processes through which the Lord would act to restore those lost words, teachings, and covenants among the Gentiles through additional scriptural witnesses "unto the taking away of their stumbling blocks" (1 Nephi 14:1).

The language of 1 Nephi 13 describing the "taking away" and "keeping back" of scripture recalls the pointed prohibitions of the Deuteronomic canon-formula texts (Deuteronomy 4:2; 12:31 [MT 13:1]) against diminishing from divinely given law. It further recalls the etiological meanings attached to the name Joseph in Genesis 30:23–24 in terms of "taking away" and "adding." Nephi's prophecies of scripture and gospel restoration on account of which "they [the Gentiles] **shall be no more** [cf. Hebrew *lō' yōsīpū* ... 'ōd] brought down into captivity, and the house of Israel **shall no more** [wēlō' yōsīpū ... 'ōd] be confounded" (1 Nephi 14:2) and that "after that they were **restored, they should no**

more be confounded [(wě)lō' yôšîpû ... 'ôd], **neither should they be scattered again** [wělo' yôšîpû ... 'ôd]" (1 Nephi 15:20) depend on the language of Isaiah. Like other Isaiah-based prophecies of Nephi (e.g., 2 Nephi 25:17, 21; 29:1–2), they also echo the name of the prophet through whom lost scripture and gospel covenants would be restored — i.e., through a “Joseph.” Moroni’s *Joseph*-wordplay in Ether 13:8 helps us more clearly see what Nephi intended. It also helps us see how the Lord would ensure that the remnant of Lehi’s seed would be “numbered **again** [yôšîpû] among the house of Israel” (1 Nephi 15:16).

Viewed in relation to the add/diminish language of the canon formula, the angel’s revelation to Nephi regarding the attempted human diminution — or taking away — of the divine word and covenants, and the prophetic Isaianic promises regarding gathering of Israel, the reader can better appreciate the Semitic/Hebrew name *yôšēp* as an expression of Joseph Smith’s divinely appointed prophetic role. Nephi knew that a Joseph would be “raised up” as a “seer” expressly for the addition, re-addition, and full restoration of scripture and divine covenants and the gathering of his people (see again 2 Nephi 3:6–15; 25:17, 21; 29:1). The results will eventually be that the Gentiles will “no more be brought down into captivity” and that the house of Israel “shall no more be confounded” nor be “scattered again” (1 Nephi 14:1–2; 15:20). All who come into the covenant will be “numbered again” among the Lord’s people (1 Nephi 15:16) — that is, be fully integrated or reintegrated his divine family. The “taking away of their stumbling blocks” (1 Nephi 14:1) will ultimately “prepare the way” (Jacob 5:61, 64) not only for the growth and complete restoration (or return) of Israel, but for the fulfillment of every divine promise in the covenant of the Father, which is the full extension of the blessings of Jesus Christ’s atonement in time and eternity to all who are willing to receive them.

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on Onomastic Wordplay and The Temple in Mormon Scripture (*Salt Lake City: Interpreter Foundation and Eborn Books, 2018*). With Aaron P. Schade, he is the coauthor of *The Book of Moses: From the Ancient of Days to the Latter Days* (Provo, UT; *Salt Lake City: Religious Studies Center and Deseret Book, 2021*). He and his wife (the former Suzanne Blattberg) are the parents of three children: Zachariah, Nathan, and Adele.

Endnotes

- 1 See, e.g., Moshe Garsiel, *Biblical Names: A Literary Study of Midrashic Derivations and Puns*, trans. Phyllis Hackett (Ramat Gan, ISR: Bar-Ilan University Press, 1991), 172–74.
- 2 Ludwig Koehler and Walter Baumgartner, *The Hebrew and Aramaic Lexicon of the Old Testament* (Leiden, NL: Brill, 2001), 74. Hereafter cited as *HALOT*.
- 3 *Ibid.*, 418.
- 4 Book of Mormon citations will generally follow Royal Skousen, ed., *The Book of Mormon: The Earliest Text* (New Haven, CT: Yale, 2009).
- 5 See Matthew L. Bowen, "'He Shall Add': Wordplay on the Name Joseph and an Early Instance of Gezera Shawa in the Book of Mormon," *Insights* 30, no.2 (2010): 2–4; Matthew L. Bowen, "Onomastic Wordplay on Joseph and Benjamin and Gezera Shawa in the Book of Mormon," *Interpreter: A Journal of Mormon Scripture* 18 (2016): 255–73, <https://journal.interpreterfoundation.org/onomastic-wordplay-on-joseph-and-benjamin-and-gezera-shawa-in-the-book-of-mormon/>.
- 6 See recently Matthew L. Bowen, "'And the Meek Also Shall Increase': The Verb *Yāsap* in Isaiah 29 and Nephi's Prophetic Allusions to the Name Joseph in 2 Nephi 25–30," *Interpreter: A Journal of Mormon Scripture* 30 (2018): 5–42, <https://journal.interpreterfoundation.org/and-the-meek-also-shall-increase-the-verb-yasap-in-isaiah-29-and-nephis-prophetic-allusions-to-the-name-joseph-in-2-nephi-25-30/>.
- 7 Jeffrey M. Bradshaw, "KnoWhy OTL03B — Did Moses Write the Book of Genesis?" *Interpreter Foundation*, January 11, 2018, <https://interpreterfoundation.org/knowhy-otl03b-did-moses-write-the-book-of-genesis/>.

- 8 See, e.g., 1 Nephi 5:11.
- 9 See Matthew L. Bowen, “‘And They Shall Be Had Again’: Onomastic Allusions to Joseph in Moses 1:41 in View of the So-called Canon Formula,” *Interpreter: A Journal of Latter-day Saint Faith and Scholarship* 32 (2019): 297–304, <https://journal.interpreterfoundation.org/and-they-shall-be-had-again-onomastic-allusions-to-joseph-in-moses-141-in-view-of-the-so-called-canon-formula/>.
- 10 Bernard M. Levinson, “You Must Not Add Anything to What I Command You: Paradoxes of Canon and Authorship in Ancient Israel,” *Numen* 50 (2003): 6–7.
- 11 See *HALOT*, 203.
- 12 G. André, “יָסַפַּ, *yāsap*,” *Theological Dictionary of the Old Testament*, ed. G. Johannes Botterweck and Helmer Ringgren (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1990), 6:122. André notes that “the hiphil of *ysp* with ‘*al* [i.e., add] is used as the opposite of *gāra‘ min* [i.e., diminish from]” in the canon formula texts.
- 13 Lehi and Nephi see what is described as a “great and spacious building” in 1 Nephi 8:26, 31; 11:36 and as a “large and spacious building” in 1 Nephi 11:35; 12:18. Nephi’s equation of the “great and spacious building” with the “great and abominable church” would have very naturally suggested itself.
- 14 Canonical versions of the Bible greatly differ even within Judaism and “orthodox” branches of Christianity. For example, James H. Charlesworth (“Introduction for the General Reader,” in *The Old Testament Pseudepigrapha*, vol. 1: *Apocalyptic Literature and Testaments*, ed. James H. Charlesworth [Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 2009], xxiv) writes, “Even in America today there are different canons among the Christian communions: for example, Protestants exclude from the canon the Apocrypha, the additional books in the Greek Old testament; the Roman Catholics, following the edicts of the Council of Trent in 1546, include them as deuterocanonical. The Mormons, moreover, argue that more books belong in the canon, and that it should remain open.” Ethiopian Christianity includes books within its canon excluded by the other branches. Charlesworth (p. xxiv) further notes that “the Falashas, Ethiopian Jews, probably dependent on Ethiopian Christianity ... have an expanded canon, including

various apocrypha and pseudepigrapha, especially the Prayer of Manasseh, Jubilees, 1 Enoch, 3 and 4 Ezra." Apart from mainline Judaism and Protestantism, the various groups who accept additional books as part of their canons would see the absence of these additional books from their canon as a loss, to one degree or another, of "plain and precious things."

- 15 On the polysemy of *dābār* as "word"/"thing" in Hebrew, see Paul Y. Hoskisson, "Straightening Things Out: The Use of Strait and Straight in the Book of Mormon," *Journal of Book of Mormon Studies* 12, no. 2 (2003): 71. Late Egyptian/Demotic *md.t/mt.t*, as "word"/"thing" reflects the same polysemy.
- 16 Cf., e.g., 1 Nephi 5:13; 7:14.
- 17 On the integrity of his work, see Ecclesiastes 3:14: "I know that, whatsoever God doeth, it shall be for ever: nothing can be put [added] to it, nor any thing taken from it: and God doeth it, that men should fear before him." God's works and his words can never be permanently diminished. See Moses 1:3–5, 38, 41.
- 18 After reporting his vision in 1 Nephi 11–14, Nephi describes how he felt witnessing the violent destruction of his people: "And it came to pass that I was overcome because of my afflictions, for I considered that mine afflictions were great above all, because of the destruction of my people, for I had beheld their fall" (1 Nephi 15:5).
- 19 John W. Welch, "Modern Revelation: A Guide to Research about the Apostasy," in *Early Christians in Disarray: Contemporary LDS Perspectives on the Christian Apostasy*, ed. Noel B. Reynolds (Provo, UT: FARMS, 2005), 105.
- 20 Robert J. Matthews, "Establishing the Truth of the Bible," in *First Nephi, The Doctrinal Foundation*, ed. Monte S. Nyman, and Charles D. Tate Jr. (Provo, UT: Religious Studies Center, 1988), 205.
- 21 Ibid.
- 22 Matthews, "Establishing the Truth of the Bible," 204.
- 23 Joseph Smith rightly recognized that the biblical writings as we have them represent the results of numerous and lengthy diachronic processes: "I believe the bible as it read when it came from the pen of the original writers; ignorant translators, careless

- transcribers, or designing and corrupt priests have committed many errors.” Joseph Smith, “History, 1838–1856, volume E-1 [1 July 1843–30 April 1844],” p. 1755, The Joseph Smith Papers, <http://www.josephsmithpapers.org/paper-summary/history-1838-1856-volume-e-1-1-july-1843-30-april-1844/127>.
- 24 Welch, “Modern Revelation,” 108.
- 25 Ibid., 109.
- 26 Cf. 2 Nephi 28:15: “O the wise, and the learned, and the rich, that are puffed up in the pride of their hearts, and all those who preach false doctrines, and all those who commit whoredoms, **and pervert the right way of the Lord**, wo, wo, wo be unto them, saith the Lord God Almighty, for they shall be thrust down to hell!” In Genesis 24:48 the Hebrew expression *derek ’emet* stands behind the KJV rendering of “right way”: “And I bowed down my head, and worshipped the Lord, and blessed the Lord God of my master Abraham, which had led me **in the right way** [*bēderek ’emet*, “in the way of truth”] to take my master’s brother’s daughter unto his son.” In Psalm 107:7, a slightly different idiom stands behind “right way”: “And he led them forth by **the right way** [*derek yēšārâ*],” or “straight way”); cf. 1 Samuel 6:12; Ezra 8:21. See also Acts 13:10: “And [Saul] said [to Elymas], O full of all subtilty and all mischief, thou child of the devil, thou enemy of all righteousness, wilt thou not cease to pervert the right ways of the Lord?”; 2 Peter 2:15: “[they are children] which have forsaken the right way, and are gone astray, following the way of Balaam the son of Bosor [Beor], who loved the wages of unrighteousness;” Moroni uses the collocation “the right way” twice in Mormon 9:20 and Moroni 6:4.
- 27 See further Psalms 119:30; 2 Peter 2:2; Mosiah 4:15.
- 28 *Webster’s Dictionary 1828*, s.v., “pervert,” <http://webstersdictionary1828.com/Dictionary/pervert>.
- 29 Matthews, “Establishing the Truth of the Bible,” 205.
- 30 Lori Driggs, “Nephi’s Vision and the Loss and Restoration of Plain and Precious Truths,” in *The Things Which My Father Saw: Approaches to Lehi’s Dream and Nephi’s Vision* (2011 Sperry Symposium), ed. Daniel L. Belnap, Gaye Strathearn, and Stanley A. Johnson (Provo, UT: Religious Studies Center, Brigham Young University, 2011), 71.
- 31 1 Nephi 13:23–24.

- 32 Matthew L. Bowen, "What Thank They the Jews? (2 Nephi 29:4): A Note on the Name 'Judah' and Antisemitism," *Interpreter: A Journal of Mormon Scripture* 12 (2014): 111–25, <https://journal.interpreterfoundation.org/what-thank-they-the-jews-2-nephi-294-a-note-on-the-name-judah-and-antisemitism/>.
- 33 Welch, "Modern Revelation," 107.
- 34 The Lord juxtaposed a quotation from Isaiah 29:13 ("Wherefore the Lord said, Forasmuch as this people draw near me with their mouth, and with their lips do honour me, but have removed their heart far from me, and their fear toward me is taught by the precept of men") with one from 2 Timothy 3:5 ("Having a form of godliness, but denying the power thereof: from such turn away").
- 35 Driggs, "Loss and Restoration," 72.
- 36 As Paul wrote to the Corinthians, "But we preach Christ crucified, unto the Jews a stumblingblock, and unto the Greeks foolishness."
- 37 Royal Skousen, *Analysis of Textual Variants of the Book of Mormon, Part 1: 1 Nephi 1–2 Nephi 10* (Provo, UT: FARMS, 2004), 290–91.
- 38 HALOT, 203.
- 39 Ibid., 204.
- 40 Shon D. Hopkin, "To the Convincing of the Jew and Gentile That JESUS Is the CHRIST," in *The Coming Forth of the Book of Mormon: A Marvelous Work and a Wonder*, ed. Dennis L. Largey et al. (Provo, UT: Religious Studies Center, 2015), 238. He further notes that "This three-fold division can be clearly seen in the teachings of Nephi (see 1 Nephi 13:38–39; 2 Nephi 25–26, 30), Mormon (see Words of Mormon 1:8; 3 Nephi 29–30; Mormon 7:1–10), and Moroni (see Mormon 8–9)" (p. 238).
- 41 Noel B. Reynolds, "Biblical Merismus in Book of Mormon Gospel References," *Journal of Book of Mormon Studies* 26 (2017): 106–34.
- 42 Noel B. Reynolds, "'Come unto Me' as a Technical Gospel Term," *Interpreter: A Journal of Latter-day Saint Faith and Scholarship* 31 (2019): 1–24, <https://journal.interpreterfoundation.org/come-unto-me-as-a-technical-gospel-term/>.
- 43 Noel B. Reynolds, "The Fifth Principle of the Gospel," *Religious Educator* 15, no. 3 (2014): 117–27.
- 44 Reynolds, "Come unto Me," 6.

- 45 Cf. also John 20:31; 1 John 2:22; 5:1; Moroni 7:44.
- 46 HALOT, 187.
- 47 Bruce A. Van Orden, “The Law of Witnesses in 2 Nephi,” in *Second Nephi, The Doctrinal Structure*, ed. Monte S. Nyman and Charles D. Tate Jr. (Provo, UT: Religious Studies Center, 1989), 307–21.
- 48 See Matthew L. Bowen, “‘They Shall No More Be Confounded’: Moroni’s Wordplay on Joseph in Ether 13:1–13 and Moroni 10:31,” *Interpreter: A Journal of Mormon Scripture* 30 (2018): 91–104, <https://journal.interpreterfoundation.org/they-shall-no-more-be-confounded-moronis-wordplay-on-joseph-in-ether-131-13-and-moroni-1031/>.
- 49 See Skousen, *Analysis of Textual Variants of the Book of Mormon*, 1:321–22.
- 50 HALOT, 958.
- 51 1 Nephi 14:2; 2 Nephi 10:18–19; Mosiah 25:12; 26:32, 36; 27:8; Alma 5:57; 27:27; 45:13–14; Helaman 15:13; 3 Nephi 2:14, 16; 3:14; 15:24; 16:3, 13; 18:31; 21:6, 22; Mormon 7:10; Ether 13:10; Moroni 6:4, 7; 7:39. Skousen (*Analysis of Textual Variants*, 1:321) writes, “Elsewhere in the current Book of Mormon text, people are virtually always numbered as members of certain groups (31 times).” Skousen argues for an additional instance in Alma 27:21 with the restoration of the missing word “numbered” in the phrase “they were **numbered** among the people of Nephi” (emphasis added).
- 52 Noel B. Reynolds, “Nephite Uses and Interpretations of Zenos,” in *The Allegory of the Olive Tree: The Olive, The Bible, and Jacob 5*, ed. Stephen D. Ricks and John W. Welch (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 1994), 27–28.
- 53 See Matthew L. Bowen, “‘I Have Done According to My Will’: Reading Jacob 5 as a Temple Text,” in *The Temple: Ancient and Restored*, ed. Stephen D. Ricks and Donald W. Parry (Orem, UT: The Interpreter Foundation, 2016), 51–52; see also Matthew L. Bowen and Loren Blake Spendlove, “‘Thou Art the Fruit of My Loins’: The Interrelated Symbolism and Meanings of the Names Joseph and Ephraim in Ancient Scripture” *Interpreter: A Journal of Mormon Scripture* 28 (2018): 294–96.
- 54 See Bowen, “‘They Shall No More Be Confounded,’” 91–104.

A MAN THAT CAN TRANSLATE AND INFINITE GOODNESS: A RESPONSE TO RECENT REVIEWS

Jonathan E. Neville

Abstract: *Since 1829, various theories about the production of the Book of Mormon have been proposed. Modern scholarship has moved away from the idea that Joseph Smith actually translated ancient engravings into English. Two books, A Man That Can Translate and Infinite Goodness, propose a “neo-orthodox” view, offering evidence that Joseph did translate ancient engravings into English. Recent reviews in the Interpreter of these two books significantly misunderstand and misrepresent the argument. This response corrects some of those misconceptions.*

[**Editor’s note:** We are pleased to present this response to two recent book reviews in the pages of *Interpreter*. Consistent with practice in many academic journals, we are also publishing a rejoinder from the author of those reviews, immediately following this response.]

Spencer Kraus recently penned separate reviews¹ of two of my books: *A Man That Can Translate*² and *Infinite Goodness*.³ These companion volumes make a case for Joseph Smith as the actual translator of the

1. See Spencer Kraus, “An Unfortunate Approach to Joseph Smith’s Translation of Ancient Scripture,” *Interpreter: A Journal of Latter-day Saint Faith and Scholarship* 52 (2022): 1–64, <https://interpreterfoundation.org/an-unfortunate-approach-to-joseph-smiths-translation-of-ancient-scripture/>; and Spencer Kraus, “Jonathan Edwards’s Unique Role in an Imagined Church History,” *Interpreter: A Journal of Latter-day Saint Faith and Scholarship* 52 (2022): 65–102, <https://interpreterfoundation.org/jonathan-edwardss-unique-role-in-an-imagined-church-history/>.

2. Jonathan Neville, *A Man That Can Translate: Joseph Smith and the Nephite Interpreters* (Salt Lake City: Digital Legends Press, 2021).

3. Jonathan Neville, *Infinite Goodness: Joseph Smith, Jonathan Edwards, and the Book of Mormon* (Salt Lake City: Digital Legends Press, 2021).

ancient engravings on the Nephite plates. Because the books introduce the Demonstration Hypothesis to reconcile disparate historical accounts, they have generated considerable discussion, both positive and negative, and I welcome robust, respectful, and candid dialogue about these topics.

The Demonstration Hypothesis offers a faithful alternative reconciliation of the conflict between (i) what Joseph and Oliver claimed — that Joseph Smith translated the plates with the Urim and Thummim that came with the plates — and (ii) what others claimed — that Joseph produced the Book of Mormon by dictating words that appeared on a stone he placed in a hat. In my books, I propose that Joseph, who had covenanted with God not to display the plates or the Urim and Thummim (D&C 5:3), used the seer stone to “satisfy the awful curiosity” of his supporters by demonstrating how the actual translation worked. Later, some of these supporters conflated the demonstration with the translation to refute the allegations of the Spalding theory.

While I appreciate the attention brought to the Demonstration Hypothesis by Kraus’s reviews, they seriously misrepresent the purpose and content of my books. Because the *Interpreter* serves as an academic record of Latter-day Saint thought, clarification is appropriate, and I appreciate the *Interpreter* publishing this brief response.

In his review of *Infinite Goodness*, Kraus summarizes his review of *A Man That Can Translate*:

My previous review responded to his claims that (1) Joseph Smith memorized and recited Isaiah from memory rather than translate it from the Book of Mormon record; (2) Joseph Smith tricked his close friends and family, making them believe that he was translating the aforementioned sections of the Book of Mormon; (3) many witnesses to the Book of Mormon are not to be believed; and (4) we should instead rely on sources hostile to The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints to properly understand Joseph’s translation effort.⁴

These caricatures of my proposals are inaccurate, as I discuss shortly. Because Kraus’s claims and my response are best evaluated in context — specifically, the ongoing faith crises generated by confusion about the origins of the Book of Mormon — we need to review the context Kraus omitted from his reviews.

4. Kraus, “Jonathan Edwards’s Unique Role,” 65–66.

Context: Competing Narratives About the Origin of the Book of Mormon

At the outset, I recognize that, for many people, the origin of the Book of Mormon doesn't matter because they have a spiritual witness of its truthfulness. That's a perfectly legitimate approach that I take no issue with.

For other people, however, the origin of the Book of Mormon is a foundation upon which to build either belief or unbelief. Joseph Smith apparently thought the origin was important. His declaration that he translated the Book of Mormon record "through the medium of" and "by the means of" "the Urim and Thummim" *that came with the plates* is a fundamental truth claim that can be tested not only spiritually, but empirically by consulting historical references, linguistic studies, extrinsic scientific data, etc.

Joseph didn't make his specific claims in a vacuum. The 1834 book *Mormonism Unveiled* had set out the stone-in-the-hat theory in some detail:

The translation finally commenced. They were found to contain a language not now known upon the earth, which they termed "reformed Egyptian characters." The plates, therefore, which had been so much talked of, were found to be of no manner of use. After all, the Lord showed and communicated to him [Joseph] every word and letter of the Book. *Instead of looking at the characters inscribed upon the plates, the prophet was obliged to resort to the old "peep stone," which he formerly used in money-digging.* This he placed in a hat, or box, into which he also thrust his face. Through the stone he could then discover a single word at a time, which he repeated aloud to his amanuensis, who committed it to paper, when another word would immediately appear, and thus the performance continued to the end of the book.⁵

This description of the stone-in-the-hat theory is familiar to modern Latter-day Saints because it is now the prevailing narrative among many LDS scholars.

5. See Eber D. Howe, *Mormonism Unveiled: or, A Faithful Account of that Singular Imposition and Delusion from its Rise to the Present Time* (Painesville, OH: printed by the author, 1834), 18, <https://archive.org/details/mormonismunvaile00howe/page/18>, emphasis added.

Continuing on the same page, *Mormonism Unveiled* provided readers a second, alternative description of the translation, based on the Urim and Thummim explanation that Joseph and Oliver always gave, albeit embellished with sarcasm:

Another account they give of the transaction, is, that it was performed with the big spectacles before mentioned, and which were in fact, the identical *Urim and Thumim* mentioned in Exodus 28–30, and were brought away from Jerusalem by the heroes of the book, handed down from one generation to another, and finally buried up in Ontario county, some fifteen centuries since, to enable Smith to translate the plates *without looking at them!*⁶

In a sense, this alternative narrative is also a stone-in-the-hat theory, i.e., the spectacles-in-a-hat theory. But as *Mormonism Unveiled* explained, the distinction is insignificant if both scenarios ignored the plates:

Now, whether *the two methods for translating, one by a pair of stone spectacles “set in the rims of a bow,” and the other by one stone*, were provided against accident, we cannot determine — perhaps they were limited in their appropriate uses — at all events the plan meets our approbation.

We are informed that Smith used a stone in a hat, for the purpose of translating the plates. The *spectacles and plates were found together*, but were taken from him and hid up again before he had translated one word, and he has never seen them since — this is Smith’s own story.⁷ *Let us ask, what use have the plates been or the spectacles, so long as they have in no sense been used?* or what does the testimony of Martin Harris, Oliver Cowdery and David Whitmer amount to?⁸

In his first review, Kraus provides the following abstract:

6. Ibid. Intentionally or not, the author missed the points that (i) the Urim and Thummim that Joseph received was not brought from Jerusalem by Lehi but instead had been used by the Jaredites in America, and (ii) Joseph actually looked at the plates with the spectacles.

7. Joseph and Oliver responded to this claim by emphasizing that Joseph translated the entire Book of Mormon with the Urim and Thummim. Separately, Joseph explained that the angel returned the Urim and Thummim to Joseph in September 1828 following the loss of the 116 pages.

8. Neville, *A Man That Can Translate*, 56–57.

This is the first of two papers that explore Jonathan Neville's two latest books regarding the translation of the Book of Mormon. Neville has long argued that Joseph Smith did not use a seer stone during the translation of the Book of Mormon, and he has more recently expanded his historical revisionism to dismiss the multitude of historical sources that include the use of a seer stone.⁹

We see how far “historical revisionism” has come when modern LDS scholars deem a traditional understanding based on what Joseph Smith and Oliver Cowdery said — that Joseph translated the plates by means of the Nephite interpreters — is now considered “historical revisionism,” while the stone-in-the-hat theory narrative from *Mormonism Unveiled* is deemed the only acceptable faithful narrative.

Kraus' claim that I “dismiss” the stone-in-the-hat sources is an allegation which I'll address below.

Conflict: Joseph and Oliver Versus Other Witnesses

The fulcrum of the translation issue is the direct conflict between what Joseph and Oliver claimed versus what others (the original stone-in-the-hat theory proponents) claimed they observed.

On three notable occasions post-*Mormonism Unveiled*, Joseph Smith provided an explanation of the translation that leaves no room for the stone-in-the-hat theory. Because Joseph's teachings have been omitted from many discussions of this issue — including from Kraus's review — we need to quote them here:

How, and where did you obtain the book of Mormon?

Moroni, the person who deposited the plates, from whence the book of Mormon was translated, in a hill in Manchester, Ontario County, New York, being dead; and raised again therefrom, appeared unto me, and told me where they were, and gave me directions how to obtain them. I obtained them, *and the Urim and Thummim with them, by the means of which, I translated the plates*; and thus came the Book of Mormon.¹⁰

With the records was found a curious instrument which the ancients called “Urim and Thummim,” which consisted of

9. Kraus, “An Unfortunate Approach,” 1.

10. “Elders' Journal, July 1838,” p. 42–43, The Joseph Smith Papers, <https://www.josephsmithpapers.org/paper-summary/elders-journal-july-1838/10>, emphasis added.

*two transparent stones set in the rim of a bow fastened to a breast plate. Through the medium of the Urim and Thummim I translated the record by the gift and power of God.*¹¹

For space reasons, I'll omit Oliver's corroborating statements. The key point here is that had Joseph merely used the term "Urim and Thummim" without specifying the origin of the instrument, modern historians who seek to conflate the term with the "peep stone" of *Mormonism Unveiled* might have a plausible argument. *But Joseph specified that the sole instrument he used to translate came with the plates.*

There are three basic explanations for the Book of Mormon. Proponents of each find support in historical documentation, which indicates the evidence is inconclusive and can support multiple working hypotheses.

1. Joseph Smith translated the ancient engravings into English, using "translate" in the ordinary sense of the word of converting the meaning of a manuscript written in one language into another language.
2. Joseph Smith (and/or confederates) composed the text and Joseph read it surreptitiously, recited it from memory, or performed it based on prompts or cues.
3. Joseph Smith dictated words that supernaturally appeared on a seer stone he placed in a hat.

Until recently, explanation 1 was the "faithful" explanation, while explanations 2 and 3 were the critical or unbelieving explanations. Lately, explanation 3 has been embraced by many believers (including Kraus) as a faithful explanation that replaces explanation 1.

Nevertheless, any of these explanations can be accepted by faithful Latter-day Saints. No one ought to be shunned or accused of apostasy for assigning different weight to particular historical evidence than someone else.

The underlying premise of Kraus' reviews of my books — that explanation 3 is the only acceptable explanation — both explains the tone of the reviews and misses the entire point of my books. I simply

11. "Church History," in *Times and Seasons* 3, no. 9 (1 March 1842), 707, The Joseph Smith Papers, <https://www.josephsmithpapers.org/paper-summary/church-history-1-march-1842/2>, emphasis added. This passage from the Wentworth letter is also found in Joseph Smith, "Latter Day Saints," in *He Pasa Ekklesia [The whole church]*, ed. Israel Daniel Rupp (Philadelphia: James Y. Humphreys, 1844), 404–10, <https://www.josephsmithpapers.org/paper-summary/latter-day-saints-1844/3>.

sought to determine whether the historical evidence could be construed to be congruent with what Joseph Smith and Oliver Cowdery said about the translation (explanation 1).

In my books, I readily recognize and discuss the evidence in favor of explanation 3. I differ with Kraus and other proponents of the stone-in-the-hat theory because I find that evidence unpersuasive not only on its face, but because it contradicts what Joseph Smith and Oliver Cowdery claimed.

Kraus's Allegations

To return to Kraus's specific allegations, let me repeat his recap that I earlier quoted:

My previous review responded to his claims that (1) Joseph Smith memorized and recited Isaiah from memory rather than translate it from the Book of Mormon record; (2) Joseph Smith tricked his close friends and family, making them believe that he was translating the aforementioned sections of the Book of Mormon; (3) many witnesses to the Book of Mormon are not to be believed; and (4) we should instead rely on sources hostile to The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints to properly understand Joseph's translation effort.¹²

In the following sections I'll examine these four allegations, in turn.

(1) Joseph Smith Memorized and Recited Isaiah From Memory Rather Than Translate It From the Book of Mormon Record

Kraus's argument is a semantic mess because he argues that Joseph read words off a seer stone instead of translating the Book of Mormon record. Nevertheless, in *A Man That Can Translate*, I observed (in a passage that Kraus forgot to quote) that

There are multiple accounts of Joseph putting a stone in a hat, covering his face with the hat, and then reading out loud the words that appeared on the stone.

The accounts lack specifics about times and dates. None mention what words Joseph actually dictated during the observed performance, so it is impossible to determine what

12. Kraus, "Jonathan Edwards's Unique Role," 65–66.

portion of the Book of Mormon was being dictated, if in fact it was Book of Mormon text.¹³

I proceeded to observe that, *if* what Joseph dictated on these occasions is *actually in* our Book of Mormon, the evidence suggests it was some part of the Isaiah chapters in 2 Nephi, such as 2 Nephi 16–17. I cited a previous article in *Interpreter* that pointed out that “there are 29 differences, or variants, in these two Book of Mormon chapters relative to the KJV. None of these variants has any obvious purpose or value. Certainly, none clarifies Isaiah’s message or substantially improves the grammar.”¹⁴

Stone-in-the-hat proponents (including Kraus) argue that Joseph did not translate these chapters from the plates using the Urim and Thummim. This leaves two alternatives: either Joseph dictated those chapters by reading them off the seer stone or from memory. Which alternative is correct is unknowable, but I lean toward memory, because whatever Joseph was doing with the seer stone, it was — by his own declarations — not translating the plates.

(2) Joseph Smith Tricked His Close Friends and Family, Making Them Believe That He Was Translating the Aforementioned Sections of the Book of Mormon

I never wrote nor implied that Joseph tricked anyone. As we’ve seen, by at least 1834, the stone-in-the-hat narrative co-existed with the alternative Urim and Thummim narrative. The Demonstration Hypothesis reconciles these with two components. The first is that Joseph was under a strict command to not display the plates or the Urim and Thummim, a command he repeated openly (and inexplicably if he never used the Urim and Thummim or the plates). The second, as Zenas Gurley put it, “That Joseph had another stone called seers’ stone, and ‘peep stone,’ is quite certain. This stone was frequently exhibited to different ones and helped to assuage their awful curiosity; but the Urim and Thummim never, unless possibly to Oliver Cowdery.”¹⁵

13. Neville, *A Man That Can Translate*, 91–92.

14. Stan Spencer, “Missing Words: King James Bible Italics, the Translation of the Book of Mormon, and Joseph Smith as an Unlearned Reader,” *Interpreter: A Journal of Latter-day Saint Faith and Scholarship* 38 (2020): 45–106, <https://journal.interpreterfoundation.org/missing-words-king-james-bible-italics-the-translation-of-the-book-of-mormon-and-joseph-smith-as-an-unlearned-reader/>.

15. Neville, *A Man That Can Translate*, 24.

Throughout the book, I discuss the differences between what a witness observed and what that witness inferred or assumed. Again, *if what Joseph dictated during the stone-in-the-hat sessions is actually in our Book of Mormon*, I propose that he introduced the sessions by explaining that he was going to show the audience how the translation process worked. I further propose that they all understood this, but decades later, under the duress of the prevailing Spalding theory, the stone-in-the-hat witnesses cited the stone-in-the-hat sessions to refute the Spalding theory.

Thus, what was once perfectly clear — that Joseph demonstrated the process while conducting the actual translation in seclusion using the Urim and Thummim and the plates — was conflated by a handful of Joseph's associates in a misguided apologetic effort. There was no trickery on Joseph's part. To the contrary, Joseph and Oliver both explicitly explained that Joseph translated the plates with the Urim and Thummim that came with the plates. Whatever people incorrectly inferred about the stone in the hat was not the fault of Joseph and Oliver.

(3) Many Witnesses to the Book of Mormon Are Not to Be Believed

This allegation misrepresents one of the key points of my books. To repeat: throughout the books I discuss the differences between what a witness *observed* and what that witness *inferred* or *assumed*. The modern proponents of the stone-in-the-hat theory have long taken the statements of the stone-in-the-hat witnesses out of context and accepted them on their face, two errors that may be common but are nevertheless inexcusable.

While some authors do reject outright what the stone-in-the-hat witnesses said (just as the modern proponents of the stone-in-the-hat theory currently reject what Joseph and Oliver said), I prefer to accept what the witnesses claimed they observed but distinguish between what they observed and what they inferred or assumed. This is an important distinction that contemporaneous cross-examination would have brought out. Because we're dealing with historical accounts, we rely on careful analysis to separate the two elements of a witness's statement, which I've done throughout the book.

(4) We Should Instead Rely on Sources Hostile to The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints to Properly Understand Joseph's Translation Effort

It's difficult to know what to make of this allegation. In my view, as explained in the books, the primary source for understanding Joseph's translation effort is what Joseph and Oliver said about the translation, including the three statements by Joseph I quoted above. Other sources are ancillary, vague, muddled, and self-contradictory — and they mix observation with inference. Yet in his review, Kraus never once quotes what Joseph and Oliver said about the translation. Instead, he relies on the stone-in-the-hat sources and parrots *Mormonism Unveiled's* explanation of the stone-in-the-hat theory.

This brief response cannot possibly address all the details of Kraus's 24,000+ word reviews. Most of Kraus's objections involve a different weighing of the evidence, and I invite readers to consider that weighing. If and when I do a detailed review, I'll post it on academia.edu.

With regard to Kraus' review of *Infinite Goodness*, Kraus has misrepresented the premise and conclusions of the book. I view the influence of Edwards as solid evidence that Joseph translated the plates, i.e., this evidence corroborates Joseph's account (and contradicts the stone-in-the-hat theory). Briefly, here are excerpts from Kraus's abstract with my responses:

Kraus's Abstract: This is the second of two papers reviewing Jonathan Neville's latest books on the translation of the Book of Mormon. In *Infinite Goodness*, Neville claims that Joseph Smith's vocabulary and translation of the Book of Mormon were deeply influenced by the famous Protestant minister Jonathan Edwards. Neville cites various words or ideas that he believes originate with Edwards as the original source for the Book of Mormon's language.¹⁶

My Response: Throughout the book I emphasize that Joseph Smith's translation was the original source for the language of the Book of Mormon because I believe he translated the plates using his own lexicon while guided by revelation (D&C 9). Edwards was one of several influences on Joseph Smith, just as each of us learns our respective native languages from a variety of influences.

16. Kraus, "Jonathan Edwards's Unique Role," 65.

Kraus's Abstract: However, most of Neville's findings regarding Edwards and other non-biblical sources are superficial and weak, and many of his findings have a more plausible common source: the language used by the King James Bible.¹⁷

My Response: This caricature of my findings is incoherent because (i) although Kraus claimed "most" of my findings are superficial and weak, he did not consult my database of over 1,000 nonbiblical terms and phrases used by Edwards which are also found in the Book of Mormon, and (ii) the database focuses specifically on terms and phrases *not found* in the King James Bible. My separate biblical intertextual database, which Kraus also did not consult, includes several examples of rephrasing and blending of biblical passages that are found in the works of Edwards, suggesting Edwards was a closer source than the KJV itself. Furthermore, Kraus's review invokes sources not known to be readily available to Joseph Smith.

Generational Divide and the Ongoing Problem

The Kraus reviews reflect a generational divide in Latter-day Saint understanding of Church history and the historicity of the Book of Mormon. Recently someone of my generation, responding to the Demonstration Hypothesis, remarked, "You mean that everything I was taught about the translation was true?" Younger generations who have been taught the stone-in-the-hat theory respond to the Demonstration Hypothesis by saying, "You mean that everything I was taught about the stone in the hat was wrong?"

This is obviously an oversimplification — there are older people who accept the stone-in-the-hat theory and younger people who reject the stone-in-the-hat theory — but the origin of the Book of Mormon remains at the forefront of issues related to conversion, retention, and activity. Latter-day Saints deserve to know about alternative faithful interpretations of the historical evidence so they can make informed decisions for themselves.

To be sure, these discussions should have no bearing on an individual's standing as a Latter-day Saint. None of these rise to the level of temple-recommend questions. None impede or enhance one's ability

17. Ibid.

to serve in Church callings, to minister to others, or to love, share, and invite.

Nevertheless, the problems with the stone-in-the-hat theory are not merely academic exercises. They strike at the “keystone of our religion” in two fundamental ways.

1. **The stone-in-the-hat theory repudiates what Joseph Smith explicitly taught.** The problems with the stone-in-the-hat theory were outlined in the 1834 book *Mormonism Unveiled*. Joseph and Oliver apparently recognized the implications, because they both taught that Joseph translated the record by means of the Urim and Thummim that came with the record. Their explanation left no room for another “translation instrument.” Modern efforts to conflate the Urim and Thummim with the stone from the well directly contradicts what Joseph and Oliver taught.
2. **The stone-in-the-hat theory replaces the ancient origins of the Book of Mormon with mystical origins.** The stone-in-the-hat theory teaches that Joseph produced the Book of Mormon by dictating words that appeared on a stone he put in a hat.

The second point is critical because a key element of the stone-in-the-hat theory is that Joseph did not consult the plates during the dictation. Looking at the stone-in-the-hat theory from an objective perspective, once the text Joseph dictated is detached from the ancient plates, the focus becomes the source of the words on the stone. Believers axiomatically argue it is a divine source. Nonbelievers axiomatically argue it is another source, whether Joseph’s imagination, a performance based on an outline, or even (for non-LDS religious believers) an evil or mischievous entity.

Thus, replacing the ancient origins with mystical origins allows readers to confirm whatever bias they want.

In my view, Joseph and Oliver did not leave us with a murky origin of the Book of Mormon. In these books, I have proposed a new way to reconcile the stone-in-the-hat accounts with what Joseph and Oliver said. Now known as the Demonstration Hypothesis, this approach has engendered many misunderstandings, as exemplified in the Kraus review.

I encourage readers to consider the evidence for themselves.

Jonathan E. Neville is a retired lawyer, educator and author who has written ten books on LDS Church history and Book of Mormon topics. He has presented at the Mormon History Association, the Joseph Smith Papers Symposium, the John Whitmer Historical Society, and other venues. He has visited over 60 countries and has lived in Europe, Asia, Africa, and in several of the United States. He currently lives with his wife on the Oregon coast. His next book advancing his research on the origins and translation of the Book of Mormon, co-authored with James Lucas and titled *Confound the Wise: Restoring Translation to the Restoration*, will be released in Fall 2022.

A REJOINDER TO JONATHAN NEVILLE’S “RESPONSE TO RECENT REVIEWS”

Spencer Kraus

Abstract: *Jonathan Neville has offered a response to my two recent reviews of his works; however, in his response, Neville offers a poor defense regarding what he wrote and misrepresents my reviews of his works. As such, I present the following rejoinder in response to Neville’s concerns.*

Jonathan Neville has offered some thoughts regarding my two recent reviews, and I am happy to discuss and defend what I wrote. In Neville’s response, he claims that I offered “caricatures” of his arguments that are “inaccurate” and that I “omitted” context in my reviews.¹ I do not believe this is an accurate assessment, and Neville misrepresents what I wrote and ignores citations that he himself included in his books to which I responded. Ultimately, his response fails to defend his works.

After offering a brief overview of his Demonstration Hypothesis (which I will discuss shortly), Neville states the important context to be aware of is the competing claims regarding the origin of the Book of Mormon. This is true, and it is context with which many believers in the Restoration are intimately familiar. Neville cites Eber D. Howe’s *Mormonism Unveiled* as proof for his view of competing origins, but misunderstands and misappropriates Howe’s arguments to apparently make this an issue regarding how the Book of Mormon was translated. This is not the issue for Howe, however. The issue for him—and the entire basis of his book—is not *how* the Book of Mormon was translated, but whether it was translated at all.

1. Jonathan Neville, “A Man that Can Translate and Infinite Goodness: A Response to Recent Reviews,” *Interpreter: A Journal of Latter-day Saint Faith and Scholarship* 53 (2022): 172.

Howe believed that Joseph Smith was a fraud and the Book of Mormon was false. Latter-day Saints claim otherwise. Howe, in his work, relates two different options for the translation of the Book of Mormon, but as I discuss in my review of Neville's work, he attacks any and all forms of translation and revelation in modern times. It is disheartening to see a response defending one's work avoid dealing with the points raised in my reviews regarding Howe's work, and does not bode well for the rest of Neville's response.²

In fact, Howe was not the first to claim that a hat was used in the translation process, with this detail found as early as 1829.³ Another important witness to the translation of the Book of Mormon came in 1830 from Josiah Stowell, a faithful friend of the prophet Joseph who staunchly defended the young prophet and never lost his faith in Joseph's prophetic gifts. In 1830, as Joseph was (again) on trial for allegedly being a "disorderly person," Stowell testified of the translation of the Book of Mormon in defense of Joseph, stating that: "as aforesaid, the prisoner [Joseph] said he translated the book of Mormon, prisoner *put a certain stone into his hat, put his face into the crown*, then drew the brim of the hat around his head to prevent Light—he could then see as prisoner said, and translate the same, the Bible, got from the hill in Palmyra."⁴ Should Joseph had desired to clarify how the Book of Mormon was translated had this been a factually incorrect statement, that would have been the perfect opportunity to do so.

Neville does not take these early witnesses of the translation into consideration when determining that Joseph and Oliver decided to refute the seer-stone method only in 1834 (without even mentioning the seer

2. For my discussion on Howe and *Mormonism Unveiled*, see Spencer Kraus, "An Unfortunate Approach to Joseph Smith's Translation of Ancient Scripture," *Interpreter: A Journal of Latter-day Saint Faith and Scholarship* 52 (2022): 25–28, <https://journal.interpreterfoundation.org/an-unfortunate-approach-to-joseph-smiths-translation-of-ancient-scripture/>.

3. See "Golden Bible," *Palmyra Freeman*, August 11, 1829, [2]; Christian Goodwillie, "Shaker Richard McNemar: The Earliest Book of Mormon Reviewer," *Journal of Mormon History* 37, no. 2 (Spring 2011): 143 also relates an 1831 account involving the hat. This 1831 account also claims to have been written based on reports by Oliver Cowdery.

4. "Trial Report, 28 August 1832 [State of New York v. JS–C]," p. [2], The Joseph Smith Papers, <https://www.josephsmithpapers.org/paper-summary/trial-report-28-august-1832-state-of-new-york-v-js-c/1>, emphasis added. Significantly, earlier in his remarks, Josiah Stowell mentioned seeing a corner of the plates as they were passed to him through the window.

stone as they did so). Through his focus on and misuse of *Mormonism Unveiled*, it could lead a reader to erroneously believe that Howe was the first to assert this method of translation.

Neville next responds by claiming that "the fulcrum of the translation issue is the direct conflict" between Joseph and Oliver's statements when faced with other witnesses to the translation.⁵ Similarly, at the outset of his response, Neville reiterates his Demonstration Hypothesis, claiming that it offers "a faithful alternative reconciliation ... between ... what Joseph and Oliver claimed ... and ... what others claimed—that Joseph produced the Book of Mormon by dictating words that appeared on a stone he placed in a hat."⁶ This is coy rhetoric, used in an attempt to paint the debate between those who believe Joseph versus those who disbelieve the prophet. As has been shown in my review and as will be shown again, this is a false dichotomy upon which to base the debate.

As evidence for his claim, Neville cites three instances of Joseph claiming that he translated the Book of Mormon with the Urim and Thummim that Joseph had obtained with the plates (after possibly implying that I had purposefully left them out of the discussion), and then claims that "Joseph specified that the sole instrument he used to translate came with the plates."⁷ Except, upon examination, it becomes obvious that this is a misreading of Joseph's statements. He does not say that no seer stone was used or that only one instrument was used — Neville reads his own presuppositions into Joseph's statements, as he has done in his books and as I have discussed at length in my two reviews.

Neville closes this portion of his response by claiming there are three explanations that Latter-day Saints can make regarding the origins of the Book of Mormon. He further asserts that "any of these explanations can be accepted by faithful Latter-day Saints."⁸ These explanations are as follows:

1. Joseph Smith translated the ancient engravings into English, using "translate" in the ordinary sense of the word of converting the meaning of a manuscript written in one language into another language.
2. Joseph Smith (and/or confederates) composed the text and Joseph read it surreptitiously, recited it from memory, or performed it based on prompts or cues.

5. See Neville, "A Response to Recent Reviews," 175.

6. Ibid., 172.

7. Ibid., 176.

8. Ibid.

3. Joseph Smith dictated words that supernaturally appeared on a seer stone he placed in a hat.⁹

Neville's first and third explanations are simply a false dichotomy, as Neville demonstrates: "explanation 1 was the 'faithful' explanation, while explanations 2 and 3 were the critical or unbelieving explanations. Lately, explanation 3 has been embraced by many believers (including Kraus) as a faithful explanation that replaces explanation 1."¹⁰ This is an inaccurate claim, as the two are not mutually exclusive. It is possible to believe that Joseph translated ancient engravings into English (explanation 1), and it is possible to simultaneously believe that Joseph did so as he read words that appeared on a divine instrument (explanation 3). Neville's definition of *translation* appears to be a scholarly endeavor, which I have responded to at length in my review of *A Man That Can Translate*.¹¹ By offering a false dichotomy between "ordinary" translation (by divine means, per explanation 1) and dictating the translation with the aid of a seer stone (per explanation 3), however, Neville inadvertently avoids responding to my reviews of his work.

Neville then mischaracterizes explanation 3 by asserting that it was historically a view of critics or unbelievers, only recently gaining acceptance by some believers, when in fact it is a form of miraculous translation compatible with the faithful belief that Joseph translated the plates through the power of God. This leads to another point of discussion raised in my reviews, which Neville also should have offered a response to in order to defend his work. I discuss two citations from Oliver Cowdery and David Whitmer that state that Joseph read words off of his translation instruments. David Whitmer even describes that it was *Joseph* who related that information to him. From these citations, it would appear that Oliver, David, and likely Joseph himself saw no conflict between Neville's first and third explanations, because none

9. Ibid.

10. Ibid.

11. See Kraus, "An Unfortunate Approach," 11–15.

truly exists.¹² (Neville cited these statements in his book, which makes his false dichotomy all the more unconvincing.)¹³

This is further contrasted with Neville's premise of believing Joseph and Oliver versus those who claimed "that Joseph produced the Book of Mormon by dictating words that appeared on a stone he placed in a hat" — especially because Oliver *and probably Joseph* (indeed, there is little reason to doubt David Whitmer on this subject) both claimed that exact method of translation.¹⁴

This was all detailed in my review, and because Neville leaves this un rebutted in his response, it is entirely improper for him to attempt to frame the debate in this manner.¹⁵ It is also worth keeping in mind that the term *Urim and Thummim* could be used to refer to multiple instruments — as early Latter-day Saints understood.¹⁶

While Neville claims his ideas are "neo-orthodox" in his abstract, his framing of orthodoxy would challenge the faithfulness of multiple Church leaders in the Book of Mormon translation.¹⁷ Russell M. Nelson, Dieter F. Uchtdorf, D. Todd Christofferson, and Quentin L. Cook have all discussed Joseph's use of the seer stone in the hat, as discussed in my review.¹⁸ The Church's Gospel Topics essay further demonstrates that it is an entirely faithful and orthodox view that Joseph did read words off of a divine instrument placed in his hat.¹⁹

12. Ibid., 13. The relevant sources from Oliver Cowdery and David Whitmer are Oliver Cowdery, quoted in Abram W. Benton, "Mormonites," *Evangelical Magazine and Gospel Advocate* 2 (9 April 1831): 120; David Whitmer, in "Questions asked of David Whitmer," 1885, Zenos Gurley Collection, Church History Library; David Whitmer, quoted in E. C. Briggs, "Letter to the Editor," *Saints' Herald* 31 (21 June 1884): 396–97.

13. See Jonathan Neville, *A Man That Can Translate: Joseph Smith and the Nephite Interpreters* (Salt Lake City: Digital Legends Press, 2020), 267–68, 273, 301.

14. Neville, "A Response to Recent Reviews," 172.

15. See Kraus, "An Unfortunate Approach," 11–15.

16. See *ibid.*, 3–6. I also discuss Orson Pratt's use of the term *Urim and Thummim* to refer to multiple instruments in Spencer Kraus, "Orson Pratt and the Urim and Thummim of Joseph(s)," *Latter-day Light and Truth* (blog), 16 July 2022, <https://latterdaylightandtruth.blogspot.com/2022/07/orson-pratt-and-urim-and-thummim-of.html>. Orson Pratt's comments may hint that he likewise viewed Joseph's seer stone as a Urim and Thummim.

17. Neville, "A Response to Recent Reviews," 171.

18. Kraus, "An Unfortunate Approach," 9–10.

19. See "Book of Mormon Translation," *Gospel Topics Essays*, <https://www.churchofjesuschrist.org/study/manual/gospel-topics-essays/book-of-mormon-translation>.

Neville's second explanation is also troublesome. It is difficult to see how surreptitiously reciting a text that Joseph or his confederates composed could be accepted by faithful members as anything but deception or fraud. However, Neville appears to adhere to a portion of this claim regarding the Isaiah portions of 2 Nephi.

Responding to this particular concern, I would challenge the assumption that it is acceptable for faithful Latter-day Saints. Elder Kim B. Clark recently discussed Book of Mormon historicity in no uncertain terms, which would rule out this explanation permanently:

The Book of Mormon is what it claims to be, and faith in the Lord Jesus Christ and in His restored Gospel means that we believe exactly what Joseph said it was. If you reverence it as a sacred text, but don't believe in its historicity, you essentially deny its origin ... as Joseph said. And so I think it is absolutely essential [for a] robust faith in the Lord Jesus Christ and in His restored Gospel.²⁰

Indeed, as Joseph Smith likewise stated on no uncertain terms, "Take away the book of Mormon, and the revelations, and where is our religion? We have none."²¹ Stephen Smoot has similarly offered persuasive arguments for the necessity of a historical Book of Mormon, which is entirely incompatible with Neville's second proposed explanation.²²

Next, Neville discusses the "caricature" I provide of his ideas, quoting the outset of my review of *Infinite Goodness*. Relating the conclusions reached in my previous review of *A Man That Can Translate*, I state that Neville argues

20. Elder Kim B. Clark, "Seeking the Lord Jesus Christ," presented at the 2020 FAIR Conference. The quote in question comes from the question-and-answer segment, and a recording with this segment is available online at [fairlatterdaysaints.org](https://www.fairlatterdaysaints.org) and <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Il1QJf-5Vr8>. The quoted remarks begin at 22:45 and end at 23:45 responding to the question, "How important is a literal belief in the historicity of the Book of Mormon as opposed to reverencing it as an allegorical text?"

21. "Minutes and Discourse, 21 April 1834," p. 44, The Joseph Smith Papers, accessed August 24, 2022, <https://www.josephsmithpapers.org/paper-summary/minutes-and-discourse-21-april-1834/2>.

22. See Stephen O. Smoot, "Et Incarnatus Est: The Imperative for Book of Mormon Historicity," *Interpreter: A Journal of Latter-day Saint Faith and Scholarship* 30 (2018): 125–62, <https://journal.interpreterfoundation.org/et-incarnatus-est-the-imperative-for-book-of-mormon-historicity/>.

that (1) Joseph Smith memorized and recited Isaiah from memory rather than translate it from the Book of Mormon record; (2) Joseph Smith tricked his close friends and family, making them believe that he was translating the aforementioned sections of the Book of Mormon; (3) many witnesses to the Book of Mormon are not to be believed; and (4) we should instead rely on sources hostile to The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints to properly understand Joseph's translation effort.²³

As Neville discusses each of the four points in depth, I will respond to him accordingly.

First, Neville argues at length that Joseph memorized portions of Isaiah to recite in his "demonstration" to the Whitmers (this appears to involve Neville's explanation 2) and continues to do so in his response. He falsely asserts that the argument provided in my review "is a semantic mess because he argues that Joseph read words off a seer stone instead of translating the Book of Mormon record."²⁴ Rather than respond to my claims — including an analysis of the Masoretic text compared with the Book of Mormon — Neville avoids discussion by claiming it to be a "semantic mess," without explanation.²⁵

He then claims I "forgot to quote" a passage of his book relating to his Demonstration Hypothesis, although no real mistake was made on my part and signifies mind-reading on the part of Neville.²⁶ Neville's argument that "it is impossible to determine what portion of the Book of Mormon was being dictated"²⁷ when the seer stone was used is inconsequential, and did not merit an in-depth response — of course it is impossible to date with exact precision any part of the Book of Mormon translation and what tool was used. However, Emma Smith and Elizabeth Ann Whitmer Cowdery relate observing Joseph using the seer stone for extended periods of time — day after day and hours at a

23. Spencer Kraus, "Jonathan Edwards's Unique Role in an Imagined Church History," *Interpreter: A Journal of Latter-day Saint Faith and Scholarship* 52 (2022): 65–66, <https://journal.interpreterfoundation.org/jonathan-edwardss-unique-role-in-an-imagined-church-history/>.

24. Neville, "A Response to Recent Reviews," 177.

25. For my response to the claim that Joseph memorized and recited Isaiah from memory, see Kraus, "An Unfortunate Approach," 19–24. This includes an analysis of multiple textual variants in the Book of Mormon with the Masoretic text.

26. Neville, "A Response to Recent Reviews," 177.

27. *Ibid.*

time.²⁸ Neville should offer a defense of why these timeframes provided by Emma and Elizabeth should be discounted in favor of his proposed Demonstration Hypothesis involving Joseph's recitation of Isaiah, but he fails to do so.

Neville defends his claim that Joseph cited Isaiah by citing an article by Stan Spencer that claims that many Isaiah variants do not offer substantial differences to the meaning of Isaiah's message.²⁹ Indeed, Spencer's analysis is true, but it is in no way indicative that Joseph memorized Isaiah. Neville further asserts that he believes Joseph memorized Isaiah, but does not deal with my review wherein I compare many of his proposed "memorization errors" to the Masoretic text in light of modern scholarship. I conclude that many of the Isaiah variants in the Book of Mormon that Neville believes were memorization errors are supported by ancient sources and would therefore be better understood as a translation of an ancient text. Neville would have done well to respond to my arguments rather than avoid them.

Regarding the Isaiah variants in the Book of Mormon, there must be a logical point where coincidence for memorization errors matching ancient texts is too fantastical a claim when weighed with the evidence. Unfortunately, Neville continues to ignore the decades of scholarship on this issue in favor of a single statement from Stan Spencer that he can use in a context Spencer did not intend.

An odd remark in Neville's response is his declaration that "whatever Joseph was doing with the seer stone, it was — by his own declarations — not translating the plates."³⁰ No citation is offered, and I know of no declaration by Joseph that he never used a seer stone to translate the Book of Mormon. Neville relies exclusively on his own speculation.

Neville also states that he "never wrote nor implied that Joseph tricked anyone."³¹ This is an issue of semantics — Neville never explicitly writes in his books that Joseph lied to anyone, nor does he use the word "tricked." He does, however, imply that Joseph did trick and lie to his

28. See "Last Testimony of Sister Emma," *Saint's Herald* 26 (1 October 1879): 289; Elizabeth Ann Whitmer Cowdery, quoted in William W. McLellin, "My Dear Friends," manuscript, February 1870, Community of Christ Library and Archives.

29. See Stan Spencer, "Missing Words: King James Bible Italics, the Translation of the Book of Mormon, and Joseph Smith as an Unlearned Reader," *Interpreter: A Journal of Latter-day Saint Faith and Scholarship* 38 (2020): 45–106, <https://journal.interpreterfoundation.org/missing-words-king-james-bible-italics-the-translation-of-the-book-of-mormon-and-joseph-smith-as-an-unlearned-reader/>.

30. Neville, "A Response to Recent Reviews," 178.

31. Ibid.

close friends regarding the translation of the Book of Mormon. This was not only done to the Whitmers, but to neighbors such as Jacob Ingersoll, who Neville claims is a trustworthy source when he states that Joseph informed him there were no actual gold plates.³²

Regarding Ingersoll's claims that Joseph lied to a toll collector, Neville claims this "demonstrates Joseph's willingness to let others make inferences without correcting them."³³ Joseph comes out on top in this instance, without having had to pay for half of his journey — hardly honest behavior. (This is contrasted with Joseph ensuring that his debts were paid before leaving for Harmony later in life.) Neville next claims that "it seems plausible that Joseph would seek to deter [efforts to steal the plates] *by spreading the word that he didn't really have plates*. A confidant such as Ingersoll would be an effective method to spread such a rumor."³⁴

Neville would do well to recall that you do not have to say something explicitly to discuss any certain principle; how one says something is just as important, if not more so — he does not have to *say* Joseph lied or tricked others about having the plates, he just has to say it *seems* like Joseph said that. The word "lie" and "trick" were not specifically used, but for all intents and purposes, that is exactly what Neville describes Joseph as doing. "Pious fraud," as critics often call Joseph's actions, is still fraud, and there is little that distinguishes Joseph lying about having plates and lying about *not* having plates, since both were allegedly performed to further his prophetic career.

Neville further insinuates that such trickery (although he fails to call it such) occurred in relation to the witnesses. He claims that Martin Harris's account of swapping the seer stone with one found by the stream offers proof for his Demonstration Hypothesis:

The way Martin tells the story comes across as Joseph playing along with Martin's test. He sits, silently (as Martin infers he is unable to read anything on the stone). Then he looks up and asks Martin what the problem was.³⁵

Later, Martin may have "realized Joseph was merely playing along with him," but still shares his experience anyway.³⁶ "Playing along with"

32. See Kraus, "An Unfortunate Approach," 15–19, 26–28.

33. Neville, *A Man That Can Translate*, 84.

34. Ibid., 85, emphasis added.

35. Ibid., 182.

36. Ibid., 183.

Martin's need for evidence through a "demonstration" is no evidence at all, and would be more harmful to faith than helpful once Martin learned the truth. While Neville relates instances of the Prophet's sense of humor as proof for his alleged tendency "to let others make inferences," the examples he cites are wholly at odds with his certain desire to assuage Martin's insecurities.³⁷ Joseph "playing along" with Martin versus Joseph "tricking" Martin becomes merely an issue of semantics.

In like measure, the same could be said for all of the witnesses who Neville claims were left to "infer" that they were witnessing a translation.³⁸ While it might be possible for Neville or his readers to claim that the Whitmers understood this as a demonstration, such does not accord with the historical record or Neville's insistence that they simply inferred Joseph was translating when they witnessed this proposed event. The above points are clearly laid out in my review.

As a final note regarding this important point, there is a large discrepancy between Neville's proposed method for the translation of the Book of Mormon and Joseph's alleged demonstration of such. Neville fails to consider why Joseph must have felt obligated to use a stone in a hat when a pair of spectacles borrowed from a neighbor would have sufficed. If Joseph wanted to appease their curiosity regarding the translation method, a device that resembles the Nephite interpreters would have been a much more understandable approach. By "demonstrating" the translation in a method completely at odds with what he had actually done (and one which he would allegedly try to refute later in life), Joseph is performing a dishonest action to get his friends to stop bothering him. Whether intentionally or not, Neville has painted Joseph in a negative light.

Third, Neville does not respond to any of my in-depth analyses regarding his claims about the various witnesses to the translation where I claim that Neville argues they should not be believed. He states that these witnesses merely inferred that a translation was occurring, but his

37. See Neville, *A Man That Can Translate*, 83. The two examples Neville cites are Joseph's humorous response in the *Elder's Journal* that money digging "was never a very profitable job to him" and Joseph's remarks to Joseph Knight Sr. the day he received the plates. See "Elders' Journal, July 1838," p. 43, The Joseph Smith Papers, accessed August 21, 2022, <https://www.josephsmithpapers.org/paper-summary/elders-journal-july-1838/11>; "Joseph Knight Sr., Reminiscence, Circa 1835–1847," reprinted in Dan Vogel, ed., *Early Mormon Documents* (Salt Lake City: Signature Books, 1996), 4:15.

38. See Neville, *A Man That Can Translate*, 81.

historical analysis is fundamentally flawed. As he has not responded to any of my arguments, I would simply refer the reader to my review.³⁹

Fourth, Neville claims that "it's difficult to know what to make of this allegation" that we ought to believe sources critical of Joseph per Neville's analysis.⁴⁰ A lengthy portion of my review, however, deals with that exclusively — Neville defends affidavits in *Mormonism Unveiled*, defends his use of Mormonism Research Ministry, and attacks multiple sources published by The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints.⁴¹ (Indeed, it is ironic that he should again claim in his review that I parrot *Mormonism Unveiled* regarding the translation, when I clearly lay out my arguments against using *Mormonism Unveiled* apologetically as he does in his books.)⁴² Neville should be under the onus, in a defense of his work, to offer some explanation why he had done so, but none is offered.

Regarding my review of *Infinite Goodness*, Neville states that my conclusions are flawed because I did not "not consult [Neville's] database of over 1,000 nonbiblical terms and phrases used by Edwards" nor did I cite his "separate biblical intertextual database."⁴³ Neither of these were available at the time I wrote my reviews, although upon review it is easily determined that his databases suffer from many of the same problems that his appendices in *Infinite Goodness* do. A single word — sometimes just a different conjugation of a verb or alternative spelling — or phrase is poor "proof" for intertextuality.⁴⁴

Neville also claims that my "review invokes sources not known to be readily available to Joseph Smith," thus weakening my conclusions.⁴⁵ However, as I point out in my review, the use of these sources is done to demonstrate that the words and phrases that Neville sees as influenced by Edwards do not originate with Edwards and reflected a wider religious tradition.⁴⁶ These words and phrases were in the common vernacular, and it does not require any theological treatise to have been consulted on Joseph's part. That Neville appears to believe I would argue that Joseph

39. See Kraus, "An Unfortunate Approach," 31–44.

40. Neville, "A Response to Recent Reviews," 179.

41. See Kraus, "An Unfortunate Approach," 25–31.

42. See Neville, "A Response to Recent Reviews," 174–75.

43. Ibid., 180–81.

44. See Kraus, "Jonathan Edwards's Unique Role," 79–87. His appendices are discussed especially on p. 79.

45. Neville, "A Response to Recent Reviews," 181.

46. I conclude my review by stating that "Even [Neville's] best suggestions are weak — they consist of phrases common in the religious literature and discourses of three centuries." Kraus, "Jonathan Edwards's Unique Role," 88.

was familiar with each of the sources I cite (such as Martin Luther) underscores how little he understood my arguments.

Finally, in Neville's response, he argues that believing that Joseph used a seer stone links the Book of Mormon to "mystical origins"⁴⁷ that can lead to false claims regarding its nature. This is a false dichotomy yet again — the Urim and Thummim provide the same "mystical origins" that a seer stone would provide. What Neville fails to consider is how *his* definition of translation differs from mainstream Latter-day Saint thought since 1830.

In *A Man That Can Translate*, Neville argues that

Joseph translated the engravings on the plates in the ordinary sense of the word The translation was inspired both because of the aid of the interpreters and because, although Joseph had to study it out in his mind (D&C 9:8), the Spirit confirmed the translation he came up with as he dictated it to his scribe. Viewed in this way, the idea that Joseph actually translated the Nephite records into English seems obvious.⁴⁸

Neville does not offer an explanation as to how, should Joseph have been performing a scholarly translation, the Urim and Thummim would truly be used. An inference many readers might make is that the interpreters became incidental to the translation process, which is further strengthened by his claims that Joseph could have "ended previous [translating] sessions at the bottom of a particular plate" in an effort to explain how Joseph could reportedly begin translating from where he left off, as witnesses such as Emma Smith testified.⁴⁹ A scholarly translation of the plates removes the mystical origins from the Book of Mormon, ultimately providing a disservice to the book of scripture.⁵⁰ By making the Book of Mormon a scholarly feat rather than a divine translation as described by Joseph, Neville's historical analysis falters in multiple points.

My two reviews offer many other claims that Neville does not mention. Many of these are critical to his theses, and as such a defense of them is warranted on Neville's part. Examples include:

47. Neville, "A Response to Recent Reviews," 182.

48. Neville, *A Man That Can Translate*, 193–94.

49. Ibid., 241.

50. See Kraus, "An Unfortunate Approach," 11–15.

- His presentism when discussing the word "peruse" in Lucy Mack Smith's history⁵¹
- Why Joseph should be understood as having great literary capacities when his own testimony and the testimonies of his family suggest otherwise⁵²
- My rebuttal to Neville's claim that Jonathan Edwards was an Elias figure to Joseph⁵³
- My critique of the proposed theological influences that Jonathan Edwards had on Joseph Smith, such as the doctrine of plural marriage (of which Joseph's revelations and Edwards's sermons are deeply at odds with one another)⁵⁴
- My critique of the various errors in Neville's proposed intertextuality with Edwards, all of which are considerably weak⁵⁵
- My response to Neville regarding chiasmus in the Book of Mormon being another influence of Jonathan Edwards on Joseph Smith⁵⁶
- My response to Neville's weak conclusions regarding additional outside influences on the Book of Mormon, including *The Late War* merely because (when comparing it to the Book of Mormon), "In both cases, we have a Title Page, a Copyright Page, and a Preface."⁵⁷
- Neville's misuse of Alma 37's reference to a seer stone in regard to both modern scholarship and historical sources⁵⁸
- My response to Neville's conflation of the seer stone with Skousen and Carmack's theories regarding Early Modern English in the Book of Mormon⁵⁹
- My critique of Neville's definition of "translation" and how it differs from Joseph's definition⁶⁰

51. See Kraus, "Jonathan Edwards's Unique Role," 66–71.

52. See *ibid.*, 66–71.

53. See *ibid.*, 71–73.

54. See *ibid.*, 73–79. The claim regarding plural marriage is rebutted on pp. 76–77.

55. See *ibid.*, 79–87.

56. See *ibid.*, 86.

57. Neville, *Infinite Goodness*, 190. See also 191–93. I respond to this in Kraus, "Jonathan Edwards's Unique Role," 87–88.

58. See Kraus, "An Unfortunate Approach," 7–9.

59. See *ibid.*, 10–11.

60. See *ibid.*, 11–15.

- My critique of Neville's use of David Whitmer to argue for a large "demonstration," when David's statement Neville cites from does not support such a reading (this includes Neville's erroneous belief that David described the seer stone in this purported demonstration, when the record states that the "spectacles" were used)⁶¹
- In addition to my analysis of Isaiah variants that better reflect ancient manuscript evidence rather than memorization errors, Neville has made multiple transcription errors regarding Isaiah in the Book of Mormon that deserve acknowledgment⁶²

Ultimately, Neville's response to my two reviews is weak. He does not deal directly with the substance of my arguments, instead doubling down on his claims provided in his two books. This is troublesome behavior for one who claims to be open-minded and willing to discuss anything he has overlooked or mistaken.⁶³ As I discussed in the conclusion to my review of *A Man That Can Translate*, "History ... is written through the careful analysis of documents in their context and against a wide array of evidence."⁶⁴ This includes determining the method in which Joseph translated the plates, especially in light of Joseph's few references to the method throughout his life. Neville is under no imperative to accept any of my conclusions, of course — but he has not adequately dealt with my arguments in his response nor has he adequately dealt with the historical evidence regarding Joseph's translation of ancient scripture.

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61. See *ibid.*, 16–19.

62. See *ibid.*, 19–25 for the full discussion regarding Nephi's use of an ancient version of Isaiah in 2 Nephi. For Neville's transcription errors specifically, see *ibid.*, 22–23. Only a handful of scriptures Neville cites were used in my response to highlight significant errors in his transcription and analysis, as due to length constraints my review could not deal with all of his errors.

63. See Neville, *A Man That Can Translate*, 21.

64. Kraus, "An Unfortunate Approach," 44.

A BACKSTORY FOR THE BRASS PLATES

Noel B. Reynolds

Abstract. *This paper brings contemporary Ancient Near East (ANE) scholarship in several fields together with the ancient scriptures restored through Joseph Smith to construct a new starting point for interpretation of the teachings of the Book of Mormon. It assembles findings from studies of ancient scribal culture, historical linguistics and epigraphy, and the history and archaeology of Mesopotamia, Egypt, and the Levant, together with the traditions of ancient Israel and the ancient scriptures restored to Joseph Smith, to construct a contextualized perspective for understanding Lehi, Nephi, and the Brass Plates as they would have been understood by their contemporaries — as prominent bearers of the Josephite textual tradition. This essay offers a hypothetical, but comprehensive backstory for the Brass Plates. Because of its hypothetical character, it cannot be claimed that it is the true account. Rather it is an attempt to build a plausible backstory given the current state of knowledge in the relevant fields of academic research and the facts provided in the ancient scriptures restored through Joseph Smith.*

Contemporary achievements in scholarship regarding both the Bible and the Book of Mormon can provide a much-expanded platform for understanding the Brass Plates that Nephi obtained from the treasury of Laban and that served the Nephite people for a thousand years as “holy scripture.” Advances in ANE studies of ancient epigraphy, archaeology, ethnography, languages, history, scribal cultures, and the texts of the Hebrew Bible over the last century now make it possible to propose a comprehensive backstory for the Brass Plates that addresses questions of their origins, language, contents, production, and purpose.

Supporting Papers from the Larger Project

This topic is too broad for a single paper. This paper draws on six others that have been part of the same project, that develop separate pieces of the overall picture, and that are either recently published or available online as working papers. The first of these draws on the recent outpouring of studies of scribal schools in the ancient oral cultures of Mesopotamia, Egypt, and Israel to show why the Book of Mormon description of the Brass Plates presumes the existence of a Manassite scribal school that could trace its origins to Joseph, the great grandson of Abraham, if not to Abraham himself. It also shows why the high literacy displayed by both Lehi and Nephi can only make sense in the oral culture of ancient Israel if they were trained in such a seventh-century scribal school in Jerusalem.¹ They were both fluent in multiple languages; could read and write at the highest level; were masters of the distinctive, seventh-century BCE Hebrew rhetoric; and could fabricate and use metal plates and other writing tools and materials.

A second paper updates and expands the continually growing literature on writing on metal in Lehi's time.² Two others identify and explain Nephi's comprehensive and artistic application of the principles of seventh-century Hebrew rhetoric to his writings in 1 and 2 Nephi.³ A fifth traces the continuation of a Nephite scribal school from the time of Nephi down to Mormon and Moroni — the last scribes of the

1. See Noel B. Reynolds, "Lehi and Nephi as Trained Manassite Scribes," *Interpreter: A Journal of Latter-day Saint Faith and Scholarship* 50 (2022): 161–216, <https://journal.interpreterfoundation.org/lehi-and-nephi-as-trained-manassite-scribes/>. That paper documents the growing scholarly consensus about the existence of scribal schools in seventh-century Judah and my extended argument for seeing the Brass Plates as evidence for an ancient and highly developed Manassite scribal school that had found refuge from the Assyrian conquest in Jerusalem before 722 BCE, but that did not survive the Babylonian conquest.

2. See Noel B. Reynolds, "An Everlasting Witness: Ancient Writings on Metal," *Faculty Publications* 5379 (2021): <https://scholarsarchive.byu.edu/facpub/5379>.

3. Noel B. Reynolds, "Nephi's Small Plates: A Rhetorical Analysis," *Interpreter: A Journal of Latter-day Saint Faith and Scholarship* 50 (2022): 99–122, <https://journal.interpreterfoundation.org/nephis-small-plates-a-rhetorical-analysis/>. Noel B. Reynolds, "Lehi's Dream, Nephi's Blueprint: How Nephi Uses the Vision of the Tree of Life as an Outline for 1 and 2 Nephi," *Interpreter: A Journal of Latter-day Saint Faith and Scholarship* 52 (2022): 231–77, <https://journal.interpreterfoundation.org/lehis-dream-nephis-blueprint-how-nephi-uses-the-vision-of-the-tree-of-life-as-an-outline-for-1-and-2-nephi/>. These papers also point to a few others in which I have developed the application of insights from Hebrew rhetoric to the Book of Mormon.

Nephite dispensation.⁴ Finally, a sixth paper uses the perspective of the Brass Plates to look at some of the problems for Old Testament history that have been raised by modern archaeologists.⁵ In particular, the Brass Plates would seem to resolve the main quandary in Old Testament studies — the lack of a written record for the Hebrew scriptures before 700 BCE. Many of the questions the present paper might raise may be addressed more fully in one of these others.

The Organization of the Paper

Because of the wide variety of materials relevant to an understanding of the Brass Plates that are presented herein, this paper will advance a long series of sub-theses to make their contributions clear. After dealing with several introductory issues, the paper proper begins with an explanation of the central role played by the Egyptian language and script in the Brass Plates and consequently in the Nephite scribal tradition. This gave the Nephites a written record in an unchanging classical language that extended without intervening translations or dependence on oral traditions all the way back to Joseph of Egypt and possibly even to Abraham. That provides a foundation for a review of the contents of the Brass Plates that explains the Josephite character of the plates.

The following section explains why it is reasonable to conclude that the other ancient scriptures revealed to Joseph Smith may also have been included in the Brass Plates. Strong traces of the Book of Moses and the Book of Abraham can be detected in the language and the teachings of the Nephite record as the Brass Plates provided a constant resource for Lehi, Nephi, and their successors.

The next three sections of the paper draw upon the insights and findings of modern biblical scholarship that identify and hypothesize a number of scribal traditions that have contributed to the modern Bible. Enormous scholarly effort has been devoted to the late nineteenth-century hypothesis that the Pentateuch was the creation of unnamed scribes who were harmonizing seventh-century transcriptions of competing oral traditions of Israelite history and scripture — all of

4. Noel B. Reynolds, “The Last Nephite Scribes,” *Interpreter: A Journal of Latter-day Saint Faith and Scholarship* 53 (2022):95–138, <https://journal.interpreterfoundation.org/the-last-nephite-scribes/>.

5. Noel B. Reynolds, “Modern Near East Archaeology and the Brass Plates,” *Interpreter: A Journal of Latter-day Saint Faith and Scholarship* 52 (2022):111–44, <https://journal.interpreterfoundation.org/modern-near-east-archaeology-and-the-brass-plates/>.

which was made possible by contemporary developments in Hebrew language and script. Later translations and versions of the Pentateuch give witness to an even wider range of early scribal traditions. Since the 1980s, it has become evident to most Bible scholars that all of the Bible down through 2 Kings has been redacted to fit the political and religious agenda of the Judahite regime of the late seventh century. All these studies are built on the recognition that our Old Testament in its various versions is not just one original and reliable composition. This in turn points to the importance of the ancient and continuous record preserved in the Brass Plates, written from the perspective of Josephite scribes.

Finally, the concluding sections of the paper briefly examine the possible circumstances that may have motivated the Josephite scribes to take on the extraordinary task of manufacturing a metallic version of their distinctive textual tradition written principally in Egyptian and containing extensive Josephite prophetic materials that were not part of the Judahite tradition. A brief look at the historical process of establishing canonical versions of scripture allows readers to rethink the Brass Plates and the Book of Mormon from the broader perspective of how scriptural traditions are generally formed.

Book of Mormon Foundations

The opening chapters of the Book of Mormon lay the foundations for everything that follows those chapters. Nephi begins by sharing the experiences through which he and his father Lehi were brought into personal and direct prophetic communication with the Lord. All that follows will stand on the revelations they received as the founding prophets of the Nephite dispensation. And they are not left to be lone witnesses. The very next episode relates how they acquired a durable copy of their family's lineage history going back to the creation through their ancestor Manasseh to Abraham and Adam — that was complete with histories, prophecies, and genealogy. The Brass Plates contained the invaluable record of the prophecies and covenants that defined Israel and its future and that would guide and govern Lehi's posterity as "a remnant of Joseph" until the final judgment. At the moment these plates came into his possession, Lehi

was filled with the Spirit and began to prophesy concerning his seed, that these plates of brass should go forth unto all nations, kindreds, tongues, and people which were of his seed. Wherefore he said that these plates of brass should

never perish, neither should they be dimmed any more by time. (1 Nephi 5:17–19)⁶

Even though the bulk of the Book of Mormon text is an abridgment by Mormon that preserves but a tiny share of the history and teachings of the Nephites and their prophets, it does report in some detail exchanges in which the Brass Plates are entrusted to a new generation's custodian when the prophecies of Lehi regarding the plates are confirmed or repeated. At one such transition point, King Benjamin told his sons that

were it not for these plates which contain these records and these commandments, we must have suffered in ignorance, even at this present time, not knowing the mysteries of God. For ... were it not for these things which have been kept and preserved by the hand of God, that we might read and understand of his mysteries and have his commandments always before our eyes, that even our fathers would have dwindled in unbelief. (Mosiah 1:3, 5)

King Mosiah next conferred the Brass Plates upon Alma along with the Nephite records and commanded him to “keep and preserve them” (Mosiah 28:20). Alma conveyed them to his son Helaman, noting that they contained “the holy scriptures” and “the genealogy of our forefathers, even from the beginning.” He also reminded Helaman that

it hath been prophesied by our fathers that they should be kept and handed down from one generation to another, and be kept and preserved by the hand of the Lord until they should go forth unto every nation, kindred, tongue, and people, that they shall know of the mysteries contained thereon. And now behold, if they are kept, they must retain their brightness. Yea, and they will retain their brightness. (Alma 37:4–5)

Alma then went on to explain the key role the Brass Plates had played in bringing their own people to salvation:

And now it hath hitherto been wisdom in God that these things should be preserved. For behold, they have enlarged the memory of this people, yea, and convinced many of the

6. All quotations from the Book of Mormon are taken from the Yale critical text. See Royal Skousen, *The Book of Mormon: The Earliest Text*, 2nd ed. (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2022). I sometimes add italics in quotations to facilitate reader focus on key terms.

error of their ways and brought them to the knowledge of their God, unto the salvation of their souls. (Alma 37:8)

Caveats and Confessions

The ambitious task set out for this paper draws on many specialist fields of study of the ANE and Hebrew Bible studies. Huge progress has been made in all these specialties over the last century as thousands of linguists, historians, and archaeologists have labored to provide ever more complete and accurate understanding of the biblical text in its ancient context. But this same academic progress has produced a great increase in disciplinary specialization that poses constant challenges for interdisciplinary thinking. As one important symposium acknowledged:

Given the explosion of data during the second half of the twentieth century and the vast increase in the number of publications, scholars must specialize out of necessity. Thus, it is becoming increasingly difficult to find scholars with broad expertise in theology, biblical history, philology, form criticism, literary analysis, comparative religions, and archaeology, though such expertise was deemed to be requisite for any biblical scholar during the first half of the twentieth century.⁷

Fortunately, for interdisciplinary interlopers like me, all of these disciplines have gradually adopted plain English as their standard, making it possible for non-specialists to read their research publications with reasonable effort. I have also benefitted greatly from the help of many friends and associates who are specialists in these fields and who have been willing to explain technical language and concepts.

Joseph Smith's claim to divine aid in the restoration of lost ancient scriptures — the Book of Mormon, the Book of Moses, and the Book of Abraham — has led many scholars to treat them skeptically as products of the early nineteenth-century culture of frontier America. This paper takes the opposite approach by accepting the factual claims of these Restoration scriptures at face value. The whole point of this paper is to explore the ways and extent to which those claims might fit in with the findings of contemporary ANE studies. In the process, those findings may help us understand the Restoration scriptures in new ways.

7. Ann E. Killebrew and Andrew G. Vaughn, eds., *Jerusalem in Bible and Archaeology: The First Temple Period* (Atlanta: Society of Biblical Literature, 2003), 2.

In an apologetic mode, Hugh Nibley liked to refer to the dictum of classical philologist Friedrich Blass and his advice for detecting forgeries masquerading as ancient texts or manuscripts:

According to Blass, the first thing to do in examining any ancient text is to consider it in the light of the origin and background that is claimed for it. If it fits into that background there is no need to look further, since historical forgery is virtually impossible. Five hundred years of textual criticism have shown the futility of trying to judge ancient writings by the standards of modern taste, or of assuming that any ancient document is a forgery before it has been tested.⁸

While my approach in this paper is exploratory, rather than apologetic, Blass's dictum is still relevant. Do the factual descriptions in these Restoration scriptures fit into a coherent account in the light of our modern understanding of the ANE? Can we formulate a plausible backstory for Lehi's Brass Plates in late seventh-century BCE Jerusalem? As the historical and scientific knowledge of ancient Israel and the ANE have grown since 1830, does the Book of Mormon account of the Brass Plates make more sense or less?

The Languages of the Brass Plates

Most of the scholarly discussion of languages and the Book of Mormon is focused on the question of Nephite language and the language Mormon used in writing the Book of Mormon. But we do have one direct reference in the text to the language or at least the script of the Brass Plates.

For it were not possible that our father Lehi could have remembered all these things, to have taught them to his children, except it were for the help of these plates; for *he having been taught in the language of the Egyptians*, therefore he could read these engravings and teach them to his children, that thereby they could teach them to their children, and so fulfilling the commandments of God, even down to this present time. (Mosiah 1:4)

Here Benjamin clearly says that Lehi was “taught in the language of the Egyptians,” which enabled him to read the engravings on the

8. Hugh Nibley, *An Approach to the Book of Mormon*, 3rd ed. (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 1988), 7.

Brass Plates and teach them (the engravings or the teachings) to his descendants. This also suggests that when Nephi was explaining to his brothers how important it was to obtain the Brass Plates that would enable them to “preserve unto our children the language of our fathers” (1 Nephi 3:19), he was likely referring to Egyptian rather than Hebrew, as is commonly supposed.

Ancient Egyptian as the Featured Language and Script

Hugh Nibley interpreted this to mean that the Brass Plates were written in both the language and the script of the Egyptians.⁹ Most Book of Mormon scholars are not convinced of that and have assumed that the Brass Plates were written in Hebrew with an Egyptian script — probably some form of hieratic, although demotic had been developed by Lehi’s time.¹⁰ Benjamin’s statement leaves both possibilities open, and I will explain below why it may be reasonable to think that the Brass Plates included early texts written originally in Egyptian language and script, as well as some later ones written in Hebrew language using the recently developed alphabetic paleo-Hebrew script. Because the Brass Plates included more recent Hebrew texts like Isaiah and Jeremiah, it seems likely that these would have been written in the Hebrew language and in paleo-Hebrew script.

A side note on ancient scripts may be helpful to some readers. Hebrew alphabetic writing first appears in documented inscriptions around 800 BCE. That is when the Israelites, like several of their small neighbor nations, developed their own national version of the West Semitic alphabet and script, which had been in use for limited applications since

9. See Hugh Nibley, *Lehi in the Desert*, ed. John W. Welch (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book and Provo: FARMS, 1988), 13–17.

10. See e.g., Sidney B. Sperry, *Book of Mormon Compendium* (Salt Lake City: Bookcraft, 1968), 31–39; and John L. Sorenson, “The Brass Plates and Biblical Scholarship,” *Nephite Culture and Society: Collected Papers* (Salt Lake City: New Sage Books, 1997), 30–31. The original publication was “The ‘Brass Plates’ and Biblical Scholarship,” *Dialogue: A Journal of Mormon Thought* 10 (Autumn, 1977): 31–39. Also John A. Tvedtnes, “Reformed Egyptian,” *The Most Correct Book* (Salt Lake City: Cornerstone Publishing, 1999), 31–33; and “Hebrew Background of the Book of Mormon,” in *Rediscovering the Book of Mormon*, ed. John L. Sorenson and Melvin J. Thorne (Provo, UT: FARMS, 1991): 77–91; Brant A. Gardner, *Second Witness: Analytical and Contextual Commentary on the Book of Mormon* (Salt Lake City: Greg Kofford Books, 2007), I:130–31. Tvedtnes explains where he thinks Nibley went wrong on this in “Was Lehi a Caravaneer?” *Most Correct Book*, 80–81.

its invention in the Egyptian delta area as early as 1940 BCE.¹¹ While there is no evidence of this first invention of alphabetic writing being taken up by scribal schools or others for use in extended texts, it seems to have been widely available through northern Egypt and the Levant for monumental, commercial, military, personal, and other uses for a millennium before it was adapted by the Hebrews for the writing of sacred or historical texts.¹²

The Late Invention of Hebrew Scripts

The square Hebrew script used today is thought to be a Persian invention that the returning Jews brought back with them from the Babylonian and then Persian captivity during the sixth century BCE. A small group of Dead Sea Scrolls and the Samaritan Pentateuch are written in the Old Hebrew or paleo-Hebrew script used before the exile that was adapted to the Hebrew language from the West Semitic (Phoenician) alphabetic script used throughout the Levant in the eighth and earlier centuries. Lehi, Nephi, and the contributors to the Brass Plates — as well as later Nephite writers — would not recognize the square script used in post-exilic Israel. It is not likely that the Josephite scribes of the eighth and seventh centuries as native Hebrew speakers would have thought it necessary to translate the writings of contemporary prophets such as Isaiah and Jeremiah back into Egyptian just because their older inherited materials were in Egyptian.

The Josephite Legacy of Egyptian Language and Script

Nephi clarified at the very beginning of his Small Plates that he was writing that record in the language of his father, “which consists of the learning of the Jews and the language of the Egyptians” (1 Nephi 1:2). While students of the Book of Mormon continue to puzzle about the meaning of that statement and others like it that surface across the full text,¹³ there are several background facts that could explain why the

11. Gordon J. Hamilton, *The Origins of the West Semitic Alphabet in Egyptian Scripts* (Washington, D. C.: Catholic Biblical Association of America, 2006), 292, provides the most comprehensive and fine-grained analysis of the full collection of inscriptions from ancient Egypt.

12. See Israel Finkelstein and Benjamin Sass, “Epigraphic Evidence from Jerusalem and its Environs at the Dawn of Biblical History: Facts First,” in *New Studies in the Archaeology of Jerusalem and its Region* 11, ed. Yuval Gadot et al. (Jerusalem: n.p., 2017).

13. For example, see the discussion in *Encyclopedia of Mormonism*, s.v. “Book of Mormon Language,” by Brian D. Stubbs, (New York: Macmillan, 1992), 179–81.

Nephites acknowledged a deep, long-term involvement with Egyptian language and script:

1. The Brass Plates may have included writings in Egyptian language or script, given the likely inclusion of Abraham's and Joseph's original writings as passed down through Joseph's line.
2. Joseph, Manasseh, and Ephraim and their families may have been fluent or even native speakers of Egyptian over three centuries or more. Asenath, the high-born Egyptian mother of that family probably only spoke Egyptian. Other Egyptians may have married her children and later generations of descendants so long as Joseph's family retained a privileged status. That world would likely have been staffed by other speakers of Egyptian.¹⁴
3. The elite education available to Joseph's and Asenath's offspring and descendants may not have included any Canaanite (Phoenician/West Semitic) language. Any scribal school that formed in the Josephite clans during the long sojourn in Egypt would have been expert in both the language and the writing systems of Egypt and may even have favored Egyptian as their native tongue over the likely vernacular Canaanite of their relatives, who were not part of the Egyptian elite.
4. Expertise in the Egyptian language and scripts and possession of important ancient manuscripts written in Egyptian may have provided a consequential distinction between Josephite scribal schools and those that emerged in other Israelite tribes that may have depended on competing versions of recently transcribed oral traditions. Traditional reliance on authoritative written texts would presumably be far less vulnerable to the syncretistic tendencies that seem to have contributed to the formation of the Hebrew Bible under the leadership of Judahite scribal schools. It should be noted that the scribal schools of the ANE typically

14. Rabbinic traditions have attempted to reduce this ethnic distance by postulating Asenath's conversion to Judaism before this marriage or describing her as a descendant of Jacob's daughter Dinah through a bizarre story that brought her to Egypt. See, for example, *The Shalvi/Hyman Encyclopedia of Jewish Women*, s.v. "Asenath: Midrash and Aggadah," by Tamar Kadari, <https://jwa.org/encyclopedia/article/asenath-midrash-and-aggadah>.

maintained and duplicated texts in ancient languages and scripts not related to their own current vernaculars.¹⁵

5. Moses was reared and educated in a royal Egyptian household and would almost certainly have been a beneficiary of the educational system that had been developed for the elite families of Egypt. The Brass Plates included the five books of Moses, which may likely have been written first in Egyptian as well.
6. The Egyptian empire that controlled the Levant including Israel in the thirteenth and twelfth centuries maintained an administration center with professional scribes in the Jaffa area that became integrated into the local economy and society of Palestine after Egypt pulled out in 1125, becoming an influence in the formation of local scribal culture after that.¹⁶ Orly Goldwasser has assembled a slowly growing collection of examples of hieratic writing from various locations in Israel after the Egyptian withdrawal, adding support to Burke's claims for the influence of the Egyptian scribes left behind.¹⁷ John Thompson has shown how Goldwasser documents the existence of an Egyptian scribal tradition in Israel in Lehi's time.¹⁸ David Carr has identified several characteristics of Israelite writing systems and scribal practices that are best explained as borrowings from Egypt in this general time period.¹⁹ Book of Mormon Central staff have helpfully provided online a documented

15. See Karel van der Toorn, *Scribal Culture and the Making of the Hebrew Bible* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2007), 65–69.

16. Aaron A. Burke, "Left Behind: New Kingdom Specialists at the End of Egyptian Empire and the Emergence of Israelite Scribalism," in *"An Excellent Fortress for his Armies, a Refuge for the People": Egyptological, Archaeological, and Biblical Studies in Honor of James K. Hoffmeier*, ed. Richard E. Averbeck and K. Lawson Younger, Jr. (Winona Lake, IN: Eisenbrauns, 2020).

17. Orly Goldwasser, "An Egyptian Scribe from Lachish and the Hieratic Tradition of the Hebrew Kingdoms," *Tel Aviv* 18 (1991): 248–53.

18. John S. Thompson, "Lehi and Egypt," *Glimpses of Lehi's Jerusalem*, ed. John W. Welch, David Rolph Seely, and Jo Ann Seely (Provo: FARMS, 2004), 259–76.

19. David M. Carr, *The Formation of the Hebrew Bible: A New Reconstruction* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011), 385.

summary of Egyptian language and script occurrences in Israel in the eighth, seventh, and sixth centuries.²⁰

7. Growing up in Jerusalem in the seventh century, Lehi lived in a world that was once again in Egyptian control. Assyrian administration faded before mid-century, and the Babylonians did not take over until after Lehi's flight into the southern desert. During this interim, Egypt seized the opportunity to exploit Israel once again as a vassal and as a buffer against Mesopotamian powers.²¹
8. Many leading epigraphers now believe that paleo-Hebrew script first distinguished itself from other West Semitic scripts in the late ninth and early eighth centuries and that the oral traditions recorded in the Hebrew Bible were first transcribed after 800 BCE.²² If Josephite scribes were maintaining an ancient textual tradition preserved in Egyptian language and/or script, they may well have felt protective of that tradition in the face of the Hebrew variants deriving from the oral traditions of the other tribes in the eighth and seventh centuries. It would also be possible that the various oral versions in the Hebrew vernacular derived in some way from the same Egyptian source that was maintained and perpetuated by the Manassites.

The Contents of the Brass Plates

Nephi reports his father's initial examination of the newly acquired Brass Plates by emphasizing three kinds of writings they contained — genealogies, prophetic writings, and a history of Israel and of the patriarchs going back to Adam and Eve.

- A And he beheld that they did contain the five books of
Moses,
1 which gave an account
a of the creation of the world

20. "Book of Mormon Evidence: Egyptian Writing," *Evidence Central*, Sept. 19, 2020, <https://evidencecentral.org/recency/evidence/egyptian-writing>.

21. An excellent summary of the historical events that provide the background for Lehi and Nephi's story can be found in Aaron P. Schade, "The Kingdom of Judah: Politics, Prophets, and Scribes," *Glimpses of Lehi's Jerusalem*, ed. John W. Welch, David Rolph Seely, and Jo Ann Seely (Provo: FARMS, 2004), 299–336.

22. Seth L. Sanders, *The Invention of Hebrew* (Champaign, IL: University of Illinois Press, 2009), 136–55.

- b and also of Adam and Eve, which was our first parents,
- B and also a record of the Jews (Israelites)
 - a from the beginning,
 - b even down to the commencement of the reign of Zedekiah, king of Judah,
- B* and also the prophecies of the holy prophets
 - a from the beginning,
 - b even down to the commencement of the reign of Zedekiah,
- A* and also many prophecies which have been spoken by the mouth of Jeremiah.
- A And it came to pass that my father Lehi also found upon the plates of brass a genealogy of his fathers;
- B wherefore he knew that he was a descendant of Joseph,
- C yea, even that Joseph
 - 1 which was the son of Jacob,
 - 2 which was sold into Egypt
- D and which was preserved by the hand of the Lord
- D* that he might preserve his father Jacob and all his household from perishing with famine.
- C* And they were also led
 - 1 out of captivity and
 - 2 out of the land of Egypt
 - a by that same God who had preserved them.
- A* And thus my father Lehi did discover the genealogy of his fathers.
- B* And Laban also was a descendant of Joseph;
- Ballast:²³ wherefore he and his fathers had kept the records.
(1 Nephi 5:10–16)²⁴

23. Following earlier authors, Jack Lundbom distinguishes “ballast lines” that bring balance or resolution at the conclusion of small rhetorical structures in biblical writing and illustrates this phenomenon with examples from Isaiah. See Jack R. Lundbom, *Biblical Rhetoric and Rhetorical Criticism* (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 2013), 133–35.

24. While I have preferred the chiasmic option to display Nephi’s rhetorical structures for this passage, it does require reversing the order of the A* and B* elements of the final sentence in the second chiasm — which is not without

References to the Brass Plates and the teachings they contained occur throughout the text of the Book of Mormon, adding considerably to the reader's knowledge of their specific contents. But in this initial account, Nephi specifies these general claims about those contents:

1. The record contains a genealogy of Lehi's ancestors back to Joseph and Jacob.
2. The record contains something like the Book of Genesis that gives an account of the creation and our first parents, which is presumably part of the five books of Moses Nephi mentioned. Given that all of these were in their late seventh-century BCE form, we cannot be sure how closely they would correspond to our modern text. This issue will be discussed below in connection with the Documentary Hypothesis.
3. It also contains a history of Israel from the times of Jacob and Joseph and the Egyptian captivity down to the reign of Zedekiah contemporary with Lehi. Again, we might expect that history to be quite different coming from the northern kingdom. As will be documented below, Bible scholars today generally believe the history in our Hebrew Bible has been heavily doctored by "the Deuteronomist" — one or more Judahite editors who reshaped Genesis through 2 Kings to discredit Israel and imbue Judah with superior political and religious authority.
4. It contains the writings of the prophets down to Lehi's time, including some of the prophecies of his contemporary Jeremiah. While persuading his brothers to persist in getting the Brass Plates from Laban, Nephi stated that these plates contained "the words which have been spoken by the mouth of all the holy prophets, which have been delivered unto them by the Spirit and power of God since the world began, even down unto this present time" (1 Nephi 3:20).
5. Readers will find out later that Lehi and his relative Laban are descendants of Joseph's eldest son Manasseh (Alma 10:3). Laban's branch of that family had been responsible for

precedent in Nephi's writings or in the Bible. See Gary A. Rendsburg, "Chiasmus in the Book of Genesis," in *Chiasmus: The State of the Art*, ed. John W. Welch and Donald W. Parry (Provo, UT: BYU Studies and Book of Mormon Central, 2020), 30. See also Donald W. Parry, *Poetic Parallelisms in the Book of Mormon* (Provo, UT: Maxwell Institute, 2007), 11–12, for an alternate and possibly superior analysis of this rhetorical structure.

keeping the records, wherefore Lehi had to send his sons to Laban to obtain these brass plates. Applying what we know about ANE scribal schools, we can see that Laban's library or treasury may have been the central depository for all the scribal records created and maintained by one branch of Joseph's Manassite posterity.²⁵ The scribal school of Manassites associated with this library would have been responsible for preserving and extending the papyrus scrolls and keeping them up to date and in good condition through periodic replacement.

The Brass Plates in the Context of Ancient Jerusalem

Considering the dramatic expansion of scholarly understanding of the scribal culture of the ANE in recent decades, it may be illuminating to ask ourselves how informed people in Lehi's day would have interpreted Nephi's story about the Brass Plates. The ability of Lehi and Nephi to immediately grasp both the Egyptian and Hebrew language content of the Brass Plates, to compose comparable accounts of their own lives and their own revelations, and to manufacture their own writing materials clearly indicates that they both had advanced training as scribes.²⁶

Scribal schools tended to be family affairs and would have included a curriculum providing instruction from beginner levels all the way up to very advanced instruction in relevant languages and literatures. Established scribal schools also would have included a workshop to produce writing materials and a library for preserving copies of important texts and for lending copies to the members of the scribal community for their own study and further copying. Laban's "treasury" could easily have been that library for Lehi, Nephi, and other trained Manassite scribes in their school.

Because the Brass Plates contained current materials such as prophecies of Jeremiah (Lehi's contemporary), this unusual collection of Israelite writings may have been a very recent production drawing on this Manassite scribal school's collection of ancient papyri, rather than a growing record inscribed on metal plates and handed down across numerous generations as has been generally assumed.²⁷ That

25. For a more complete explanation of the connection between libraries and treasuries in this context, see Reynolds, "Lehi and Nephi," 184–86.

26. Ibid., 161–216.

27. Following suggestions of Sidney B. Sperry, *A Book of Mormon Compendium* (Salt Lake City: Bookcraft, 1968), 104–108. See John W. Welch, "Authorship of the

traditional core of texts would have been maintained on periodically renewed papyrus scrolls. Any such recent production as the Brass Plates would likely have come from this scribal school and could very well have included Nephi and even Lehi in the production process — which would provide a much-needed explanation for Nephi’s ability to make and engrave metal plates for his own records after their arrival in a new promised land.

The Brass Plates and “the Remnant of Joseph”

Given the specific contents of the Brass Plates, they would presumably preserve a unique tradition of genealogy and prophecy that was valued by one family line of Manasseh back through his father Joseph to Jacob himself. This ancestral connection was important to Nephite prophets across a thousand years. It has consequently been significant in Latter-day Saint teaching, which justifies a review of scholarly understanding of “the remnant of Joseph.”

One of the most distinctive Book of Mormon prophecies repeatedly identified the descendants of Lehi in the last days as the referent for the “remnant” prophecies in the Bible. Mormon cites the Brass Plates to teach that “our father Jacob also testified concerning a remnant of the seed of Joseph” and to show that ancient Jacob had prophesied about the Nephites as that remnant (3 Nephi 10:17).²⁸ In the Hebrew Bible, only Amos mentions the possibility “that the Lord God Almighty will have mercy on *the remnant of Joseph*” (NIV, Amos 5:15). But the Genesis story of Joseph has him introduce the theme himself in its material sense of saving lives:

- A Then Joseph said to his brothers, “Come close to me.”
- B When they had done so, he said, “I am your brother Joseph, the one you sold into Egypt!
- C And now, ... for selling me here
 - 1 do not be distressed
 - 2 and do not be angry with yourselves,

Book of Isaiah in Light of the Book of Mormon,” in *Isaiah in the Book of Mormon*, ed. Donald W. Parry and John W. Welch (Provo, UT: FARMS, 1998), 430–31, for a discussion of the dating of the Brass Plates in which he suggests that the Brass Plates may have been manufactured between 620 and 610 BCE as part of the Josianic reforms and not as a product of a competing scribal tradition.

28. The remnant of Joseph will play a central role in the Lord’s work in the last days.

- D because it was to save lives that God sent me ahead of you.
- E For two years now there has been famine in the land,
- E* and for the next five years there will be no plowing and reaping.
- D* But God sent me ahead of you
- 1 to preserve for you a remnant on earth
- 2 and to save your lives by a great deliverance.
- C* So then, it was not you who sent me here, but God.
- B* He made me father to Pharaoh, lord of his entire household and ruler of all Egypt.
- A* Now hurry back to my father and say to him, ‘This is what your son Joseph says:
- 1 God has made me lord of all Egypt.
- 2 Come down to me; don’t delay.’”²⁹

Bible Scholarship and the Remnant Idea

In the 1970s publication of his Vanderbilt University dissertation on this “major theological motif,” Gerhard Hasel recognized that multiple attempts by biblical scholars to make sense of the remnant prophecy and its origin had produced a wide variety of theories and no persuasive consensus.³⁰ In 1988, Lester Meyer also concluded that “no consensus

29. NIV, Genesis 45:4–9. See Gerhard P. Hasel, *The Remnant: The History and Theology of the Remnant Idea from Genesis to Isaiah*, 2nd ed. (Berrien Springs, MI: Andrews University Press, 1974), 154–59 for his discussion of this Joseph story. This second edition includes the results of his updated and extended analysis of all the Hebrew terms used to refer to the *remnant* in *Hebrew Bible*; see Gerhard P. Hasel, “Semantic Values of Derivatives of the Hebrew Root ŠR,” *Andrews University Seminary Studies* 11 (1973): 152–69, wherein the high frequency of applications of remnant terminology to humans in the Hebrew Bible and the signal case of Joseph are emphasized.

30. See Hasel, *Remnant*, vii, 40–44 and 465–66. As can be seen in Hasel’s summary of the main scholarly findings in his contribution to the undated (1975?) Supplementary Volume of *The Interpreter’s Dictionary of the Bible*, none of the scholarly interpretations focus on Jacob, Joseph, or his descendants. See *The Interpreter’s Dictionary of the Bible*, s.v. “Remnant,” 735–36. Also see his latest and

has emerged concerning the origin of the concept of a remnant.”³¹ Commenting on the scene of destruction in Nephite lands at the time of Christ’s crucifixion, Mormon cited the prophecies of Zenos and Zenoch in the Brass Plates about Christ and about their Manassite descendants as the remnant. Mormon’s formulation specifies that the remnant will be of the seed of Joseph as first prophesied by his father Jacob:

Yea, the prophet Zenos did testify of these things, and also Zenoch spake concerning these things — because they testified particular *concerning us, which is the remnant of their seed.*

Behold, our father Jacob also testified concerning a remnant of the seed of Joseph. And behold, are not we a remnant of the seed of Joseph? And these things which testifies of us, are they not written upon the plates of brass which our father Lehi brought out of Jerusalem? (3 Nephi 10:16–17)

Welsh scholar G. Henton Davies’s broad, philosophical approach to the remnant idea in the Hebrew Bible is quite helpful for a comparison of the idea as represented in the Book of Mormon with the Old Testament meanings.³² After reviewing the four Hebrew roots from which most Hebrew Bible remnant terminology derives and their principal occurrences, Davies surveys the key stories that exemplify the remnant idea — starting with Noah. “The little group in the Ark maintain life through the crisis, and they become the founders of the new humanity.” Of all Noah’s descendants, Abram is selected to be the new head of God’s people, and then the Exodus story produces another remnant with a new start for Israel in a promised land. Davies also points out that “the idea of election contains the idea of a remnant.” “The prophets [e.g., Noah, Isaiah, Jeremiah] are called to proclaim the doom of their contemporaries,” but believers possessing Jehovah’s word “will not

more comprehensive review in *The International Standard Bible Encyclopedia*, s.v. “Remnant” (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1988), 130–34.

31. *The Anchor Bible Dictionary*, s.v. “Remnant,” by Lester V. Meyer (New York: Doubleday, 1992), 5:671.

32. *A Theological Wordbook of the Bible*, s.v. “Remnant,” by G. Henton Davies, ed. Alan Richardson (London: SCM Press, 1957), 188–91. For a detailed analysis of how the remnant concept shaped Nephite prophecy, see Noel B. Reynolds, “Understanding the Abrahamic Covenant through the Book of Mormon,” *BYU Studies Quarterly* 57, no. 3 (2018): 55–66.

perish, but form part of the remnant. ... [T]he remnant survives and is therefore saved just as it also seeks to save others.”³³

Based on his linguistic and textual analyses, Davies abstracts five characteristics of the “biblical remnants”:

1. Remnants are composed of “survivors from a great catastrophe” that is usually understood “as a punishment for sin.”
2. The remnant are noted for righteousness and faith and may be described as “the poor of the land.”
3. Through the surviving remnant, the life of their people can continue, as in the Joseph story cited above. “The connexion of the idea of the remnant with the idea of life is fundamental.”
4. Jehovah is the Deliverer who leaves a remnant.
5. The remnant is marked by its separation from the wickedness of its people in the past, its own righteousness, and the presence of God in its new life.

These characteristics stand out in the stories of Noah, Abraham, and Moses, and finally in the survival of Judah as God’s elect — leading to the coming of Christ, in whose resurrection the idea of a remnant meets its end.³⁴

The Remnant Idea and the Book of Mormon

The Nephite prophecies put a very different twist on this last point by featuring the remnant of Joseph as the ones who will provide a principal instrument, the Book of Mormon itself, by which all Israel will be gathered in the last days, including scattered Judah.³⁵ Matthew Bowen has shown how the famous incident of Captain Moroni gathering his people by writing on a title of liberty evokes the same image.³⁶ Hasel recognized how the prophet Amos undermined the standard Israelite

33. Davies, s.v. “Remnant,” 189.

34. Ibid., 189–91.

35. See references on the Nephite interpretation of the Abrahamic covenant in note 60, below.

36. Matthew L. Bowen, “We are a Remnant of the Seed of Joseph”: Moroni’s Interpretive Use of Joseph’s Coat and the Martial *nēs*-Imagery of Isaiah 11:11–12,” *Interpreter: A Journal of Latter-day Saint Faith and Scholarship* 41 (2020):169–92, <https://journal.interpreterfoundation.org/we-are-a-remnant-of-the-seed-of-joseph-moronis-interpretive-use-of-josephs-coat-and-the-martial-nes-imagery-of-isaiah-1111-12/>.

idea that because they were the chosen people, they would finally be forgiven for their sins and be saved.³⁷ It is Amos who uniquely identifies the Israelite remnant as a remnant of Joseph. “Hate evil and love good and set out justice in the gate. Perhaps the *Lord God of Israel may grant grace to Joseph’s remnant*.”³⁸

The Josephite family line could easily have seen itself as the true standard bearer and heir of the Abrahamic tradition, with Joseph as Jacob’s favored son and family savior and Manasseh as Joseph’s firstborn. Jacob designated Ephraim, Joseph’s second son, to receive the first blessing.³⁹ There are scattered evidences, however, that Manasseh was the much stronger tribe and that it was given priority over Ephraim in various ways in the early history of Israel.⁴⁰

It is also quite possible that as brothers and next-door neighbors, these two tribes could have supported and shared scribal schools. Because of the northern kingdom’s large administrative need for scribes and its religious waywardness, there may have been multiple schools devoted variously to serving the palace, the Omride dynasty’s Baalist temple, and the commercial and international trade enterprises in Samaria or to maintaining the prophetic record inherited from Abraham and Joseph.

Writing on Two Sticks in Ezekiel 37:15–17

Latter-day Saints have long interpreted Ezekiel’s prophecy about the two sticks with writing for Judah and Joseph being eventually brought together as a reference to the Bible and the Book of Mormon. The Book of Mormon version of that prophecy comes from ancient Joseph as quoted by Lehi to his own son Joseph, presumably from the Brass Plates (2 Nephi 3:12). Once we recognize that the Brass Plates are also a record of the Josephite branch of Israel, it is apparent that the stick of Joseph might be interpreted to include them with Mormon’s gold plates and other Nephite records in explanations of Ezekiel 37:15–17.⁴¹ Hugh Nibley’s exhaustive exploration of this prophecy from a Latter-day Saint perspective examines the frustrations of Bible scholars who have tried

37. Hasel, *Remnant*, 178 and 197–99.

38. Amos 5:15, Robert Alter, trans., *The Hebrew Bible*, vol. 2, *Prophets, Nevi'im*. *A Translation with Commentary* (New York: W. W. Norton, 2019), 2:1268.

39. Also, compare D&C 133:32–34, where Ephraim is given priority. But in the history of Israel and in the Old Testament, Manasseh often stands out.

40. Aapeli A. Saarisalo, “Manasseh,” *The International Standard Bible Encyclopedia*, rev. ed. (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1979), 3:233–34.

41. See Thompson, “Brass Plates,” 13, where he develops the same point.

to make sense of this passage and the ancient context that makes it reasonable to interpret the two sticks as prophetic writings.⁴² Apparently, none of these realized that there was an even older scribal tradition of writing on sticks in South Arabia, that might be directly related.⁴³

Nephi cited an expanded version of this prophecy, which makes it clear that the Book of Mormon, the Bible, and other similar books would come forth in the last days to convince both Jew and Gentile that they must come unto the Lamb if they would be saved.

For behold, saith the Lamb, I will manifest myself unto thy seed that they shall write many things which I shall minister unto them, which shall be plain and precious. . . . Behold, these things shall be hid up to come forth unto the Gentiles by the gift and power of the Lamb. And in them shall be written my gospel, saith the Lamb, and my rock and my salvation.

And . . . I beheld *other books* which came forth by the power of the Lamb from the Gentiles unto them, unto the convincing of the Gentiles and *the remnant of the seed of my brethren* and also to the Jews, which were scattered upon all the face of the earth — that the records of the prophets and of the twelve apostles of the Lamb are true.

And the angel spake unto me, saying: These last records . . . shall establish the truth of the first . . . and shall make known to all kindreds, tongues, and people that the Lamb of God is the Eternal Father and the Savior of the world and that all men must come unto him or they cannot be saved. . . .

42. Nibley's 1953 essay still stands as the most thorough scholarly treatment of this topic. It has been reprinted as chapter 1: "The Stick of Judah" in Hugh Nibley, *The Prophetic Book of Mormon*, vol. 8 of *The Collected Works of Hugh Nibley*, ed. John W. Welch (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 1989), 1–48. While Nibley did not think to include the Brass Plates in his analysis of the Stick of Joseph, he does point out that it could include other Restoration scriptures such as the Doctrine and Covenants and the Pearl of Great Price. See p. 36.

43. In ancient South Arabia, writing on wooden sticks represented for centuries a scribal tradition preceding the first monumental inscriptions of the 8th century BCE. Peter Stein, *Die altsüdarabischen Minuskelinschriften auf Holzstäbchen aus der Bayerischen Staatsbibliothek in München* (EFAH, Band 5) (Tübingen, Germany: Wasmuth Verlag, 2010), 1:46n196. For a review in English see Alessandra Avanzini, *Journal of Semitic Studies* 57, no. 1 (Spring 2012): 191–93, <https://doi.org/10.1093/jss/fgr050>.

And the words of the Lamb shall be made known in the records of thy seed as well as in the records of the twelve apostles of the Lamb. Wherefore they both shall be established in one, for there is one God and one Shepherd over all the earth.⁴⁴

Presumably, the Brass Plates would be one of these books that would come forth at that day in accordance with Lehi's prophecy. As Nephi reported, Lehi "was filled with the Spirit and began to prophesy ... that these plates of brass should go forth unto all nations, kindreds, tongues, and people" and that "these plates of brass should never perish, neither should they be dimmed any more by time" (1 Nephi 5:17–19).

A Josephite Tradition of Prophecy

It should also be kept in mind that Lehi and Laban were both descendants of Manasseh (Alma 10:3) and that the Brass Plates preserved not only their genealogy but a distinctive prophetic tradition that may have been identified with their lineage through Joseph, the son of Israel. Book of Mormon writers cite several prophets whose writings are included in the Brass Plates but who are not known to the Judahite tradition preserved in the Old Testament. In his teaching, Sidney Sperry would emphasize this point by referring to the Brass Plates as "the official scripture of the ten tribes."⁴⁵ Non-biblical prophecies of Joseph of Egypt from the Brass Plates are cited at length by Lehi in his blessing to his own son named Joseph (2 Nephi 3:5–22), which led Nephi to comment:

And now I Nephi speak concerning the prophecies of which my father hath spoken concerning Joseph, who was carried into Egypt. For behold, he truly prophesied concerning all his seed. And the prophecies which he wrote, there are not many greater. And he prophesied concerning us and our future generations, and *they are written upon the plates of brass.* (2 Nephi 4:1–2)

Nephi also cited Zenoch, Neum, and Zenos, who had recorded important details about the prophesied crucifixion and burial of the God of Israel (1 Nephi 19:10). Later, Nephi's younger brother and

44. Excerpted from 1 Nephi 13:23–41.

45. See Sperry, *Book of Mormon Compendium*, p. 107. A more comprehensive discussion of these other prophets is found in Robert L. Millet, "The Influence of the Brass Plates on the Teachings of Nephi," in *The Book of Mormon: Second Nephi, the Doctrinal Structure*, ed. Monte S. Nyman and Charles D. Tate, Jr. (Provo: Religious Studies Center, 1989), 207–25.

successor Jacob turned to the writings of Zenos for the full allegory of the olive tree, which was mentioned in Nephi's account but would not have been familiar to their readers (1 Nephi 10:12; 1 Nephi 15:7, 12–18; and Jacob 5:1–77). Amulek and Alma turned to the words of Zenos, Zenoch, and Moses to explain how redemption comes through the Son of God (Alma 34:6–7).

Restoration Scriptures and the Brass Plates

It may surprise some readers to learn that the other ancient scriptures revealed to Joseph Smith — the Book of Moses (1867)⁴⁶ and the Book of Abraham (1842), after he translated the Book of Mormon (1830) “by the gift and power of God” — may have an important role to play in our investigation of the Brass Plates. But as will be explained here, important features and claims of the Book of Mormon and the Brass Plates are best understood by reference to those additional restored records and to the teachings and histories they contain that are not fully formulated or reported in the Bible.

1. While academic study of the ancient scriptures restored by Joseph Smith tends to take these three books separately, there are some important themes that run through all three and that together provide and reinforce important doctrinal grounding for the Restoration project.⁴⁷ For present purposes, three of their shared themes require special mention. Each provides important grounding for Joseph Smith and his work and teachings:
2. All three mention or even explicate the great plan of salvation, including the gospel, which God presented before

46. The first full printing of the first eight chapters of Joseph Smith's “inspired version” of Genesis were published in 1867 by the Reorganized Church of Jesus Christ of Latter Day Saints. Various excerpts had been printed previously, and the printing history overall has been complex and imperfect in various ways. See the detailed explanations in Kent P. Jackson, *The Book of Moses and the Joseph Smith Translation Manuscripts* (Provo, UT: Religious Studies Center, Brigham Young University, 2005), 1–52, <https://rsc.byu.edu/book-moses-joseph-smith-translation-manuscripts/history-book-moses>.

47. One study includes a review of the historical environment in which these ancient scriptures were published and provides an important discussion of how their teachings combine with each other and with the Book of Mormon to educate and support Joseph Smith with lost ancient foundations for the Restoration project. See Terry L. Givens, *The Pearl of Greatest Price: Mormonism's Most Controversial Scripture* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2019), 121–34.

the foundation of this world and which provides meaningful structure to the mortal experience of all mankind.

3. Each confirms or even elaborates on the importance of the sacred records begun by Adam and continuing through subsequent dispensations.
4. Among the three are many accounts of the divine calling of key prophets — usually at the initiation of new dispensations — who enter the presence of God in a divine council or other setting and are shown the big picture of the past, present, and future of this earth and its inhabitants.

The Brass Plates as a Key Resource for Lehi and Nephi

While these restored ancient scriptures have provided invaluable guidance and vision for Joseph Smith and his followers in connection with these three themes, the Brass Plates seem to have contained some of the same Abrahamic and Mosaic material — thereby providing the same support to the Nephite dispensation. When Lehi taught his children about the creation of Adam and Eve and their subsequent temptation by the devil with all its implications for all peoples, he referred to “the things which I have read” that provided him with an extensive understanding of that fallen angel, who seeks “the misery of all mankind” (2 Nephi 2:17–18). When explaining the future of the house of Israel and the Gentiles and of the Nephites themselves, Nephi invoked the prophecies of Isaiah, Zenock, Neum, and Zenos, that he had read in the Brass Plates, to supplement his own.⁴⁸ And as will be shown below, the Brass Plates apparently provided Nephi and Lehi with other examples of earlier prophets who, like themselves, were called by God in face-to-face encounters to launch a new dispensation — including Adam, Enoch, Abraham, Moses, and Isaiah.⁴⁹

The Book of Moses

These eight chapters are usually understood as having been given to Joseph Smith as a replacement for the first chapters of Genesis in his new translation of the Bible. These include an extensive opening vision in which Moses is shown the extent and magnitude of the Lord’s creations

48. Nephi quotes the Brass Plates prophecies of Zenock, Neum and Zenos in 1 Nephi 19 and of Isaiah extensively in 1 Nephi 20–21 and 2 Nephi 7–8, 12–24.

49. See the discussion in Hugh Nibley, *Abraham in Egypt*, ed. Gary P. Gillum, 2nd ed. (Provo: FARMS, 2000), 29, which links Enoch, Abraham, and Moses to this same initiation into the “heavenly mysteries.”

and receives a prophetic call, an extended account of the instruction given to Adam and Eve after leaving the garden, and a 117-verse Book of Enoch (Moses 6:20–7:69), which also includes Enoch’s theophany and prophetic call. These provided important comparison accounts for Lehi and Nephi and their own visionary experiences when called as prophets.⁵⁰

There is strong evidence that the version of Genesis contained in the Brass Plates was the same or similar to the Book of Moses as given to Joseph Smith. In other papers, Jeff Lindsay and I have identified almost 100 distinctive, non-biblical phrasings or word groupings that occur in the Book of Mormon and appear to be drawn from the Book of Moses — which Joseph Smith received not long after the publication of the Book of Mormon.⁵¹

The Book of Moses also confirms the keeping of a record from the time of Adam and a tradition among the believers of perpetuating that literacy:

And a book of remembrance was kept, in the which was recorded, in the language of Adam, for it was given unto as many as called upon God to write by the spirit of inspiration; And by them their children were taught to read and write.
(Moses 6:5–6)

The great vision of God and all his works is the focus of the first chapter as Moses is “caught up into an exceedingly high mountain” and “saw God face to face” and “talked with him.” There he experienced the “glory of God” and was shown the creation of the world and “all the children of men which are, and which were created” (Moses 1:1, 8). He learned firsthand of the opposition of Satan and of the role of the

50. As reported in 1 Nephi 1 and 8–15. See Reynolds, “Lehi’s Vision,” wherein I explain how Nephi includes these three themes in his presentation of the vision received by him and Lehi.

51. See Noel B. Reynolds, “The Brass Plates Version of Genesis,” *Interpreter: A Journal of Latter-day Saint Faith and Scholarship* 34 (2019):63–96, <https://journal.interpreterfoundation.org/the-brass-plates-version-of-genesis/>; and Jeff Lindsay and Noel B. Reynolds, “‘Strong Like unto Moses’: The Case for Ancient Roots in the Book of Moses Based on Book of Mormon Usage of Related Content Apparently from the Brass Plates,” *Interpreter: A Journal of Latter-day Saint Faith and Scholarship* 44 (2021):1–92, <https://journal.interpreterfoundation.org/strong-like-unto-moses-the-case-for-ancient-roots-in-the-book-of-moses-based-on-book-of-mormon-usage-of-related-content-apparently-from-the-brass-plates/>.

Only Begotten who would lead God's great work — "to bring to pass the immortality and eternal life of man" (Moses 1:39).

Subsequently Moses was told of the instruction of Adam by the voice of the Lord, by his angels, and by the Holy Ghost. He learned of the plan of salvation and the gospel of the Son (Moses 5:4–15, 57–59). In chapter 6, we learn that a record was kept from the beginning "in the language of Adam" by those who followed the Lord. For "it was given unto as many as called upon God to write by the spirit of inspiration; and by them their children were taught to read and write, having a language which was pure and undefiled" (Moses 6:5–6).

The Book of Moses reports the experience of one more prophet who was called by the Lord from heaven as Enoch was shown "the spirits that God had created" and "all things which were not visible to the natural eye" (Moses 6:27–36). The "Book of Enoch" inserted here reports Enoch teaching the plan of salvation and the gospel of Jesus Christ, drawing on his own revelations and the "book of remembrance" that they had, "written among us, according to the pattern given by the finger of God ... in our own language" (Moses 6:46).

In its eight chapters, the Book of Moses as given to Joseph Smith relates God's threefold teaching and revelation to three prophets — Moses, Adam, and Enoch — with a fullness that goes well beyond what the Judahite tradition has preserved in its version of Genesis. It should be remembered that scholars believe that the Hebrew Bible versions of the earliest texts would have been recovered from the oral traditions and transcribed in the newly available paleo-Hebrew script during the eighth and seventh centuries by Jewish scribal schools.

The Book of Abraham

The Book of Abraham confirms the continuation of that same tradition many centuries later. Soon after acquiring the four Egyptian mummies and the papyrus scrolls that came with them, Joseph Smith reportedly told people that these scrolls included an original record preserved by Joseph in Egypt that contained teachings of Abraham — presumably in Egyptian language and script:

On the last of June four Egyptian mummies were brought here. With them were two papyrus rolls, besides some other ancient Egyptian writings. As no one could translate these writings they were presented to President Smith. He soon knew what they were and said that the rolls of papyrus

contained a sacred record kept by Joseph in Pharaoh's court in Egypt and the teachings of Father Abraham.⁵²

One important theme of Abraham's autobiography focuses on this same written tradition and his plans to extend it for his posterity:

But I shall endeavor, hereafter, to delineate the chronology running back from myself to the beginning of the creation, for *the records have come into my hands, which I hold unto this present time. . . .*

But *the records of the fathers, even the patriarchs*, concerning the right of Priesthood, the Lord my God preserved in mine own hands; therefore a knowledge of the beginning of the creation, and also of the planets, and of the stars, as they were made known unto the fathers, have I kept even unto this day, and *I shall endeavor to write some of these things upon this record, for the benefit of my posterity* that shall come after me. (Abraham 1:28, 31)

The kinds of records described by both Moses and Abraham would be labeled "lineage histories" by anthropologists today and do not assume widespread literacy or shared writing systems beyond what can be maintained within a family from one generation to another.⁵³

52. W. W. Phelps, letter to Sally Phelps, July 20, 1835, quoted in Bruce van Orden, "Writing to Zion: The William W. Phelps Kirtland Letters (1835–1836)," *BYU Studies Quarterly* 33, no. 3 (1993): 554, <https://scholarsarchive.byu.edu/byusq/vol33/iss3/9/>.

53. John L. Sorenson developed this concept of lineage histories in his *An Ancient American Setting for the Book of Mormon* (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 1996), 50–56. His final and much expanded explanation of lineage histories in Mesoamerica, in other ancient cultures, and in the Nephite writings can be found in John L. Sorenson, *Mormon's Codex: An Ancient American Book* (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 2013), 198–218. Sorenson borrowed the basic idea from Robert Carmack's description of pre-Hispanic codices from the Guatemalan highlands as histories of "political-descent groups." See Robert M. Carmack, "Toltec Influence on the Postclassic Culture History of Highland Guatemala," in *Archaeological Studies in Middle America* (New Orleans: Tulane University, 1970), 49–92; and *Quichean Civilization: The Ethnohistoric, Ethnographic, and Archaeological Sources* (Oakland: University of California Press, 1973), 11–19.

Abraham and “the Right of Priesthood”

Another salient theme for Abraham featured his successful quest to receive and preserve the “right of priesthood.” As he explains in the opening lines,

I sought for the blessings of the fathers, and the right whereunto I should be ordained to administer the same; having been myself a follower of righteousness, desiring also to be one who possessed great knowledge, and to be a greater follower of righteousness. (Abraham 1:2)

And so he “became a rightful heir, a *High Priest*, holding the right belonging to the fathers,” which was conferred upon him “from the fathers.” This priesthood had come “down from the fathers, from the beginning of time, yea, even from the beginning, or before *the foundation of the earth*, down to the present time” (Abraham 1:3).

Abraham’s discussion of priesthood in this text as given to Joseph Smith connects repeatedly with the principal discussion of priesthood that seems to come almost out of nowhere in the Book of Mormon in Alma’s preaching to the apostate people at Ammonihah. Alma speaks of those who have been “called and prepared from *the foundation of the world* according to the foreknowledge of God” and “who were *ordained* and became *high priests* of God on account of their exceeding faith and repentance, and *their righteousness* before God” (Alma 13:10). This single passage goes far beyond other discussions of priesthood in the Book of Mormon and clearly has an air of being drawn from another source both in its terminology and doctrine — both of which would find a comfortable home in the Book of Abraham. The resemblance is sufficient to at least raise the possibility that the Brass Plates may have included some version of Abraham’s record.

Recognizing the probable Abrahamic or Josephite origins of the Brass Plates record may resolve a problem that has bothered some Book of Mormon readers. Numerous similarities have been noted between Alma chapters 12–13 and Hebrews 7:1–4. One scholar cites this as an anachronism that proves the Book of Mormon was “composed in the nineteenth century by Joseph Smith.”⁵⁴ But if Alma had access to Abraham’s original autobiography in the Brass Plates, that would explain why he and the author of Hebrews — who appears to have had access to the same text, which does not show up in any other Jewish or

54. David P. Wright, “Historical Criticism: A Necessary Element in the Search for Religious Truth,” *Sunstone* 16, no. 2 (September 1992): 34.

Christian text — could have cited the same facts about Abraham while using those facts to frame completely different theological arguments.⁵⁵

Joseph Smith's Book of Abraham provides us with the most complete description of Abraham's life and activities and is the only text that is written from Abraham's own perspective. We note for present purposes that Abraham sought and received the priesthood from the fathers along with their records going back to Adam and that he intended to pass both down to his posterity.⁵⁶ In a similar way, the third-century BCE *Aramaic Levi Document* cites the Book of Noah and "sets the Levitical priesthood in the sacerdotal line reaching back to Adam."⁵⁷

Abraham's Theophanies

Not only was Abraham intimately connected to the educated elites of his day, like Enoch, Joseph, Moses, Lehi, and Nephi in their days, he was also brought repeatedly into the society of the gods.⁵⁸ While praying for deliverance from the priest of Pharaoh, "the Lord hearkened and heard, and he filled me with *the vision of the Almighty*, and *the angel of his presence stood by me*" (Abraham 1:15). "And *his voice was unto me: Abraham, Abraham, behold my name is Jehovah, and I have heard thee, and have come down to deliver thee*" (1:16).

55. In his commentary on Hebrews, Harold Attridge noted that "numerous attempts have been made to discover traditional sources for this chapter [7]" but that the results of these efforts "have been ambiguous at best." See Harold W. Attridge, *Hebrews: A Commentary on the Epistle to the Hebrews* (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, 1989), 187.

56. Book of Abraham 1:2–3, 28, 31. Bill Arnold's rhetorical inquiry into the debate on whether "the fathers" should be read as referring to the patriarchs or to the generation of the exodus has shown that even the Deuteronomistic redactors are appealing to the land of promise associated with the patriarchs when they include the exodus generation in the meaning of "the fathers." See Bill T. Arnold, "Re-examining the Fathers," in *Torah and Tradition, Old Testament Studies* 70, ed. Klas Spronk and Hans Barstad, (2017): 10–14. See also Ariel Feldman, "Patriarchs and Aramaic Traditions," in *T&T Clark Companion to the Dead Sea Scrolls*, ed. George J. Brooke and Charlotte Hempel (London: T&T Clark, 2018), 469–80.

57. Jonas C. Greenfield, Michael E. Stone, and Esther Eshel, *The Aramaic Levi Document: Edition, Translation, Commentary* (Leiden: Brill, 2004), 36. The authors see this tendency "to establish Levi as an ideal priest from the past" as an echo of Malachi 2:4–9.

58. See the discussion of these similar theophanies as prophetic calls in Reynolds, "Lehi's Dream, Nephi's Blueprint," 242–45.

The Lord appeared to Abraham again after he moved to Haran and explained the role his posterity would play in the future in bringing the gospel and blessings of salvation to the people on the earth:

For I am the Lord thy God; I dwell in heaven; the earth is my footstool; ... My name is Jehovah, and I know the end from the beginning; therefore my hand shall be over thee. And I will make of thee a great nation, and I will bless thee above measure, and make thy name great among all nations, and thou shalt be a blessing unto thy seed after thee, that in their hands they shall bear this ministry and Priesthood unto all nations. And I will bless them through thy name; for as many as receive this Gospel shall be called after thy name, and shall be accounted thy seed, and shall rise up and bless thee, as their father; ... and in thy seed after thee ... shall all the families of the earth be blessed, even with the blessings of the Gospel, which are the blessings of salvation, even of life eternal. (Abraham 2:7–11)⁵⁹

The accounts of this covenant in Genesis as given to Abraham and then to Isaac and Jacob have been interpreted in Jewish tradition primarily as promises of land and posterity — with an unexplained and often forgotten reference to being a blessing to the nations. But in Abraham’s autobiographical account his posterity is redefined as those who receive the Gospel and land is not mentioned at all. The repeated focus is on the Gospel that his seed will bear to “all the families of the earth.” The fact that multiple references to this covenant in the Nephite record make this same point repeatedly might indicate that the Nephites were reading about the Abrahamic covenant in a Book of Abraham from the Brass Plates.⁶⁰

The Lord subsequently spoke to Abraham on occasion to give him instructions as he arrived in Egypt, to instruct him in sacred astronomy,

59. Compare the biblical versions of these promises as given to Abraham in Genesis 12:2–3, 18:18, and 22:17–18, to Isaac in Genesis 26:3–4, and to Jacob in Genesis 35:11–12.

60. For an extended discussion and comparison of Nephite, Jewish, and Christian interpretations of the Abrahamic covenant, see Reynolds, “Understanding the Abrahamic Covenant,” 39–74, and Noel B. Reynolds, “All Kindreds Shall Be Blessed: Nephite, Jewish, and Christian Interpretations of the Abrahamic Covenant,” in *Seek Ye Words of Wisdom: Studies of the Book of Mormon, Bible, and Temple in Honor of Stephen D. Ricks*, ed. Donald W. Parry, Gaye Strathearn, and Shon D. Hopkin (Provo, UT: Interpreter Foundation, 2020), 115–39.

and to show him how God had organized all the intelligences “before the world was,” and how in a great pre-earth council the Lord was chosen to lead in the organization and formation of “the heavens and the earth” (Abraham 3:18–4:1). Abraham then describes the creation of the earth and the first man and woman as he witnessed it in this vision (Abraham 4–5).⁶¹ Clearly, the Book of Abraham constitutes another record that throws increased light on the three themes and that could well have been included in the Josephite records collected and preserved in the Brass Plates.⁶²

Abraham in History

Possibly the most important take-away from this discussion of Abraham and his writings in the Brass Plates is that it rescues the biblical and other accounts of Abraham from the realms of folklore, myth, and legend, where most modern scholarship has assigned him, and places him firmly in recorded history with a written autobiographical account passed down conscientiously by one scribal school among his descendants. The canons and methodologies of contemporary Bible scholarship recognize that the biblical traditions about Abraham have no verifiable historical sources but were drawn at some point from oral traditions that were not transmitted into written tradition for a millennium after the eighteenth century BCE, when he is usually thought to have lived.⁶³

61. The published Book of Abraham ends abruptly at this point in the creation account, though there is reason to believe Joseph Smith had translated a good deal more of that record. See John Gee, *The Role of the Book of Abraham in the Restoration* (Provo, UT: FARMS, 1997), <https://archive.bookofmormoncentral.org/content/role-book-abraham-restoration>.

62. As detailed earlier (see under the heading “Restoration Scriptures and the Brass Plates”), those three themes are (1) God’s plan of salvation, (2) the importance of keeping sacred records, and (3) the calling of prophets who are heads of new dispensations. For a documented account of the limited impact of the Book of Abraham on early Latter-day Saint teachings see Gee, *The Role of the Book of Abraham in the Restoration*, 14–15.

63. See, for example, the careful discussion of this problem in John Van Seters, *Abraham in History and Tradition* (Brattleboro, VT: Echo Point Books, 2014), 158–66. In his 1973 German dissertation, Thomas Thompson marched systematically through the history of efforts to that point in time to find historical support for the biblical patriarchs in ANE studies and concluded that all of them were based in unacceptable logical leaps or methodological confusion. See the 2002 English version in Thomas L. Thompson, *The Historicity of the Patriarchal Narratives: The Quest for the Historical Abraham* (Horsham, PA: Trinity Press International, 2002).

The Brass Plates as described in the Book of Mormon and as interpreted in association with other Restoration scriptures above would have given the Nephite dispensation an actual historical record of Abraham as the source for their recurrent appeals to him and his promised blessings in the construction of their own identity. While the Jews maintained a firm belief in their Abrahamic origins, their scribal schools could not claim documentary connections like those contained in the Brass Plates and were forced to rely instead on potentially suspect oral traditions that were not transcribed until the eighth or seventh century BCE.

The Harmonizing Efforts of the Judahite Scribal Schools

The companion paper on scribal practices in ancient Israel reviews how these Judahite scribal practices were standardized on many dimensions across geography and scribal traditions.⁶⁴ Some of these were linguistic standardizations as the Hebrew alphabet, script, and orthography were developing. The Hebrew Bible also reflects a harmonizing inclusiveness as texts written with northern dialects were incorporated into the overwhelmingly southern tradition. In addition, a developed Hebrew rhetoric, whether imported from the north or developed primarily in the south, flowered in the late seventh century in Jerusalem and was particularly evident in the writings of Nephi and his successors.

That harmonizing spirit was most dramatically evidenced in the editing and redacting processes that scholars have now identified in the Hebrew Bible. It will be suggested below that the Manassite scribal school decision to create a brass-plates version of their traditional writings can be seen as a strategic move to protect their lineage histories and prophetic writings from the rampant syncretism and redactioning being promoted in the Judahite schools — especially considering the ideology of an ongoing Davidic dynasty that these efforts promoted.

The Documentary Hypothesis

Far and away the most significant harmonizing endeavor that twentieth-century Bible scholars have attributed to the Jerusalem scribal schools is the hypothesized merger of multiple scribal traditions in the creation of the Pentateuch. The Documentary Hypothesis (hereafter DH) as propounded by Julius Wellhausen and others in the late nineteenth century won nearly universal support and still holds great sway among

64. Reynolds, “Lehi and Nephi.”

some Bible scholars, though it is also widely challenged and modified today. DH enjoyed enormous success among Bible scholars through much of the twentieth century and provided an assumed background for new forms of biblical criticism that emerged in the second half of the century.⁶⁵ As Rendsburg has recently summarized,

Most modern biblical scholars remain wedded to the classic DH, which seeks to explain the so-called duplications and contradictions in the Torah by assigning different portions to different authors or schools.⁶⁶

The Documentary Hypothesis Today

Yale professor Joel Baden has recently published a much simplified and refocused presentation and defense of the DH, sweeping away mountains of DH elaborations that he sees as poorly grounded and confusing. As an interpretive hypothesis, he sees the DH as “a proposed literary solution to the literary problems of the Pentateuch, no more, no less.”⁶⁷ Over the last century and a half, Hebrew Bible scholars have struggled to explain duplicate and contradictory versions of stories, divine revelations, and official rules and practices as reported in the

65. For an even-handed and comprehensive review of the wide range of Latter-day Saint thought and responses to the DH, see Kevin L. Barney, “Reflections on the Documentary Hypothesis,” *Dialogue: A Journal of Mormon Thought* 33 no. 1 (Spring 2000): 57–99. In his defense of the Book of Mormon’s account of a journey through the Arabian Peninsula, Jeff Lindsay included an insightful excursus on DH that adapts it for support of the Brass Plates story as well. See Jeff Lindsay, “Joseph and the Amazing Technicolor Dream Map: Part 2 of 2,” *Interpreter: A Journal of Latter-day Saint Faith and Scholarship* 19 (2016), 294–305, <https://journal.interpreterfoundation.org/joseph-and-the-amazing-technicolor-dream-map-part-2-of-2/>.

66. Gary A. Rendsburg, “The Literary Unity of the Exodus Narrative,” in *Did I Not Bring Israel Out of Egypt?*, ed. James K. Hoffmeier, Alan R. Millard, and Gary A. Rendsburg (Winona Lake, IN: Eisenbrauns, 2016), 113.

67. See Yale professor Joel S. Baden’s *The Composition of the Pentateuch: Renewing the DH* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2012), 32. This book has won widespread admiration for being an attractive, clear, and well-written reassessment and restatement of that position, while being severely criticized for failure to exploit important theoretical and methodological developments in the field. See Angela Roskop Erisman, “Review of Baden, Joel S., *The Composition of the Pentateuch: Renewing the DH*,” *H-Judaic, H-Net Reviews* (December 2012), <https://networks.h-net.org/node/28655/reviews/31018/roskop-erisman-baden-composition-pentateuch-renewing-documentary>. But it is not yet obvious that it will reclaim the spirited support the DH enjoyed three generations ago.

standard text. The original solution proposed in the DH consists in the hypothesization of four or more source documents that were blended together by Judahite scribes to create the Pentateuch that we have in the Bible today.⁶⁸ That harmonizing project is usually assumed to have been undertaken in the eighth or seventh century and possibly completed in post-exilic times.⁶⁹

It has often been observed that the project tended to include and preserve repetitive and sometimes contradictory texts rather than reconciling them.⁷⁰ The growing dissatisfaction with the DH today does not dispute the assumption that various scribal traditions are blended together in our modern Pentateuch. Rather, it grows out of doubts about the value of focusing current and future Bible study on those hypothesized scribal variants when we have before us whole texts that were finalized by someone much closer to the originals than we are today. In his comprehensive review of the main threads of the debate about Pentateuchal sources over the last century, David Carr explains the wide range and varieties of scholarly disagreement, and ironically, how the European scholars have now largely rejected the DH, while a new generation of Americans have taken up its defense.⁷¹ A huge literature

68. Wellhausen's principal work is currently available as an American reprint of the 1885 English translation. See Julius Wellhausen, *Prolegomena to the History of Israel* (Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1994). Richard Friedman has been a tireless defender of the DH in recent decades. In an appendix to his principal work on the topic, he provides a chart showing to which of the four hypothesized sources of the Pentateuch he would assign each verse of the Hebrew text. See Richard Elliott Friedman, *Who Wrote the Bible* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 2019), 229–37.

69. A helpful summary statement of the classical view today that describes probable redactors and their likely dates of contribution can be found in Richard Elliott Friedman, "Three Major Redactors of the Torah," in *Birkat Shalom: Studies in the Bible, Ancient Near Eastern Literature, and Postbiblical Judaism Presented to Shalom M. Paul on the Occasion of his Seventieth Birthday*, ed. Chaim Cohen et al. (Winona Lake, IN: Eisenbrauns, 2008), 31–44.

70. It should be recognized as a caution not often noted in DH studies that field studies by anthropologists studying orality and literacy have turned up the same kinds of variations in oral performance in real time. One of these has asked "whether or not similar doublets and repetitions in OT texts have sometimes resulted from the dynamics of oral performance, rather than literary processes." See Burke O. Long, "Recent Field Studies in Oral Literature and Their Bearing on OT Criticism," *Vetus Testamentum* 26, Fasc. 2 (April 1976): 195.

71. David M. Carr, "Changes in Pentateuchal Criticism," in *Hebrew Bible/Old Testament: The History of Its Interpretation, Volume III, From Modernism*

has grown up criticizing the endless attempts to identify the original source documents hypothesized by Wellhausen and his successors.

Thus, while a few are attempting a return to source criticism as it was before tradition history, the bulk of contemporary pentateuchal scholarship ultimately has followed Rendtorff in undertaking a tradition-historical reinvestigation of the formation of the Pentateuch/Hexateuch — reconstructing the formation of the Pentateuch from its smaller units to its broader extent.⁷²

Joel Baden's simplified reformulation of the DH lists four hypothetical documents from which the text in the Pentateuch is derived through an eighth and seventh century scribal process in Jerusalem that interwove these documents and preserved them all in that combined form. Though not usually featured in the discussion, it must be assumed that each of these hypothetical documents was available to the redactors of the final Pentateuch because of its origins and preservation in its own scribal tradition.

Multiple Scribal School Traditions Hypothesized

The larger Jahwist document (J) was assumed to be the contribution of the Judahite scribes centered in Jerusalem. The much smaller Elohist document (E) is usually assumed to come from northern Israel, possibly from an Ephraimite or Manassite scribal school. The Priestly document (P) would presumably derive from the scribal schools of the Levites, who did not have their own territory but were scattered among assigned cities throughout Judah and Israel. Deuteronomy (D) is usually thought to be of northern origin as well and is often equated with the Book of the Law discovered in the Jerusalem temple by priests in 622 during the reign of King Josiah with the implicit claim that it was more ancient than any of the contemporary scribal school products. As Carr explained, none of these hypothesized original documents has escaped severe criticism and rejection over the last half century.

The Book of Mormon and the Documentary Hypothesis

In 1977, the eminent Book of Mormon scholar, John L. Sorenson, took a close look at the then-current state of the DH literature and argued

to *Post-Modernism* (The Nineteenth and Twentieth Centuries), ed. Magne Sæbo (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck and Ruprecht, 2015), 433–66.

72. Ibid., 466.

that the Brass Plates may have included the Elohist E document.⁷³ The strongest part of his argument focuses on the scholars' widely shared conviction that E is a northern source, which dovetails perfectly with Lehi's Manassite genealogy.⁷⁴ Sorenson was writing before the explosion of scholarly explorations of the scribal schools in the ANE, so the extensive personal connections between Lehi and Nephi and the scribal schools of Jerusalem were not so evident to him in 1977 as they are today. Even then, Sorenson notes that the Small Plates "could plausibly be considered a manifestation of that scribal tradition."⁷⁵

Others have expanded on Sorenson's insight. Richley Crapo observed that "Lehi had clearly been socialized in the imagery of the northern kingdom" as is evidenced in his featured involvement with "the ministry of angels, the role of visionary dreams, [and] the imagery in these dream visions of the Tree of Life," among other elements of characteristically northern imagery.⁷⁶ Keith Thompson's essay expands considerably on Sorenson's case for seeing Israel as the homeland of the Brass Plates.⁷⁷ While the present article differs in many ways from the analyses offered previously by Sorenson and Thompson, they stand

73. Sorenson, "The Brass Plates." Another early attempt to relate the Book of Mormon to Deuteronomy can be seen in an online presentation by BYU student Allen Kendall. See Allen Kendall, "The Deuteronomic Contribution to the Brass Plates," (Student Symposium, Religious Studies Center, Brigham Young University, Provo, UT, February 19, 2016).

74. The 2021 publication of what appears to be a proto-Deuteronomy text presents itself straightforwardly as an Elohist document, referring to Elohim repeatedly with the attachment of a beginning and an ending verse each referencing Yahweh. See Idan Dershowitz, *The Valediction of Moses: A Proto-Biblical Book* (Tubingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2021). It is not yet obvious that Dershowitz's analysis will change the long-held opinion of Hebrew epigraphers that this text is most likely a nineteenth-century forgery. Dershowitz has provided a summary of his argument and evidence in Dershowitz, Idan. "The Valediction of Moses: New Evidence on the Shapira Deuteronomy Fragments" *Zeitschrift für die alttestamentliche Wissenschaft* 133, no. 1 (2021): 1–22, <https://doi.org/10.1515/zaw-2021-0001>; <https://doi.org/10.1515/zaw-2021-0001>.

75. Sorenson, "Brass Plates," 33.

76. Richley Crapo, "Lehi, Joseph, and the Kingdom of Israel," *Interpreter: A Latter-day Saint Journal of Faith and Scholarship* 33 (2019):302, <https://journal.interpreterfoundation.org/lehi-joseph-and-the-kingdom-of-israel/>.

77. Keith Thompson, "The Brass Plates: Can Modern Scholarship Help Identify Their Contents?" *Interpreter: A Latter-day Saint Journal of Faith and Scholarship* 45 (2021):81–113, <https://journal.interpreterfoundation.org/the-brass-plates-can-modern-scholarship-help-identify-their-contents/>. After an extended exploration of the possibility that biblical Micah might have been included in the Brass Plates,

out among the few substantial and plausible backstories for the Brass Plates that have been proposed to this date. They should be considered carefully by anyone doing further research on this topic.⁷⁸

Current Doubts About DH Still Assume Multiple Scribal Traditions Behind the Hebrew Bible

The arguments for the hypothesized J and E documents came under severe criticism after 1970 — and particularly in Europe where the DH is considered by many to be dead. Even though the primary criticisms were directed at the Yahwist, it was the hypothesized Elohist tradition that was essentially obliterated by these attacks on the DH. Robert Gnuse has attempted to resurrect E more recently.⁷⁹ And Michael Goulder has shown how an ancient selection of twelve psalms should be interpreted as the missing Elohist tradition. The “Asaph psalms” (50, 73–83) repeatedly refer to the people of God as *Joseph*, invoke the word *covenant*, and provide numerous other indications of a possible northern origin.⁸⁰

While no documents have been found that correspond to these hypothesized DH sources, many scholars today do agree with Baden at some level that hypothesizing the merger of previously existing scribal traditions is “the most economical, clearest, and most complete solution currently available for the literary complexities of the canonical text.”⁸¹

Prominent Bible scholar David Noel Freedman has also pointed out that there must also have been an original narrative source from which these four documentary traditions could have been drawn. Such a source would have

dealt in connected fashion with the principal themes of Israel’s early history and prehistory — including the primeval

Thompson concludes that this eighth-century prophet who did focus on the remnant prophecy was not likely included. See pp. 98–102.

78. Kevin Christensen has explored the implications of Sorenson’s argument for the Book of Mormon by integrating this analysis with the perspective of Old Testament scholar Margaret Barker. See his *Paradigms Regained: A Survey of Margaret Barker’s Scholarship and Its Significance for Mormon Studies* (Provo: FARMS, 2001), 28–32, <https://archive.bookofmormoncentral.org/content/paradigms-regained-survey-margaret-barkers-scholarship-and-its-significance-mormon-studies>.

79. Robert K. Gnuse, “Redefining the Elohist,” *Journal of Biblical Literature* 119, no. 2 (2000): 201–20.

80. Michael Goulder, “Asaph’s *History of Israel* (Elohist Press, Bethel, 725 BCE),” *Journal for Study of the Old Testament* 65 (1995): 71–81.

81. Baden, *The Composition of the Pentateuch*, 32.

history, patriarchal sagas, the exodus and wanderings, and presumably the settlement in the Promised Land. [It] is no longer extant, but what remains of its contents is scattered through the books from Genesis to Joshua.⁸²

From that perspective, the DH assumes at least five additional scribal traditions that would lie behind our modern Pentateuch. It must be wondered if the version of that history preserved by the Manassites might have been something like the original tradition Freedman was hypothesizing. It could even have been the source of the various oral traditions that were gathered and transcribed in Jerusalem during the seventh century.

Additional Insights From Documentary Hypothesis Studies

We should not assume that the textual harmonizing that the ancient Judahite scribes accomplished in bringing a variety of traditions into the Pentateuch was necessarily a peaceful and amicable process. Mark Smith has provided both evidence and analysis to argue that the process would be better described as a culture war. As he summarizes, “The Bible constitutes more than the representations of collective memory about cultural conflicts; it became the very site, the battlefield for playing out these cultural conflicts, followed by later compromises.”⁸³

Sanders has asked how the weaving of multiple scribal traditions together in the Pentateuch compares with the scribal policies of other ANE traditions. His finding, using the Flood narrative as the sample for comparison, was that the Mesopotamian scribes kept the text *coherent* and basically unchanged over a thousand-year period, but that the Hebrews wove multiple traditions together to maintain *comprehensiveness*. This comparative study is not only supported by the DH, but it also fits well with the growing view that the Pentateuch is the product of many layers of interpretation — so much so that it is best understood as Midrash from the beginning. Sanders argued that the Mesopotamian scholarly text-making was always additive, but never

82. David Noel Freedman, *Divine Commitment and Human Obligation: Selected Writings of David Noel Freedman*, vol. 1: History and Religion, ed. John R. Huddleston (Winona Lake: Eerdmans, 1997), 103–104.

83. Mark S. Smith, “Recent Study of the Israelite Religion in Light of Ugaritic Texts,” in *Ugarit at Seventy-Five*, ed. K. Lawson Younger (University Park, PA: Pennsylvania State University Press, 2007), 11.

allowed the weaving in of alternative traditions — the approach that defines the Pentateuch.⁸⁴

In a subsequent work, Sanders compared Mesopotamian accounts of the scribe Adapa and post-exilic accounts of Enoch, each a patron saint of his scribal tradition, to reveal “the distinctive patterns: a Babylonian scribal culture of continuity and a Judean scribal culture of reinvention.”⁸⁵

Ongoing historical and socio-linguistic studies of the Pentateuch continue to recognize the usefulness of the DH. The assumption of most promoters of the DH that the contributing oral traditions were transcribed or produced sometime in the ninth to seventh centuries fits reasonably well with analyses of the artifacts collected so far by epigraphers. But ongoing studies now question the assumption that these hypothesized sources would all be that late — both on epigraphical and historical methodological grounds. And traditional assumptions about the transmission from oral to written traditions are being questioned in light of empirical studies. As van Bekkum warns, “It is important to be cautious in creating sources, because they more often reflect scholarly assumptions than historical reality,” and “it is dangerous to posit too many stages of transmission.”⁸⁶

Finkelstein and Sass have also challenged the dominant tradition of Hebrew epigraphers by pointing out that there are no securely dated inscriptions that support the biblical account of a flourishing, literate regime in Jerusalem in the tenth or ninth centuries. Rather, “the

84. Seth L. Sanders, “What if there Aren’t any Empirical Models for Pentateuchal Criticism?” in *Contextualizing Israel’s Sacred Writings: Ancient Literacy, Orality, and Literary Production*, Ancient Israel and its Literature 22, ed. Brian Schmidt (Atlanta, GA: Society of Biblical Literature Press, 2015), 295.

85. Seth L. Sanders, *From Adapa to Enoch* (Tübingen, DE: Mohr Siebeck, 2017), 3.

86. Koert van Bekkum, “The ‘Language of Canaan’: Ancient Israel’s History and the Origins of Hebrew,” in *Biblical Hebrew in Context: Essays in Semitics and Old Testament Texts in Honour of Professor Jan P. Lettinga*, ed. Koert van Bekkum, Gert Kwakkel, and Wolter H. Rose (Leiden: Brill, 2018), 66. Rolf Rendtorff, a leading Bible scholar at the University of Heidelberg, once summarized the state of DH studies by showing how wildly they varied in their conclusions and recommended the canonical approach that just takes the final document as the proper text for scholarly study. See Rolf Rendtorff, “Directions in Pentateuchal Studies,” *Current Research: Biblical Studies* 5 (1997): 43–65. This “canonical” approach continues to attract a growing segment of Bible scholars today.

9th century was a period of transition from Proto-Canaanite to cursive Hebrew and other regional West Semitic alphabets.”⁸⁷

The recension of the standard Pentateuch that came out of seventh-century Israel was incorporated into the Masoretic Text (MT), which became the standard version of the Hebrew Bible in the following centuries — another harmonizing product of the post-exilic Jerusalem scribal schools — which eventually became the canonical Hebrew Bible that would provide the standard text for both the Jewish and the Christian worlds. The fact that none of the hypothesized source texts for the Pentateuch is extant continues to invite new proposals and controversies from Bible scholars.⁸⁸

For purposes of this paper, the point is that the thousands of Bible scholars who have accepted the DH over the decades have necessarily accepted the reality of multiple hypothetical textual traditions contributed by unidentified scribal schools to a common project during the seventh century. The dominance of the DH in biblical studies over the last century and a half has clearly planted the concept of multiple undocumented scribal traditions contributing to the Hebrew Bible as it has come down to the modern world. While Bible scholars continue to propose competing theories about dating and origins of various textual traditions, there has been continuing resistance to the recurring suggestion that the Pentateuch itself is a post-exilic composition.⁸⁹

Post-exilic Scribal Traditions

With the rise of the Greek and then Roman empires, Greek became the *lingua franca* of the Mediterranean world. Even in Israel, Greek and Aramaic dialects were replacing Hebrew for most people. The infiltration of Aramaic language through invasions by Aramaic

87. Finkelstein and Sass, “Epigraphic Evidence from Jerusalem,” 25. The principal target of this critique is Christopher Rollston. A more technical and expansive summary of the new generation of epigraphical studies as they address older approaches, including a current bibliography, can be found in Andrew R. Burlingame, “Writing and Literacy in the World of Ancient Israel: Recent Developments and Future Directions,” *Bibliotheca Orientalis* LXXVI, nos. 1–2 (January–April 2019): 46–74.

88. For an illuminating analytical history of the canonization processes that developed in connection with Mesopotamian, Jewish, Christian, and even Muslim literatures, see William W. Hallo, “The Concept of Canonicity in Cuneiform and Biblical Literature: A Comparative Appraisal,” in *The Biblical Canon in Comparative Perspective*, ed. Bernard F. Batto (Lewiston, NY: E. Mellen Press, 1991): 1–12.

89. Freedman, *Divine Commitment and Human Obligation*, 344.

speakers from nearby Damascus and Syria generally is detectable but not sharply defined as early as the tenth century in northern Israel.⁹⁰ While archaeologists can confirm the ninth-century conquest of Dan by the Damascenes, the nature and extent of their rule in the north are currently major questions for archaeologists working in that area.⁹¹

The Septuagint

In the third and second centuries BCE a new Greek translation of the Hebrew Bible known as the Septuagint (LXX) provided critical access to the Hebrew scriptures for the Greek-speaking Jewish world in diaspora in the Roman Empire.

No one has identified a single, clear, original Hebrew source (*Vorlage*) for the LXX. This should not be surprising given that the collection of texts in the LXX does not match up perfectly with the Hebrew Bible, and the different books of the LXX have different translators using different translation styles. These translators were working at different times and places — though third-century Alexandria is regarded as the principal origin for the translations. What is clear is that the LXX translations do not derive from the canonical Hebrew proto MT and are “often at variance with the MT.”⁹² They do, therefore, attest to at least one or more Hebrew recensions that were available in the third century BCE that are not derived from any scribal school known today.

Different examples illustrate ways in which the LXX can point to independent Hebrew language sources, some of which also circulated at Qumran. Unlike the various scribal schools hypothesized by modern Hebrew Bible scholars, the Qumran scribes were more interested in collecting and preserving the ancient texts than in harmonizing or revising them. Possibly the most famous example of this disposition would be the two Qumran versions of Jeremiah, which differ by about

90. Benjamin Sass, “Aram and Israel during the 10th–9th centuries BCE, or Iron Age IIA,” in *In Search for Aram and Israel: Politics, Culture, and Identity*, ed. Omer Sergi, Manfred Oeming, and Izaak J. de Hulster (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2016), 199–227.

91. Yifat Thareani, “Enemy at the Gates? The Archeological Visibility of the Aramaeans at Dan,” in *In Search for Aram and Israel*, 169–97.

92. *The Interpreter’s Dictionary of the Bible*, s.v., “Septuagint,” by J. W. Wevers, 4:277. See also *Dictionary of Biblical Interpretation*, s.v., “Septuagint,” by Wevers, 2:462. A more complete account of the background supporting these conclusions can be found in Emanuel Tov, “Septuagint,” in *Mikra: Text, Translation, Reading and Interpretation of the Hebrew Bible in Ancient Judaism and Early Christianity*, ed. Martin Jan Mulder (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, 1988), 161–88.

15 per cent or 2700 words in length and are arranged differently. Both versions were in use at Qumran. The longer 4QJer^a is now preserved in the Hebrew Bible, while the shorter 4QJer^b was used for the translation in the LXX. In his Harvard dissertation, Gerald Janzen found that detailed comparisons of the double readings, parallel contexts, human names, haplographies, and supposed abridgments that distinguished the two versions all pointed to the conclusion that the LXX version of Jeremiah was much closer to the shared, hypothetical, original Hebrew *Vorlage*, while the longer MT version resulted from a much longer series of redactions and harmonizing expansions.⁹³

Literary Improvements

Zipora Talshir has argued persuasively for a hypothetical version of the Book of Kings in Hebrew that was chosen for the LXX translation and that explains the differences in the short section explaining the division of Solomon's kingdom as artistic rewritings that seek to elevate the literary quality of a key passage without ideological or political motivation and that cannot be explained as a byproduct of textual transmission or of the translation into Greek.⁹⁴

The growing recognition of the ancient interaction between oral cultures and their literate elites has introduced another important dynamic into the discussion of multiple versions of specific texts. As Susan Niditch concluded:

We do well even in working with written manuscripts of ancient Israelite literature to allow ourselves to think in an oral mode. An “orally” informed worldview provides a context for the writing and receiving of versions of the compositions now housed in particular forms in the Hebrew Bible.⁹⁵

The Samaritan Pentateuch Also Suggests Additional Scribal Traditions

An Exodus scroll found at Qumran provides evidence of a class of efforts to harmonize connected units of the Torah, which also showed

93. J. Gerald Janzen, *Studies in the Text of Jeremiah*, Harvard Semitic Monographs 6 (1973), 32–33, 67–68, 69, 86, 114–15, and 127–35.

94. Zipora Talshir, *The Alternative Story of the Division of the Kingdom: 3 Kingdoms 12:24a–z*, (Jerusalem: Simor Ltd., 1993), 11–18.

95. Susan Niditch, *Oral World and Written Word: Orality and Literacy in Ancient Israel* (London: SPCK, 1997), 76.

up in a further modified form in the Samaritan Pentateuch (see below).⁹⁶ All of these examples show how Hebrew Bible scholars move quickly to posit hypothetical alternative scribal traditions to explain differences in later manuscripts.

While the origins of the Samaritan people are unclear, they are the geographical heirs of the Josephite tribes and are concentrated today in Nablus (ancient Samaria). Since the seventeenth century, the Samaritan scriptures have attracted the attention of European scholars. These writings have been studied thoroughly in relationship to the Jewish traditions. They feature a Samaritan version of the Pentateuch and a historical work that parallels the biblical books of Joshua, Judges, Samuel, Kings, and 2 Chronicles. For the purposes of this paper, that background raises the question of whether there might be a distinctive Josephite element in the Samaritan tradition, which is believed by some to go back to exilic times or possibly even earlier.⁹⁷ But most scholars today believe the Samaritan people gained their identity as separated from the Jews after the destruction of their temple in Shechem by John Hyrcanus in 128 BCE, centuries after the disappearance of any Josephite scribal traditions that may have existed before destructions and deportations of the Assyrian and Babylonian conquests.

The Samaritan scribal traditions intriguingly claim origins with Abisha, son of the priest Phineas who was contemporary with Joshua at the very beginning of the Israelite nation and that “they preserve the authentic Israelite tradition.”⁹⁸ This claim to Levitical origins is consistent with the biblical assignment of Levites to cities within the boundaries of both Manasseh and Ephraim. However, as Emmanuel Tov and others have demonstrated, the texts differ from the Jewish traditions only marginally — and not in ways that would signal a Josephite bias. The more obvious differences are the substitution of *Shechem* and *Mount Gerizim*, written as one word, in all textual references to Jerusalem — and certain phonological differences. The oldest Samaritan texts are written in the paleo-Hebrew script found at Qumran, but, nevertheless, seem to be quite late.

96. Judith E. Sanderson, *An Exodus Scroll from Qumran; 4QpaleoExodm and the Samaritan Tradition*, Harvard Semitic Studies 30 (Atlanta, GA: Scholars Press, 1986).

97. See the discussion in Emanuel Tov, *Textual Criticism of the Hebrew Bible*, rev. ed. (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, 2001), 80–83.

98. Tov, *Textual Criticism*, 82.

A Samaritan version of the Pentateuch also appeared in the second century BCE.⁹⁹ And a few copies of a non-canonical (different than the MT) version of Hebrew Bible texts found at Qumran seem to have been written at about the same time. Over the years, many theories have been put forth describing possible sources and time frames for the origins of these late texts.¹⁰⁰ The surprise consensus of the most recent studies is that both the Samaritan Pentateuch and some variant Dead Sea Scrolls (e.g., 4QpaleoExod^m) were using the same alternative Hebrew source in the third or second century BCE — an Old Palestinian tradition, possibly from the fifth century, which itself has not been found and must still remain hypothetical. At this point in time, scholars do not know to which scribal school it should be linked. So these late studies add one more candidate to the growing list of potential alternative scribal traditions containing Pentateuchal material. The most recent comprehensive re-examination of issues related to the Samaritan Pentateuch confirms the prevailing explanations for variations from the MT as scribal adjustments introduced in the Second Temple period or later.¹⁰¹

The Deuteronomistic History

The harmonizing spirit displayed in the foregoing examples of scribal traditions being brought together is marked principally by a willingness to be inclusive and to preserve all extant versions of Hebrew scripture. Unmentioned to this point is a second major movement in Bible

99. While some have argued on epigraphical grounds that the Samaritan Pentateuch may have an ancient origin going back even to the eighth century, leading scholars on this topic today seem to be have agreed on the second century as its most likely date of composition. One good explanation of this view can be found in James D. Purvis, *The Samaritan Pentateuch and the Origin of the Samaritan Sect* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1968), 16–28.

100. See the comprehensive discussion in Tov, *Textual Criticism*, 80–100. Other helpful treatments can be found in R. J. Coggins, *Samaritans and Jews: The Origins of Samaritanism Reconsidered* (Louisville: John Knox Press, 1975), 148–55; Albright, *From the Stone Age to Christianity*, 345–46; and Purvis, *The Samaritan Pentateuch*, 16–87. In her detailed analysis of 4QpaleoExod^m, Sanderson reviewed the scholarly efforts to locate the origins of the Samaritan Pentateuch in time and in textual traditions and finally found the Qumran Exodus variant to be supportive of the original positions taken by Purvis and Coggins. See Sanderson, *An Exodus Scroll from Qumran*, 28–35 and 317–20.

101. Robert T. Anderson and Terry Giles, *The Samaritan Pentateuch: An Introduction to its Origin, History, and Significance for Biblical Study* (Atlanta, GA: Society of Biblical Literature, 2012).

scholarship over much of the last century to explain systematic revisions in the developing canonical text, changes that would mandate centralized control of worship in Jerusalem and that would glorify the Davidic monarchy and dynasty as divinely favored in the person of Josiah, the righteous seventh-century heir and reformer. These revisions are attributed by scholars to the *Deuteronomist*, who is thought by many to have been a single writer but might well have been a series of two or three scribes or even a scribal school with shared political and religious objectives that could be promoted through intentional revision of scripture. While formulated most fully by Martin Noth, principal inspiration for American scholars that promoted this theme seems to have come earlier from Harvard professor Frank M. Cross:

The two themes in the Deuteronomistic Book of Kings appear to reflect two theological stances, one stemming from the old Deuteronomic covenant theology which regarded destruction of dynasty and people as tied necessarily to apostasy, and a second, drawn from the royal ideology in Judah: the eternal promises to David. ...

In fact, the juxtaposition of the two themes of threat and promise provide the platform of the Josianic reform. The Deuteronomistic history, insofar as these themes reflect its central concerns may be described as a propaganda work of the Josianic reformation and imperial program. In particular, the document speaks to the North, calling Israel to return to Judah and to Yahweh's sole legitimate shrine in Jerusalem, asserting the claims of the ancient Davidic monarchy upon all Israel. Even the destruction of Bethel and the cults of the high places was predicted by the prophets, pointing to the centrality of Josiah's role for northern Israel.¹⁰²

Both the details and the structure of the Deuteronomistic History continue to be the subject of competing scholarly explanations,¹⁰³ but

102. Frank Moore Cross, *Canaanite Myth and Hebrew Epic: Essays in the History of the Religion of Israel* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1973), 284. See also Martin Noth, *The Deuteronomistic History* (Sheffield: University of Sheffield Academic Press, 1981).

103. For example, see the pointed dissent of Lowell K. Handy in his essay "Historical Probability and the Narrative of Josiah's Reform in 2 Kings," in *The Pitcher is Broken: Memorial Essays for Gösta W. Ahlström*, ed. Lowell K. Handy and Steven Winford Holloway (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1995), 252–75. Handy advances reasons to reject most of the assumptions of this scholarly debate,

most agree that the text of the Bible from Genesis through 2 Kings underwent significant redaction that included both modification and supplementation of the standard text. The summary provided by David Noel Freedman is a good example. He sees the Deuteronomistic History as the product of a series of editors beginning with northern Levite priests fleeing the 722 BCE Assyrian invasion and bringing with them the anti-monarchical and anti-idolatry attitude of the northern priests and prophets. Generations later in Jerusalem, the second and third redactions first promoted the Josianic agenda for worship reform and subsequently recognized Israel's failure to keep covenant with Yahweh and the resulting inevitable punishment in the Babylonian exile.¹⁰⁴

The distinguished Hebrew Bible scholar Thomas Römer published his review of the competing theories scholars had advanced to explain the Deuteronomistic History. Taking all the evidence for these theories together, he proposed a compromise view in which the Deuteronomistic History began as a propagandistic effort of scribes in the royal court of Josiah "in order to reinforce the legitimacy of Josiah, presenting him as the true successor of David." Later additions and revisions introduced the exilic perspective as well. Römer's book attempts to bring all the evidence together in support of that compromise approach.¹⁰⁵

Independent support for this approach has been found in a study of the relevant Assyrian documents and historical events. Karl Haugberg has shown that the Assyrian records confirm the historicity of the Hebrew Bible on one hand but also show that 1 and 2 Kings "have been created with a specific theological goal, emphasizing historical events according to the importance they held as stories of reward or reprisal in accordance with the religious guidelines of the author or authors,"

including identification of the document found in the temple as Deuteronomy, the linking of that find to the Josianic reforms, and the historical reliability of the Kings history on that reform.

104. There is a vast and still-growing literature on the Deuteronomistic History. The example mentioned here is found in Freedman, *Divine Commitment*, 1:279–85. See also Joseph Blenkinsopp, "The Sage, The Scribe, and Scribalism in the Chronicler's Work," in *The Sage in Israel and the Ancient Near East*, ed. John G. Gammie and Leo G. Perdue (Winona Lake, IN: Eisenbrauns, 1990), 310–11, for an account of Levites serving in teaching and scribal functions in the time of Josiah and in the Persian period.

105. Thomas Römer, *The So-called Deuteronomistic History: A Sociological, Historical and Literary Introduction* (London: T&T Clark, 2005), 43.

rendering Kings “a dubious material source” when used by itself as a history.¹⁰⁶

The Deuteronomistic History and Archaeology

Israeli archaeologist Israel Finkelstein seized on this theory of the textual scholars to resolve several persistent contradictions between the archaeological record and traditional readings of Israelite history. For example, he and others have concluded that the biblical “account of a great United Monarchy is a late-monarchic ideological construct” designed to justify and promote the political and religious agenda of King Josiah and others. This history was vulnerable to ideological manipulation because of the lack of historical writings. “Archaeology has shown that significant scribal activity did not appear in Judah prior to the 8th century B.C.E.” Combining the petrographic record with archaeological findings, he concluded “that northern Saul traditions reached Judah with Israelite refugees in the late 8th century B.C.E., after the fall of the Northern Kingdom.”¹⁰⁷

Most recently, Finkelstein has mobilized newer archaeological and textual studies to argue that what later became the “northern kingdom” was in fact the first united kingdom identified as Israel. He sees two territorial entities established in the late Bronze Age and the early Iron Age and controlled from Shechem that were eventually destroyed by Sheshonq I, thereby opening the way for the rise of the Gibeon-Gibeah entity in the late eleventh century BCE. The first fifty years of the northern kingdom would then correspond to the emergence of the “Tirzah polity” in the middle of the tenth century, which was replaced by the rise of the Omride Dynasty in the early ninth century, which soon moved its capital to nearby Samaria. By this time, the name of the former Shechemite polity had become Israel. During this period the Omrides expanded into new areas they had not previously governed,

106. Karl Kristine Haugberg, *Assyrian Foreign Policy in the Levant Before Sennacherib* (Sunnyvale, CA: LAP Lambert Academic Publishing, 2016).

107. Israel Finkelstein, “The Last Labayu: King Saul and the Expansion of the First North Israelite Territorial Entity,” in *Essays on Ancient Israel in its Near Eastern Context: A Tribute to Nadav Na’aman*, ed. Yairah Amit et al. (Winona Lake, IN: Eisenbrauns, 2006), 177. Finkelstein brought his lifetime of rich archaeological knowledge together with a comprehensive historical account in Israel Finkelstein, *The Forgotten Kingdom: The Archaeology and History of Northern Israel* (Atlanta, GA: Society of Biblical Literature, 2013). See Daniel Pioske’s review of this book in *Review of Biblical Literature* (October 2014) for an excellent summary and critique of Finkelstein’s paradigm-changing theory.

including “the mountainous Galilee, the northern Jordan Valley, and areas in Transjordan beyond the western slopes of the Gilead.”¹⁰⁸

Finkelstein says that scholarly reflections on the Deuteronomistic History helped him resolve the puzzles that had accumulated with archaeological studies that showed ancient Israel being the kind of powerful political and economic entity the Hebrew Bible attributes to Solomon, and that show Judah was never more than an agricultural backwater before the arrival of the northern refugees fleeing the Assyrian conquest before 722 BCE. He even points out the lamentable absence of a Manassite version of Israel’s history:

It is only natural to assume that there were northern prophets ... who were closer to the royal institutions in Samaria. ... Had Israel survived, we might have received a parallel, competing, and very different history. But with the Assyrian destruction of Samaria and the dismantling of its institutions of royal power, any such competing histories were silenced. Though prophets and priests from the north very likely joined the flow of refugees to find shelter in the cities and towns of Judah, biblical history would henceforth be written by the winners — or at least the survivors — and it would be fashioned exclusively according to the late Judahite Deuteronomistic beliefs.¹⁰⁹

The developed Omride dynasty of the ninth century that established itself in Samaria would necessarily have maintained its own scribal schools (possibly Ephraimite in origin) to produce the scribes needed by the palace and the temple for bureaucratic, military, diplomatic, religious, and commercial activities. Any such schools would in all likelihood have persisted through time to support subsequent northern regimes and as presumed by Finkelstein, would have been carried into exile with the other officers of the late eighth-century regime. The Brass Plates as described in the Book of Mormon would more likely have been the product of an independent and competing scribal tradition in Manasseh that was devoted to preserving Egyptian-language facility

108. Israel Finkelstein, “First Israel, Core Israel, United (Northern) Israel,” *Near Eastern Archaeology* 82 (2019): 9–12.

109. Israel Finkelstein and Neil Asher Silberman, *The Bible Unearthed: Archaeology’s New Vision of Ancient Israel and the Origin of Its Sacred Texts* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 2001), 223. For an expanded discussion of this issue, see Noel B. Reynolds, “Modern Archaeology and the Brass Plates.”

and their inheritance of Josephite records and religion and that found refuge in Jerusalem in time to avoid the Assyrian deportations.¹¹⁰

Editorial Redactions

While some scholars deny the concept of a Deuteronomistic redaction completely, and a few others see that redaction as post-exilic in its entirety, the majority would agree with Freedman and Finkelstein that our modern Bible was shaped by redactions made both before and after the Babylonian exile.¹¹¹ By the end of the century, it seemed that most scholars were persuaded by Frank Cross's 1968 essay that argued for these two editions of the Deuteronomistic History.¹¹²

Clear examples of editorial additions, deletions, relocations, and revisions have recently been assembled to show empirical evidence for the theory that the Hebrew Bible contains many kinds of editorial changes that accumulated in the history of various texts before the point that the texts were frozen in the versions we have today.¹¹³ Scholars have drawn on "textual witnesses that differ from the MT" and on "parallel passages within one textual tradition" to "show that substantial editing took place in the literary history of the Hebrew Bible."¹¹⁴ The prevalence and significance of these editorial interventions in the text lead many scholars "to question the viability and validity of any theory that is based on the use of the final texts to reconstruct the culture, history, and religion of ancient Israel and Judaism."¹¹⁵

110. See Reynolds, "Lehi and Nephi."

111. For an excellent review and categorization of the full range of scholarly theories see Erik Eynikel, *The Reform of King Josiah and the Composition of the Deuteronomistic History* (Leiden: Brill, 1996), 7–31. The case for sixth-century composition is made in R. N. Whybray, *The Making of the Pentateuch: A Methodological Study* (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1987), 221–42.

112. See Eynikel, *The Reform of King Josiah*, 31 and F. M. Cross, "The Themes of the Books of Kings and the Structure of the Deuteronomistic History," *Annual of the College of Jewish Studies* 3 (1968), 9–24, republished in Cross, *Canaanite Myth and Hebrew Epic*, 274–89.

113. See Reinhard Müller, Juha Pakkala, and Bas ter Haar Romeny, *Evidence of Editing: Growth and Change of Texts in the Hebrew Bible*, Society of Biblical Literature Resources for Biblical Study 75 (Atlanta, GA: Society of Biblical Literature, 2014). The authors present and discuss fifteen leading examples that may illuminate innumerable others that may no longer be discoverable through the limited methods available to textual and literary critics.

114. *Ibid.*, 219.

115. *Ibid.*, 220.

A Scholar's Warning for Students of the Old Testament

Israeli Hebrew Bible and Dead Sea Scrolls scholar Shemaryahu Talmon offers the following as a blunt caveat to Jews and Christians reading the Old Testament who may assume too close a connection between the prophets who wrote the original versions of those books and their final editors and redactors:

There is probably no other extant text ... which is witnessed to by so many diverse types of sources, and the history of which is so difficult to elucidate as that of the text of the Old Testament.

The Old Testament books were handed down ... not only in their original Hebrew or ... Aramaic tongue, but also in a variety of translations. ... The scholar who takes a synoptic view of all the sources at his disposal is confronted with a bewildering plethora of *variae lectiones* in the extant versions of the Old Testament books. ... The printed editions represent the end of a long chain of textual development and of editorial activities which were aimed at unifying the sacred texts. These late editions can in no way be taken to exhibit faithfully the autographs of the biblical authors. In fact not one single verse of this ancient literature has come to us in an original manuscript, written by a biblical author or by a contemporary of his, or even by a scribe who lived immediately after the time of the author. Even the very earliest manuscripts at our disposal ... are removed by hundreds of years from the date of origin of the literature recorded in them.

Not one tradition and not one manuscript is without fault. Each and every one patently exhibits errors which crept into it during the long period of its transmission, in the oral state, when written by hand, and even ... when handed down in the form of printed books.¹¹⁶

116. Shemaryahu Talmon, "The Old Testament Text," in *Qumran and the History of the Biblical Text*, ed. Frank Moore Cross and Shemaryahu Talmon (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1975), 3–4.

A Book of Mormon Perspective

Being himself a great devotee and scholar of the Bible, Professor Talmon obviously is responding to the uncritical approach of so many of his fellow Jews and Christians who steadfastly avoid recognition of the numerous problems presented by the biblical text. A better-informed recognition of those challenges can help readers of the Book of Mormon to appreciate more fully the detailed story embedded in that text that informs the reader at every step about the identity, the purposes, and the circumstances of the authors. That information is crucial for the reader's interpretation and assessment of the text and its message. But that same information is rarely reliably available in the biblical texts that have emerged from unmeasured, undocumented, and unexplained scribal processes over lengthy periods of time. In short, the Book of Mormon reader is constantly in direct contact with the prophet writer.¹¹⁷ This is far less true for the Bible reader.

If our contemporary Bible scholars are correct, Lehi and Nephi would most likely have been aware of the ongoing editing projects in the Judahite scribal schools of their generation and of the political and religious ideologies — possibly in support of the Josianic reform movement — that were driving them. Not all traces of the anti-monarchical ideology of the North were expunged from the redacted history, some of which appears to show up in Nephite discourse.¹¹⁸ But one can easily speculate that the refugee families from the North, including Lehi and Nephi, might well have been alarmed by the propaganda embedded in the new redactions promoting Josiah's imperial program by "calling Israel to return to Judah and to Yahweh's sole legitimate shrine in Jerusalem, asserting the claims of the ancient Davidic monarchy upon Israel."¹¹⁹

Resisting the Drive to Harmonize Competing Textual Traditions

All these hypothesized scribal projects inhabit a universe of discourse that can instantly make sense of the Book of Mormon claim to represent another scriptural tradition deriving from yet another scribal school.

117. For a full account of this phenomenon of scribal tracking in the Book of Mormon, see Reynolds, "The Last Nephite Scribes."

118. Note, e.g., Nephi's reluctance to serve as a king (2 Nephi 5:18) and Mosiah's explanations of the dangers of monarchical rule (Mosiah 29:4–44). For a full discussion, see Noel B. Reynolds, "Nephite Kingship Reconsidered," in *Mormons, Scripture, and the Ancient World: Studies in Honor of John L. Sorenson*, ed. Davis Bitton (Provo, UT: FARMS, 1998), 151–89.

119. Cross, *Canaanite Myth*, 284.

The Nephite descriptions of their Brass Plates clearly point to a Josephite scribal tradition. There is little in the history or surviving texts of ancient Israel that would document a Josephite scribal school or scriptural tradition. But as Lehi and his successors read and quoted from the Brass Plates over time, a composite picture emerges of a separate tradition. The Nephite “holy scriptures” featured a genealogy of ancient Joseph and Manasseh’s descendants, some prophets that appear in the Hebrew Bible and several others that do not, minor variations on Isaiah’s writings, a Genesis tradition that clearly varies from the Hebrew Bible in some ways, and even extended prophecies of Enoch, Abraham, and Joseph for which there are no traces in the Hebrew Bible. From the beginning to the end, the Nephite prophets emphasize the Abrahamic covenant in their teachings and prophecies while offering a noticeably different interpretation of that covenant from those proffered in Jewish and Christian traditions.¹²⁰ Neither the Hebrew Bible nor other later traditions make mention of a Josephite scribal tradition before we are confronted with the Book of Mormon’s account of the Brass Plates at the very end of the seventh century.

Why Manufacture the Brass Plates at the End of the Seventh Century BCE?

Susan Niditch has speculated that the two books of Chronicles may have been written “at the time of the imminent Babylonian threat and hidden for safekeeping by Levitical groups.” The motivation would not have been to preserve an objective history in the modern sense. Rather, the Chronicler was “a preeminent transmitter of essential story ... to provide his view of the truly true, his concept of Israelite myth, his vision of the workings of God in the human cosmos, his version of the underlying frameworks of Israelite identity.”¹²¹ It may be that a different, but analogous theory of motivation can provide the best explanation for the creation of the Brass Plates in that same late seventh-century time period.

The foregoing pages document and explain the shared belief of most Bible scholars today in an ongoing effort among the scribal schools of Jerusalem in the last half of the seventh century to harmonize the variety of textual traditions scribes from different tribes had brought to Jerusalem as they fled the Assyrian invasion. Scholars also believe the

120. See Reynolds, “Understanding the Abrahamic Covenant,” 39–74, and Reynolds, “All Kindreds Shall Be Blessed,” 115–39.

121. Niditch, *Oral World and Written Word*, 129.

seventh century Judahite scribal schools then massaged the resulting collection of texts to fit shifting political and theological interpretations of Israelite history and futures. But if there had also been a now-forgotten Josephite scribal tradition in that mix, the Josephite scribes may have had any or all of the following reasons for manufacturing the Brass Plates that Lehi sent his sons back to Jerusalem to retrieve.

1. The Josephites would have been the most likely custodians of the records gathered and maintained by Abraham and may have been alarmed by the ever more evident danger that their authentic Abrahamic tradition would be revised or replaced by the royally favored and evolving Judahite scribal products. As mentioned above, Joseph Smith believed that the Book of Abraham was a record in the possession of Joseph of Egypt at one point.¹²²
2. It was commonly assumed in the seventh-century scribal schools and the ANE generally that writing important texts on metal was the best way to preserve them unchanged forever.¹²³
3. The Brass Plates include numerous prophetic writings that had not been included in the Judahite tradition. Lehi and presumably his Josephite scribal colleagues deemed these records to be of inestimable value for future generations, even though they apparently were not accepted by the Judahite scribes in their harmonizing project. The fact that some of the unique ancient writings most closely identified with the Josephite scribal tradition were recorded and preserved in the Egyptian language and/or script might have made them look even more endangered in a scribal world being taken over by the Judahites, whose records are thought to have originated in eighth- and seventh-century transcriptions of older oral traditions — all in the evolving vernacular Hebrew.
4. Jeremiah, Uriah, Lehi, and other prophets in late seventh-century Jerusalem foresaw an immediate future in which the crumbling Assyrian imperial administration would be replaced by the increasingly aggressive Babylonians — despite the continuing reliance of the Judahite regime on

122. See Reynolds, “The Brass Plates Version of Genesis,” 63–96; and Lindsay and Reynolds, “‘Strong Like unto Moses,’” 1–92.

123. See Reynolds, “An Everlasting Witness,” 15–17.

the Egyptians. If Jerusalem were to fall to the upsurging Babylonians, there would be nowhere for these prophets and scribes to hide. Another captivity could easily lead to more deportations of elites and to the final disintegration of their own scribal schools and libraries.

5. All the intellectual, financial, and material resources necessary for manufacturing the Brass Plates would have been available in such a seventh-century Josephite school. Whether driven by these concerns or by divine inspiration, the Josephite scribes in Jerusalem as a team with their own workshop would have had the ability to divide up their collection of papyrus scrolls and manufacture a combined metallic version of their scriptural tradition in relatively short order once that decision was made.
6. For the time being, the Josephite “treasury” or library maintained by Lehi’s Manassite cousin Laban would seem to be the most secure depository for the Brass Plates, along with the traditional scroll collection of the Josephite scribal school. Laban’s cohort of fifty guards likely provided as much security as could be mustered in late seventh-century Jerusalem (see 1 Nephi 3:31, 4:1).

Establishing Canonical Versions of Scripture

Scholars have tried to make sense of the idea of canon and the processes by which canonical versions of scripture or other literature take shape over time. While there is clearly plenty of disagreement on this subject, it may be significant for present purposes to note that the motivations and strategies scholars have suggested for the canon-formation process of the Hebrew Bible reflect some of the motivations hypothesized above for the creation of the Brass Plates in the last decade of the seventh century in Jerusalem. Some scholars point to conflict between scribal schools that led to efforts to establish one preferred tradition or to merge and accommodate several traditions into a single acceptable version for future generations.¹²⁴ It is likely that after a century of refugee status in Jerusalem, influential members of this proposed Josephite scribal school were being assimilated into the society and culture of the politically and socially favored Judahite schools.

124. See Philip R. Davies, *Scribes and Schools: The Canonization of the Hebrew Scriptures* (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 1998), 42–54, for a categorization and critique of these proposed explanations.

The resulting culture wars may have motivated more conservative Josephite scribes to render their tradition permanent in brass plates.¹²⁵

Conclusions

This paper brings contemporary findings of Bible scholars, and Ancient Near Eastern archaeologists, linguists, epigraphers, and historians together with the modern restoration of lost ancient scriptures by the American prophet Joseph Smith to explore how the Book of Mormon account of its first prophets, Lehi and Nephi, and their Brass Plates, would have been understood in ancient Jerusalem at the end of the seventh century BCE. In that setting, it appears that both Lehi and Nephi would have been seen as highly trained scribes positioned in a conservative scribal tradition that traced its origins to Joseph, the son of Jacob in ancient Egypt and that would have included the records inherited from his great grandfather Abraham. Because most of these records were written in Egyptian, this unique Josephite scribal school included and perpetuated thorough training in the writing and reading of that ancient language, giving these Josephite scribes the ability and responsibility to maintain a continuous written record from the time of Abraham — unlike the other scribal schools that may only have had recent Hebrew transcriptions of their orally transmitted ancient scripture traditions.

There are good reasons to conclude that the Brass Plates also contained the same texts of Abraham and Moses that were restored through Joseph Smith. In that way, the Brass Plates provided Lehi and Nephi in their times with the corroborating testimonies of Adam, Enoch, Abraham, and Moses who had also been shown the great vision of all things that came to both Lehi and Nephi as they were prepared to be the founding prophets of the Nephite dispensation. All of these were provided to Joseph Smith as part of his preparation to lead the final dispensation.

As a refugee group in Jerusalem, where the Judahite scribal schools enjoyed the patrimony of the monarchy and the temple administration, the members of this hypothesized Josephite scribal school may well have seen the looming possibility of extinction for themselves and their scriptural tradition in the growing threats of assimilation with Judahite traditions in Jerusalem and deportation to an expanding Mesopotamian empire — the fate their ancestors had avoided over a century earlier by seeking refuge in Jerusalem.

125. See the documentation of this ancient strategy in Reynolds, “An Everlasting Witness,” 15–17.

Bible scholars today have advanced two principal theories, the Documentary Hypothesis and the Deuteronomistic History, to explain the extensive scribal efforts that produced the Hebrew Bible in the form it has come down to us today. The initial motivation for manufacturing the Brass Plates may have been to preserve the Josephite tradition — including its invaluable and mostly ancient Egyptian-language components — intact for future generations in view of the significant trends toward syncretism and politically motivated redaction that were evident in the Judahite scribal schools of the time. As members of a refugee seventh-century Josephite or Manassite scribal school in Jerusalem, Lehi and Nephi may have been involved in manufacturing the Brass Plates or even in financing their production. Lehi apparently believed he had a right to withdraw those plates from the library of his scribal school. And so he sent his sons to Laban with that request.

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A RESEARCH NOTE: CONTINUING EXPLORATION AND RESEARCH IN OMAN

Warren P. Aston

Abstract: *The significance of the ongoing studies into the potential location of the Old World “Bountiful,” which Nephi reminds us was “prepared of the Lord” (1 Nephi 17:5), and is documented in great detail by him, can hardly be overstated. Bountiful’s resources had to be truly substantial and unique to enable the Lehites to recover from years of land travel from Jerusalem and to build a ship capable of reaching the New World. Exploration and scientific studies of the Dhofar region of southern Oman, the only section of the Arabian coast containing the feature Nephi describes, continue to the present. Here I briefly discuss, chronologically, recent developments of special significance to Book of Mormon studies.*

My introduction to the subject of identifying Nephi’s Bountiful came in October 1987 when I made my first visit to Oman. This came at a time when I had just begun exploring neighboring Yemen in connection with historical references to Nahom, the burial place of Ishmael (1 Nephi 16:34). The only known previous visit of Latter-day Saint researchers to southern Oman was in 1976 when Lynn and Hope Hilton spent 24 hours in Dhofar, their movements severely restricted by an ongoing civil war. They had only enough time to establish that many of the features required by Nephi’s text were present.

With peace restored and after years of applying for a visa, I was eager to simply see the place for myself and began visiting all areas that were open to visitors, including the fascinating site of Khor Rori. However, it rapidly became obvious to me that the Salalah area in Dhofar failed, in significant ways, to match the description of the Old World Bountiful preserved in 1 Nephi. The basic elements reported by the Hiltons were not found in any single area, as the text seemed to require, but were widely scattered. More significantly, several of them were altogether absent,

such as timber trees, natural vegetation, the oft-mentioned “fruit” for which Bountiful was named, and a nearby mountain.

While still in Oman I began a closer re-examination of Nephi’s text to extract the details about Bountiful. A total of twelve descriptors, both logical and textual requirements, emerged¹ and it became obvious that further exploration was needed before conclusions could be drawn.

The following year, 1988, I returned to Oman, this time pushing my exploring further west of Salalah. Almost immediately, I determined that the Qamar mountain range in the west had pockets of greater fertility than the Qara hills inland of the Salalah bay, demolishing the prevailing belief (among Latter-day Saint and non-Latter-day Saint scholars alike back then) that the Qara hills were the only place where trees grew in all of Arabia. This discovery reinforced the need to continue exploration further west along the Dhofar coast and into Yemen.

Thus began a four-year series of visits exploring the hundreds of miles of coast of both Oman and Yemen. By the conclusion of the visits in 1992, the entire eastern coast of Arabia from Aden northwards had been explored and documented, on the ground — the only time this has been done.

It is difficult to overstate the significance of this exploration and the various studies made into the potential location of the Old World Bountiful, described with some tantalizing details in Nephi’s text as a truly special place “prepared of the Lord” (1 Nephi 17:5). Initially, the resources of this special place had to provide water, food, and shelter for the group to enable them to recover from years of overland travel. Then, following the direction of the Lord to build a ship, it needed to provide other resources such as ore and timber, plus a physical setting allowing

1. These have become widely accepted since they were first posited. See, for example, “148-Twelve Requirements for the Land of Bountiful,” *BYU Studies* (1999), <https://byustudies.byu.edu/further-study-chart/148-twelve-requirements-for-the-land-of-bountiful/>; and John W. Welch and Greg Welch, “Twelve Requirements for the Land of Bountiful,” *Charting the Book of Mormon: Visual Aids for Personal Study and Teaching* (Provo, UT: Foundation for Ancient Research and Mormon Studies, 1999), Chart 148, <https://archive.bookofmormoncentral.org/content/twelve-requirements-land-bountiful>. Also see: *Book of Mormon: Student Manual: Religion 121-122* (Salt Lake City: Seminaries and Institutes of Religion, 2009), 37-38, <https://www.churchofjesuschrist.org/study/manual/book-of-mormon-student-manual/chapter-5-1-nephi-16-18> and a map of the entire land route (p. 410), <https://www.churchofjesuschrist.org/study/manual/book-of-mormon-student-manual/appendix-journey>. This was also published in Warren P. Aston, *Lehi and Sariah in Arabia: The Old World Setting of the Book of Mormon* (Xlibris: 2015), 104-106.

a ship capable of reaching the New World to be built and launched into the ocean.

With the coastal exploration completed, closer investigation of the most promising candidate for Bountiful began in 1993 with the first full expedition team being sponsored by FARMS. Annual efforts continued, but aside from these teams, no other Latter-day Saint efforts were undertaken until 1999. Research visits continued over the years since, usually without any institutional support, until the arrival of the COVID pandemic in 2020. Late last year, in 2021, travel restrictions to Oman finally eased, and my research and the work of others was able to resume.

Oman Government Decree Protecting Khor Kharfot and Wadi Sayq

Early in 2020, Sultan Qaboos of Oman passed away. During his almost fifty-year reign he brought Oman from an isolated, almost totally undeveloped backwater to the modern, friendly, and peaceful nation it is today. He was succeeded by Sultan Haitham bin Tarik, the former Minister for Heritage and Culture since 2002, a position overseeing all activities connected with archaeological and anthropological fields more generally.



Figure 1. A team of 22 researchers from the British Exploring Society (BES) photographed in 2012 at Khor Kharfot. Multiple visits by BES teams have resulted in an abundance of published papers. (Image courtesy of BES.)

On August 23, 2021, the new Sultan — well aware of the interest in Khor Kharfot shown over many years by Latter-day Saint researchers and many non-Latter-day Saints (for an example of the latter, see the team pictured in Figure 1) interested in the unique flora and fauna there — decreed that the entirety of Khor Kharfot and of Wadi Sayq be designated an “Archaeological Reserve.”² This was a particularly gratifying development for me, as I had led a campaign from 2008–2011, lobbying through various government departments in Oman, utilizing Omani and Gulf media, and finally through UNESCO, for the protection of Khor Kharfot due to threatened development projects. The effort was ultimately successful. With this new decree, some of the issues that have continued to degrade the site — including, sadly, the acts of some members of the Church — will end. Anyone wishing to visit Khor Kharfot and Wadi Sayq in the future, for any reason, will require a specific government permit.

Ancient Timber Resources in Dhofar

Late in 2021 a new project began to identify what timber and food resources would have been available to people living in southern Oman in the pre-modern period, extending back 3000 years into the past. This has already largely been done in the Salalah area bounded by the Qara hills, but has not yet been done further west in the equally large area bounded by the higher Qamar mountains. The two areas are quite different geographically and have climatic differences as a result, although both are impacted by the *khareef* (the annual monsoon rains).

For the first step, last December a senior Omani botanist from the Royal Botanical Garden near Muscat joined me for several days to make an initial identification of all present-day flora, including trees, at various locations along the Qamar coast. While several botanical studies have been undertaken at Khor Kharfot in the past, this new study encompasses the whole coastal region.

2. This was accomplished through Royal Decree No. 58/2021. Two representative media features published about the decree: “Khor Kharfot Archaeological Reserve famed for grazing trees, water resources,” *Oman Observer*, August 23, 2021, <https://www.omanobserver.om/article/1105834/oman/khor-kharfot-archaeological-reserve-famed-for-grazing-trees-water-resources>; “HM issues Royal Decree to establish Khor Kharfot Archaeological Reserve,” *Times of Oman*, August 23, 2021, <https://timesofoman.com/article/105802-hm-issues-royal-decree-to-establish-archaeological-reserve-in-dhofar>.



Figure 2. A general view of trees near Dhalqut taken during a survey in December, 2021.

Despite being undertaken at the beginning of the dry season, this initial survey revealed several useful species that Latter-day Saint commentary, including my own, has been unaware of, giving us a baseline against which the next step — pollen studies that can be carbon dated — will be undertaken. This is expected to take up to two years and among other things will give us a much clearer picture of what the Lehte community would have had available ca. 600 BC.

New Insights into Ruins at Khor Kharfot

During my explorations of the little-visited al Hauta coast in 2021, I came across a striking stone tower standing high above one of the two major wadis there. Access to the tiny village on the coast was only possible by sea until just a decade or so ago. During my follow-up research after that first visit, I established that only *one* of the recognized authorities in early Arabian history and archaeology was aware of the tower and that no one had properly investigated it. There was no mention of it in the archaeological catalogs and atlases.

In March 2022 I returned for an extended and closer examination of the tower. Local informants claim that the tower was built by the Minjui, a somewhat mysterious group of unknown origin who ruled Dhofar a millennium ago. The tower was supposedly built as the lower end of a simple pulley system designed to bring goods down from the mountains above.



Figure 3. The tower on the al Hauta coast. It stands 6 meters (just over 20 feet) tall.



Figure 4. The collapsed tower structure at Khor Kharfot, in a view facing the ocean.

What intrigued me upon hearing this was that in 2010 our expedition team at Khor Kharfot was told the same thing about the largest ruin there. A large collapsed structure on the eastern side of the bay dominates

the area. It, too, sits directly below the high mountain and Khor Kharfot is accessed mostly by sea, as was al Hauta until very recently. Are the similarities between the two towers just coincidence? The al Hauta structure has now been placed under the protection of Oman's Ministry of Heritage and Culture and plans are already underway to see what more can be learned about its history and potential link to Khor Kharfot.³

To be clear: the tower on the al Hauta coast was built more than a thousand years too late to have any possible direct connection with the LeHITE clan's stay at Bountiful. It now seems likely that the same is *also* true of the structure that dominates the eastern side of Khor Kharfot, a place that shows every indication of being a collapsed version of the al Hauta tower, i.e., a squared stone tower, perhaps built as the base of a pulley system to transfer items between it and the mountain directly behind it.

While this may perplex and even disappoint those who have seen the Khor Kharfot tower as possibly being a tangible link to the LeHites, it is, in fact, a major step forward in our still-developing understanding of the location. Other ruins there are much more likely to be connected to the time period of Lehi and Sariah's group, but there is still a long way to go before our picture of the past is anything close to complete.

Excavations Resume

Many readers will be aware of preliminary excavations at Khor Kharfot from 2016 to 2018 that were widely reported in Latter-day Saint media. Effective February 2022, these have resumed at two locations at Khor Kharfot — one on the western plateau and the other on the eastern side of the bay.

The initial results are expected to appear later in *Interpreter* followed by publication in other secular venues.

Other Projects

Other projects are underway. One is examining claims made some years ago that a large source of iron ore had been located on the coast of Dhofar and could have been a source Nephi used in order to make his

3. My preliminary report documenting the tower at al Hauta and proposing a likely link between it and the tower at Khor Kharfot contains additional images. See Warren P. Aston, "The Enigmatic Minjui: Potential Traces of a Forgotten Dynasty in Dhofar," *Popular Archaeology* (July 15, 2022), <https://popular-archaeology.com/article/mysteries-in-stone/> and https://www.academia.edu/83225362/The_Enigmatic_Minjui_Potential_traces_of_a_forgotten_dynasty_in_Dhofar.

tools. However, initial analysis by geologists at Sultan Qaboos University in Muscat of samples collected in March 2022 has raised some questions about this site that are currently being resolved. Regardless of the outcome, this possible ore source has no direct bearing on either of the Bountiful candidates (Khor Rori and Khor Kharfot) under consideration by scholars; both have established and accessible iron-ore deposits. It is, however, of interest geologically and helps us better appreciate this area.

And, in a completely unexpected development related to my explorations in Oman, several new sources have been found for very early maps of Arabia that preserve the tribal place-name NHM. One source alone has some 1300 maps that are available for checking! Examining these maps and collating the data will reveal much about the historical documentation of the tribal name and inform our knowledge about interactions between both the sub-tribes of the Nihm and its neighboring tribes. More details will be forthcoming in the near future.

Summary

The work continues of bringing the ancient background, both Old and New World, of our keystone scripture, the Book of Mormon, into the light. A great many fields of scholarship are involved and those who follow these studies see a steady stream of insights and correspondences that enhance plausibility of an ancient origin for the text being published, primarily by The Interpreter Foundation, Book of Mormon Central (especially its Evidence Central), and *BYU Studies Quarterly*. In my own research, it has been a revelation to me that even after 35 years of exploring this one special area of Oman, there remains much to do and more to discover. I'm impressed with the work of non-Latter-day Saint scientists in many fields who have done, and continue to do, what we have not always had the ability to accomplish ourselves.

What seems certain is that as we embrace this research and dig beyond our cultural assumptions, our understanding of Nephi's account and of its setting in the Old World will continue to deepen.

Warren P. Aston is an independent researcher based in Brisbane, Australia. Since 1984 his exploratory efforts throughout the Near East and Mesoamerica have identified the candidates for "Nahom" and the Old World "Bountiful" now accepted by most Latter-day Saint scholars. In 2013 he co-founded the Khor Kharfot Foundation, leading several international teams undertaking fieldwork at the site. He is the author

of In the Footsteps of Lehi (1994); Lehi and Sariah in Arabia: The Old World Setting of the Book of Mormon (2015) and numerous papers and articles. Warren's findings have been reported in Church Education System manuals, BYU Studies Quarterly, Encyclopedia of Mormonism, and the Journal of Book of Mormon Studies. They have also been presented at non-Latter-day Saint forums such as the annual Seminar for Arabian Studies in the UK and in publications such as the Journal of Arabian Studies. His work continues in both Arabia and Mesoamerica, including a major Book of Mormon Central exploratory project focused on the hill Ramah/Cumorah.

THE DIACHRONIC USAGE OF EXCLAMATION MARKS ACROSS THE MAJOR BOOK OF MORMON EDITIONS

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Abstract: *The usage of the exclamation mark has changed over time but continues to serve as an important textual interpretation aid. Punctuation itself has not been a permanent fixture in English, rather it was slowly introduced to English documents with changing standard usages after the invention of the printing press. Here we highlight the use of the exclamation mark across major editions of the Book of Mormon and document the presence of the exclamation mark in a reference table.*

When the Book of Mormon was first translated and dictated by Joseph Smith to his scribe Oliver Cowdery, it was done without punctuation. The original manuscript was thus a stream of unbroken text. Though Cowdery and another scribe added scattered punctuation to the printer's manuscript, a compositor for the Grandin Press, John Gilbert, largely disregarded it.¹ Instead, Gilbert primarily employed his own punctuation and paragraphing — even with no affiliation to the new Church. John Gilbert commented on the 1830 manuscript some sixty-three years later:

Every chapter, if I remember correctly, was one solid paragraph, without a punctuation mark, from beginning to end. ... I punctuated it to make it read as I supposed the

1. Royal Skousen, "Worthy of Another Look: John Gilbert's 1892 Account of the 1830 Printing of the Book of Mormon," *Journal of Book of Mormon Studies* 21, no. 2 (2012): 58–72.

Author intended, and but very little punctuation was altered in proof-reading.²

From these remarks, it is unclear whether Gilbert was referring to Smith or the ancient authors of various books within the Book of Mormon. Even still, the overwhelming majority of John Gilbert's edits were deemed acceptable by early Church leaders for the first publication of the Book of Mormon. According to Royal Skousen, compiler of *The Book of Mormon: The Earliest Text*, it is estimated "that over 90 percent of Gilbert's punctuation marks in the printer's and original manuscripts were carried over without change into the 1830 edition."³

Since the first edition in 1830, there have been twenty English editions of the Book of Mormon recognized by The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints or the Community of Christ (formerly Reorganized Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints).⁴ A short history of various editions of the Book of Mormon is available in Appendix 1. For more on the story of the earliest editions of the Book of Mormon, including punctuation, we refer the readers to *The Parallel Book of Mormon: The 1830, 1837, and 1840 Editions* by Curt Bench.

With every new edition of the Book of Mormon came changes to the format, grammar, and punctuation. For instance, the original unpunctuated text of 2 Nephi 13:9 read,

wo unto their souls for they have rewarded evil unto themselves

However, John Gilbert added sentence capitalization, an exclamation mark after *souls*, and a period after *themselves*. Following this, the punctuated 1830 text read,

Wo unto their souls! For they have rewarded evil unto themselves.

Four editions later (1879), the punctuation of this verse was changed: the sentence-medial (mid-sentence) exclamation mark following *souls*

2. Memorandum by John H. Gilbert, September 8, 1892, Church History Catalog, The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, <https://catalog.churchofjesuschrist.org/assets/162efea4-cb3f-459f-937f-949b3995e572/0/0>.

3. Skousen, "Worthy of Another Look," 66; Stephen D. Ricks, Donald W. Parry, and Andrew H. Hedges, eds., *The Disciple as Witness: Essays on Latter-Day Saint History and Doctrine in Honor of Richard Lloyd Anderson* (Provo, UT: FARMS, 2000).

4. Royal Skousen, ed., *The Book of Mormon: The Earliest Text* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2009), 739–44.

was replaced by a comma, and the period following *themselves* was replaced with the sentence-final exclamation mark. This change reflected a general change in punctuation usage at the time. Accordingly, the subsequent editions read,

Wo unto their souls, for they have rewarded evil unto themselves!

This change in the location and use of the exclamation mark shifted emphasis from the worth of a soul (especially one who sins) towards the consequences of evil choices. While not affecting the semantic content, this subtle shift introduced by punctuation seems to alter the clausal emphasis: either on the distressing state of the soul or the consequences of wicked actions. Consequently, it creates a change in tone that may inform one's interpretation.

Similarly, Alma 5:37 also once contained a sentence-medial exclamation mark that was changed to sentence-final. Compare these two excerpts, showing the punctuation change:

Oh! ye workers of iniquity. (1879)

O ye workers of iniquity; ... but ye will not hearken unto his voice! (2013)

This change shifts the focus from a call for attention to a judgment of the behaviors of the people. With the exclamation mark employed at the end of the long verse, the verse now emphasizes that this group is prideful, foolishly choosing to ignore Christ's call.

Interpretation disparities only widen in instances where the exclamation mark was changed to (or from) a question mark. In 1879, Ammon's comment in Alma 26:3 existed as a posed question, compared below to its current punctuation.

How many of [the Lamanites] are brought to behold the marvellous light of God? (1879)

How many of [the Lamanites] are brought to behold the marvellous light of God! (1920–current)

Reverted back to an exclamation mark in the subsequent 1920 edition, this question mark renders this statement to be read with significantly different intent, perhaps offering a rhetorical purpose or seeking information rather than glorying in God's work.

In this article, we consider the diachronic use of all of the exclamation marks for the eight Book of Mormon editions featured by The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints on its official website under the heading

“History of the Scriptures.”⁵ Precisely *because* the printer’s manuscript was presented without punctuation — and presumably the reformed Egyptian from which it was written was also unpunctuated — the presence of punctuation necessarily affects one’s reading of the Book of Mormon. It cannot be ignored because it determines the sentence shape and, in many cases, its meaning. Underscoring this verity, Royal Skousen, in his *Analysis of Textual Variants of the Book of Mormon* explains “how a single word or punctuation mark might alter our understanding of a verse.”⁶

The exclamation mark, as a mark of emphasis or focus, especially encourages readers to be drawn to the statements or words that are marked, creating a textual world in which it is not only the reader, the text, and the Spirit, but unavoidably also the editor(s)’s interpretation. Starting with a brief history of the exclamation mark, we discuss the process for making changes to the editions and document each use of the exclamation mark across eight editions.

A Brief History of The Exclamation Mark

The term *punctuation* comes from the word *punctilious*, meaning *attentive to formality or etiquette*, elucidating the primary role of punctuation as, what editor Lynne Truss calls, “a *courtesy* designed to help readers to understand a story.”⁷ Introduced in the later fifteenth century, the exclamation was among the last marks introduced to punctuation. Over the years, scholars identified three main purposes for punctuation (and for the exclamation mark in particular): to serve a rhetorical function such as wonder, to indicate pauses, and to clarify sentence construction.

Over time, changes occurred regarding the formatting and function of the exclamation mark. It has long been used to express admiration,⁸

5. “History of the Scriptures,” The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, April 13, 2021, <https://abn.churchofjesuschrist.org/study/manual/about-the-scriptures/history?lang=eng&adobe>; See also “Understanding the Process of Publishing the Book of Mormon,” Church Newsroom, The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, January 1, 2008, <https://newsroom.churchofjesuschrist.org/article/understanding-the-process-of-publishing-the-book-of-mormon>.

6. Grant Hardy, “Approaching Completion: The Book of Mormon Critical Text Project,” *BYU Studies Quarterly* 57, no. 1 (2018): 167.

7. Lynne Truss, “Introduction — The Seventh Sense,” in *Eats, Shoots, and Leaves: The Zero Tolerance Approach to Punctuation* (New York: Gotham Books, 2004), 7, emphasis added.

8. F. Howard Collins, *Authors’ and Printers’ Dictionary* (London: Oxford University Press, 1912), 309–10.

but the use of the exclamation mark to express friendship or sincerity, especially in emails and social media, is a relatively new development.⁹ Using it to express thanks is also a modern shift in usage, such as signing emails with *Thank you so much!!!!*. These usages did not appear in any usage dictionaries until 2019. While the first users of the exclamation mark would perhaps have gawked at some modern constructions like

I'm so excited to see you tomorrow!!!!

where it would seem one exclamation is not enough, modern readers might likewise find the following construction a little odd:

I'm so excited! to see you tomorrow.

Yet, this kind of sentence-medial punctuation was common until the 1980s, when this usage was dropped in favor of sentence-final usage. The primary function of punctuation in time and context “is to resolve structural uncertainties in a text, and to signal nuances of semantic significance which might otherwise not be conveyed at all, or would at best be much more difficult for a reader to figure out.”¹⁰

Charting Changes in the Placement and Frequency of the Exclamation Mark

Our research team obtained data on the placement of exclamation marks for two of the editions — 1981 and 2013 — through digital versions extant in WordCruncher,¹¹ a textual analysis software developed by Monte Shelley and Jason Dzubak at Brigham Young University's Digital Humanities Office. From the WordCruncher software, we exported the data into a tabular format and filtered for verses that contained exclamation marks.

The remaining editions that we analyzed are available on Archive.org,¹² which is also known as the “Internet Archive” and hosts millions

9. Stuart Jeffries, “The Joy of Exclamation Marks!” *The Guardian*, Guardian News and Media, April 28, 2009, <https://www.theguardian.com/books/2009/apr/29/exclamation-mark-punctuation>.

10. Malcolm B. Parkes, *Pause and Effect: An Introduction to the History of Punctuation in the West* (New York: Routledge, 2016), 1.

11. “WordCruncher: Search, Study and Analyze,” V.7.1.107, Digital Humanities, Brigham Young University, 1991–2022, Windows 10, app by Jason Dzubak, James Rosenvall, and Monte Shelley. Software available at <https://wordcruncher.com>.

12. We searched the book title “Book of Mormon” on archive.org and found over 5,000 results. Many of these are publications related to the Book of Mormon, and so we sifted through to identify those that included a PDF of the Book of Mormon.

of books, movies, software, music, websites, and more in a digital format. Since the labeling is sometimes unclear or absent, some manual intervention was necessary to examine the publication stamps for each edition. These editions were in a scanned PDF format, making extraction of the data more difficult. Once the desired editions were located, exclamation marks were then painstakingly searched by hand, and whenever an exclamation mark was identified, the verse with the mark was carefully transcribed to preserve the edition's variance. From this transcription, two things were excluded: superscript footnotes and any hyphenation of words due to word wrapping.¹³

The table in Appendix 2 summarizes these changes involving the exclamation mark across the major editions of the Book of Mormon. Each reference in the table includes the parenthetical phrase that directly precedes the exclamation mark and the edition(s) in which it appears.

Findings

Looking at each exclamation mark from the vantage point of the current 2013 edition, we find that they are naturally divided into four categories: those preserved across all the editions up to the present; those added since the first edition (and remain in the current edition); those removed since the first edition; and lastly, those that underwent multiple revisions. This last category is referred to hereafter as “irregularities.”

Preserved

Only fifty-seven of the original seventy-four exclamation marks from the 1830 edition are retained in the 2013 edition. Thus, while 77 percent of the original remain, they comprise only half of the current edition's 113 instances of the exclamation. Whether this is a trend of cultural emphasis on the exclamation mark or attributable to some other aspect of editing is unclear.

Once these entries were narrowed down, each PDF was found on pages 2–3 of the results.

13. We wanted to preserve only the text that is considered scriptural. The footnote characters are considered metadata, and the text is more easily comparable without them. Likewise, there are two types of hyphenations: soft and hard hyphens. Hard hyphens are when a word purposely has a hyphen in the middle of the word. Soft hyphens are added when the word is being split and partially moved to the next line of text. When the word is designed to have a hard hyphen, then the hyphen is preserved. When the word is being split because of word wrapping, we ignore the hyphen.

Added

Over the several editions of the Book of Mormon since the 1830 edition, sixty-seven instances of exclamation marks were added, though only fifty-five of them still exist in the 2013 edition. These fifty-five remaining instances were added at various times: one was added in the Second Edition (1837), two in the Orson Pratt Revision (1879), and the other fifty-two in the committee of Apostles edition (1920).

The added exclamation mark in the Second Edition was likely to conform to the already-established pattern of punctuation. In First Nephi 11, Nephi is commanded by an angel a total of eight times to *Look!* All these instances were followed by an exclamation mark, except for the instance in the twelfth verse, which, due to the Second Edition revisions, now follows the established pattern.

In the 1830 edition, there were only nine instances of the exclamative *wo*. These were preserved through the 2013 edition, but in many cases the placement of the exclamation mark was moved from the sentence-medial to sentence-final position. However, in the 1920 edition, twenty-seven more “woeful” statements were made exclamative. This means that over half of the additions of the exclamation mark in the 1920 edition were of this type. Two examples of added exclamations statements in the 1920 edition include Lehi’s lamentation and Nephi’s recording of Isaiah’s prophecy:

Wo, wo, unto Jerusalem, for I have seen thine abominations!
(1 Nephi 1:13)

Wo unto the wicked, for they shall perish, for the reward of
their hands shall be upon them! (2 Nephi 13:11)

Removed

Since the 1830 edition, sixteen exclamation marks have been removed. While seven were removed across the span of the 1800s, nine were removed in 1920. The majority of these were replaced with periods and commas. Notably, seven of the sixteen utterances in which exclamations were removed contained the imperative *Behold*. For example, 1 Nephi 16:26 from the 1830 edition stated:

“And it came to pass that the voice of the Lord said unto him,
Look upon the ball, and behold the things which are written!”

In this verse, there are two imperatives: *look* and *behold*. However, in 1920, this exclamation mark was removed and replaced with a

period. It is significant that while similar words such as *look* and *wo* were receiving additional exclamation marks, the word *behold* was stripped of its exclamation mark in several instances. These variances are puzzling, especially since *look* and *behold* are synonyms and may be used interchangeably.

Irregularities

Not every exclamation mark in the Book of Mormon has a straightforward narrative; some have a more complex diachronic history. There are fourteen exclamation mark “irregularities” in the Book of Mormon. These are subcategorized as follows: (1) added and then removed; and (2) removed, re-added, and then preserved in the 2013 version; and in just the 1840 edition, there is a further category of (3) removed, re-added, and then removed.

Added and Then Removed

There are twelve instances of exclamation marks in the Book of Mormon that were added and then removed. Of these, all were added in the 1800s and eight were removed in the 1920s. Typically, these exclamation marks were switched to periods, commas, and question marks. The affected books in this category are 1 Nephi, Jacob, Alma, Helaman, 3 Nephi, and Mormon. Though these changes were distributed across different books within the Book of Mormon, five of the twelve added-and-then-removed exclamation marks are found in Alma.

Removed, Re-added, and Then Preserved

The sole instance in this category is found in Alma 26:3, where Ammon glories in the Lamanites coming unto the Lord, exclaiming,

But behold, how many of them are brought to behold the marvelous light of God!

In 1841, this exclamation mark was changed to a question mark, which consequently affected the function of the clause. When read as an interrogative statement, it is less certain that the speaker already possesses the answer to the question. However, in 1920, this was changed back to an exclamation mark and has remained since.

Removed, Re-added, and Then Removed Again

This category only includes two verses: 2 Nephi 13:9 and 2 Nephi 13:11. The exclamation mark in 2 Nephi 13:9 was removed in 1840 when it was replaced with a question mark, re-added in 1841 with an exclamation mark, and then removed again in 1920. This last change may have to

do in part with the transition from sentence-medial to sentence-final punctuation. The original verse in the 1830 edition read:

The show of their countenance doth witness against them,
and doth declare their sin to be even as Sodom, and they
cannot hide it. Wo unto their souls! for they have rewarded
evil unto themselves.

Similarly, in 2 Nephi 13:11, the exclamation mark was removed in 1840, re-added in 1841, and then removed in subsequent editions.

Discussion

It is not the aim of this paper to elucidate the best methodologies or approaches to use in the study of the exclamation mark throughout the Book of Mormon. However, for an example of one approach to studying the exclamation point in the 2013 edition, see Hingson, et al. (forthcoming).¹⁴ Furthermore, a few observations based on another approach used by Anderson (2022) in her master's thesis is worth noting here.¹⁵ There, Anderson used Ricoeur's interpretation theory, which describes the necessary interrelationship between the reader and the text for interpretation to occur. Since this theory has a rich history of application to religious texts, Anderson applied it to help uncover relationships between the genre of text and use of the exclamation mark.

One underlying theme that Anderson noted throughout the editions is that the epistle genre exclaims themes of God's judgment, power, and destruction, while commands, or imperatives, exclaim the theme of love of God due to the sacrifice of Christ. The 1830 edition conveys that both God's love and power are among the most important doctrines to be emphasized. This aligns with Joseph Smith's remarks in his King Follett Sermon, where he states that the first principle of the gospel is "to know for a certainty the character of God."¹⁶ Thus the 1830 edition calls the reader to behold the love of God and sacrifice of Christ and makes an argument for God's character.

14. Hingson, et al, "Something Wicked this Way Comes! Applying Linguistic Structures within Ricoeur's Interpretation Theory" (unpublished manuscript, September 23, 2022), Microsoft Word file.

15. Brooke Anderson, "Exclamation Marks in the Book of Mormon: A Linguistic Analysis" (unpublished master's thesis, Brigham Young University, 2022).

16. B. H. Roberts, *History of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints* (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 1950), 6:305, <https://byustudies.byu.edu/further-study-lesson/volume-6-chapter-14/>.

By the 1920 edition, the changes in exclamation marks shifts some from focusing primarily on the characterization of God; instead, exclamation points co-occur with *no statements*. These exclaimed verses contain themes of the destruction and wickedness that results from rejecting or forgetting Christ, His works, and His counsel. By the exclamations of asides (brief tangential remarks, such as Mormon's editorial comments), the punctuation aims the message at the future reader to whom Mormon was writing. These exclamations that emphasize what is happening outside of Book of Mormon times draw us into the eternal underlying themes of salvation through Christ. In all, the 1920 edition sees a larger emphasis on the many sins we can commit and the need to call upon God for his grace in overcoming them. The calamities of hell are painted in vivid picture, as is the call to repentance. The asides bring the story to the reader as they exclaim the foolishness of men at the denial of Christ and the compensating need for the preaching of the Gospel.

The shifts in what is exclaimed from 1830 to 1920 may reflect changing views or approaches toward religion, punctuation generally, Church missionary efforts, or those doctrines that merit emphasis by inspired leaders at the time. These areas (and more) are worth examining to see what impact punctuation has on interpretation of the Book of Mormon. These kinds of analysis and scholarship are made possible by compiling all instances of punctuation marks across time and editions in one place (as done for the exclamation mark in Appendix 2) so that future scholars may more easily analyze and interpret them.

Conclusion

Over the 183-year period in which the eight Church-featured editions of the Book of Mormon were produced, the exclamation mark underwent a number of changes as to its frequency and placement. Of the original seventy-four exclamation marks added by John Gilbert in the first edition, fifty-seven (77 percent) are preserved in the 2013 edition of the Book of Mormon. In contrast to the first edition's 74, the current edition (2013) has 113 exclamation marks; fifty-eight (51 percent) are preserved from the first edition, while the remaining fifty-five (49 percent) were added in later editions and perpetuated to the present. Of those fifty-five later added, most of them (fifty-two) were added in 1920. Since 1920, only minimal changes to exclamation marks were made in the text.

An understanding of the various changes, as well as the larger trends they exhibit, will aid readers' interpretation of the Book of Mormon text.

Through closer examination, changes in exclamation marks may reveal a doctrinal emphasis from solely focusing on God's character, to also now alerting readers to the dangers of sin and exigency to personally seek salvation through Christ. Consequently, by observing where these impactful marks occur in the text of the various Book of Mormon editions, we gain greater insight into those doctrines, principles, and commentaries regarded by their editors as worthy of the exclamation and its attending emphasis at the time.

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Appendix 1: Eight Major Book of Mormon Editions

Information for this appendix was adapted from a page on The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints' official website: History of the Scriptures.¹⁷

1830: The First Edition

This edition was created based on the original manuscript as dictated by Joseph Smith, as well as the printer's manuscript — a copy of the original produced by Oliver Cowdery for printing purposes. The edition consisted of 5,000 copies printed by E.B. Grandin in Palmyra, New York, with the aid of the typesetter, John Gilbert.

1837: The Second Edition

Printed in Kirtland, Ohio, this edition underwent hundreds of grammatical changes and had a preface written by Parley P. Pratt and John Goodson. The 1830 edition and the printer's manuscript were used as the basis for this edition.

1840: The Third Edition

Joseph Smith made corrections to this edition, but because of the Third Edition's rarity and limited availability to the Apostles in England, the First European Edition (known as the 1841 edition) served as the basis for most subsequent publications of the Book of Mormon by the Church. Thus, Joseph Smith's 1840 corrections were not referenced for changes made to any of the other listed editions, making it an edition that has no influence on current punctuation choices in the Book of Mormon. However, many of the errors, grammatical or content-related, were gradually corrected over the following century.

1841: The First European Edition

With Joseph Smith's permission, the Book of Mormon was printed by J. Tompkins in Liverpool, England, while the apostles Brigham Young, Heber C. Kimball, and Parley P. Pratt were serving missions there with

17. See <https://www.churchofjesuschrist.org/study/manual/about-the-scriptures/history>.

the other Twelve Apostles. This was the last edition of the Book of Mormon to be published in Joseph Smith's lifetime.

1879: The Orson Pratt Revision

Orson Pratt made his own revision at Brigham Young's request. The versification of the Book of Mormon was introduced in this edition. This edition was electrotyped in London, England, but printed and bound in Liverpool. Pratt took duplicate electrotypes to Salt Lake City. This set was used for most Book of Mormon copies until the Apostles' Revision (1920).

1920: The Apostles' Revision

A committee of the Apostles of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-Day Saints held a conference in 1920 with a mandate "to examine the several editions of the Book of Mormon' (that is, to compare texts)," and "to correct a few errors that had crept into some of the issues through bad proof-reading' (to update the text)."¹⁸ The committee was composed of four apostles and two general authorities, with Elder George F. Richards acting as chair because of seniority and Elder James E. Talmage having the most editing experience. These two had the heaviest hand in the editing process, with Talmage effectively becoming managing editor and, later, project manager. Edits were made on the most recent 1912 edition with reference to the other available editions. Interestingly, neither the original nor the printer's manuscript were available at this time for comparison. Also of interest to this study is that while the First Presidency reviewed any proposed changes to the text, "the First Presidency allowed the committee to implement punctuation changes without review."¹⁹

1981: Scriptures Publication Committee Edition

As part two of the Church's historic English scriptures project, this edition received new and expanded chapter summaries, as well as expanded footnotes cross-referencing all the Church's standard works. Some additional textual corrections were made to the Book of Mormon based on close comparisons with early manuscripts.

18. Richard L. Saunders, *The 1920 Edition of the Book of Mormon: A Centennial Adventure in Latter-Day Saint Book History* (Salt Lake City: Greg Kofford Books, 2021), 25.

19. *Ibid.*, 33.

2013: The Scriptures Committee Edition

The latest edition — the Scriptures Committee version — was produced in 2013, again under the direction of the First Presidency and Quorum of the Twelve Apostles. The edits were minor, correcting some spelling and punctuation and modernizing some word spellings.

Appendix 2: Table of Exclamation Mark Presence

The presence of an exclamation mark is indicated by a “P” whenever the mark is present in an edition.

Reference	1830	1837	1840	1841	1879	1920	1981	2013
1 Nephi 1:13 (And he read, saying, Wo, wo unto Jerusalem!)	P	P	P	P	P			
1 Nephi 1:13 (And he read, saying: Wo, wo, unto Jerusalem, for I have seen thine abominations!)						P	P	P
1 Nephi 1:14 (Great and marvelous are thy works, O Lord God Almighty!)	P	P	P	P	P	P	P	P
1 Nephi 1:14 (thou wilt not suffer those who come unto thee that they shall perish!)	P	P	P	P	P	P	P	P
1 Nephi 2:9 (O that thou mightest be like unto this river, continually running into the fountain of all righteousness!)						P	P	P
1 Nephi 2:10 (O that thou mightest be like unto this valley, firm and steadfast, and immovable in keeping the commandments of the Lord!)						P	P	P
1 Nephi 11:8 (And it came to pass that the Spirit said unto me: Look!)	P	P	P	P	P	P	P	P
1 Nephi 11:12 (And it came to pass that he said unto me: Look!)		P	P	P	P	P	P	P
1 Nephi 11:19 (and after she had been carried away in the Spirit for the space of a time the angel spake unto me, saying: Look!)	P	P	P	P	P	P	P	P
1 Nephi 11:21 (Behold the Lamb of God, yea, even the Son of the Eternal Father!)	P	P	P	P	P	P	P	P
1 Nephi 11:24 (And after he had said these words, he said unto me: Look!)	P	P	P	P	P	P	P	P
1 Nephi 11:26 (Look and behold the condescension of God!)	P	P	P	P	P	P	P	P
1 Nephi 11:30 (And it came to pass that the angel spake unto me again, saying: Look!)	P	P	P	P	P	P	P	P

Reference	1830	1837	1840	1841	1879	1920	1981	2013
1 Nephi 11:31 (And he spake unto me again, saying: Look!)	P	P	P	P	P	P	P	P
1 Nephi 11:32 (And it came to pass that the angel spake unto me again, saying: Look!)	P	P	P	P	P	P	P	P
1 Nephi 11:35 (I beheld that they were in a large and spacious building, like unto the building which my father saw!)		P	P	P	P			
1 Nephi 12:1 (Look, and behold thy seed, and also the seed of thy brethren!)	P	P	P	P	P			
1 Nephi 12:11 (And the angel said unto me: Look!)	P	P	P	P	P	P	P	P
1 Nephi 12:14 (And the angel said unto me, behold thy seed, and also the seed of thy brethren!)	P	P	P	P				
1 Nephi 13:1 (And it came to pass that the angel spake unto me, saying: Look!)	P	P	P	P	P	P	P	P
1 Nephi 13:11 (behold the wrath of God is upon the seed of thy brethren!)	P	P	P	P				
1 Nephi 14:16 (and, behold, thou seest all these things!)	P							
1 Nephi 14:18 (And it came to pass that the angel spake unto me, saying: Look!)	P	P	P	P	P	P	P	P
1 Nephi 14:20 (And the angel said unto me, Behold, one of the twelve apostles of the Lamb!)	P	P	P	P	P			
1 Nephi 16:26 (look upon the ball, and behold the things which are written!)	P	P	P					
1 Nephi 16:32 (and now when they beheld that I had obtained food, how great was their joy!)						P	P	P
1 Nephi 16:38 (Now, he says that the Lord has talked with him, and also, that angels have ministered unto him!)	P							
1 Nephi 17:40 (Behold, he loved our fathers!)				P	P			
1 Nephi 17:41 (and the labor which they had to perform, was to look!)	P	P	P	P				
1 Nephi 20:18 (O that thou hadst hearkened unto my commandment! (s)) ²⁰	P	P	P	P	P			
2 Nephi 1:13 (they are carried away captive down to the eternal gulf of misery and woe!)	P	P	P	P	P			

20. In the 1830 edition, *commandment* is plural. In all other editions, it appears singular.

Reference	1830	1837	1840	1841	1879	1920	1981	2013
2 Nephi 1:14 (Awake!)	P	P	P	P	P	P	P	P
2 Nephi 4:17 (O wretched man that I am!)						P	P	P
2 Nephi 4:28 (Awake, my soul!)	P	P	P	P	P	P	P	P
2 Nephi 4:32 (my heart is broken and my spirit is contrite!)						P	P	P
2 Nephi 4:32 (O Lord, wilt thou not shut the gates of thy righteousness before me, that I may walk in the path of the low valley, that I may be strict in the plain road!)						P	P	P
2 Nephi 4:33 (O Lord, wilt thou encircle me around in the robe of thy righteousness!)						P	P	P
2 Nephi 4:33 (O Lord, wilt thou make a way for mine escape before mine enemies!)						P	P	P
2 Nephi 4:33 (Wilt thou make my path straight before me!)						P	P	P
2 Nephi 8:9 (Awake, awake!)	P	P	P	P	P	P	P	P
2 Nephi 9:8 (O the wisdom of God!)	P	P	P	P	P			
2 Nephi 9:8 (his mercy and grace!)	P	P	P	P	P	P	P	P
2 Nephi 9:13 (O how great the plan of our God!)	P	P	P	P	P	P	P	P
2 Nephi 9:17 (O the greatness and the justice of our God!)	P	P	P	P	P	P	P	P
2 Nephi 9:19 (O the greatness of the mercy of our God, the Holy One of Israel!)	P	P	P	P	P	P	P	P
2 Nephi 9:20 (O how great the holiness of our God!)	P	P	P	P	P	P	P	P
2 Nephi 9:27 (But wo unto him that has the law given, yea, that has all the commandments of God, like unto us, and that transgresseth them, and that wasteth the days of his probation, for awful is his state!)	P	P	P	P	P	P	P	P
2 Nephi 9:28 (O that cunning plan of the evil one!)	P	P	P	P	P	P	P	P
2 Nephi 9:28 (O the vainness, and the frailties, and the foolishness of men!)	P	P	P	P	P	P	P	P
2 Nephi 13:9 (Wo unto their souls!)	P	P		P	P			
2 Nephi 13:9 (Wo unto their souls! for they have rewarded evil unto themselves!)						P	P	P
2 Nephi 13:11 (Wo unto the wicked!)	P	P		P	P			

Reference	1830	1837	1840	1841	1879	1920	1981	2013
2 Nephi 13:11 (the reward of their hands shall be upon them!)						P	P	P
2 Nephi 15:8 (Wo unto them that join house to house, till there can be no place, that they may be placed alone in the midst of the earth!)	P	P	P	P	P	P	P	P
2 Nephi 15:11 (Wo unto them that rise up early in the morning, that they may follow strong drink, that continue until night, and wine inflammeth them!)	P	P	P	P	P	P	P	P
2 Nephi 15:20 (Wo unto them that call evil good, and good evil, that put darkness for light, and light for darkness, that put bitter for sweet, and sweet for bitter!)	P	P	P	P	P	P	P	P
2 Nephi 15:21 (Wo unto the wise in their own eyes and prudent in their own sight!)	P	P	P	P	P	P	P	P
2 Nephi 15:23 (Who justify the wicked for reward, and take away the righteousness of the righteous from him!)	P	P	P	P	P	P	P	P
2 Nephi 16:5 (Then said I: Wo is unto me!)	P	P	P	P	P	P	P	P
2 Nephi 20:2 (to take away the right from the poor of my people, that widows may be their prey, and that they may rob the fatherless!)	P	P	P	P	P	P	P	P
2 Nephi 20:15 (as if the staff should lift up itself as if it were no wood!)						P	P	P
2 Nephi 24:4 (How hath the oppressor ceased, the golden city ceased!)	P	P	P	P	P	P	P	P
2 Nephi 24:12 (How art thou fallen from heaven, O Lucifer, son of the morning!)	P	P	P	P	P	P	P	P
2 Nephi 24:12 (Art thou cut down to the ground, which did weaken the nations!)	P	P	P	P	P	P	P	P
2 Nephi 26:7 (O the pain, and the anguish of my soul for the loss of the slain of my people!)	P	P	P	P	P	P	P	P
2 Nephi 27:14 (wo be unto him that rejecteth the word of God!)						P	P	P
2 Nephi 27:27 (And wo unto them that seek deep to hide their counsel from the Lord!)						P	P	P
2 Nephi 28:15 (wo, wo, wo be unto them, saith the Lord God Almighty, for they shall be thrust down to hell!)						P	P	P

Reference	1830	1837	1840	1841	1879	1920	1981	2013
2 Nephi 28:16 (Wo unto them that turn aside the just for a thing of naught and revile against that which is good, and say that it is of no worth!)						P	P	P
2 Nephi 28:24 (Therefore, wo be unto him that is at ease in Zion!)						P	P	P
2 Nephi 28:25 (Wo be unto him that crieth: All is well!)						P	P	P
2 Nephi 28:26 (Yea, wo be unto him that hearkeneth unto the precepts of men, and denieth the power of God, and the gift of the Holy Ghost!)						P	P	P
2 Nephi 28:27 (Yea, wo be unto him that saith: We have received, and we need no more!)						P	P	P
2 Nephi 28:28 (And in fine, wo unto all those who tremble, and are angry because of the truth of God!)						P	P	P
2 Nephi 28:29 (Wo be unto him that shall say: We have received the word of God, and we need no more of the word of God, for we have enough!)						P	P	P
2 Nephi 28:32 (Wo be unto the Gentiles, saith the Lord God of Hosts!)						P	P	P
2 Nephi 29:3 (many of the Gentiles shall say: A Bible!)					P	P	P	P
2 Nephi 29:3 (many of the Gentiles shall say: A Bible! A Bible!)					P	P	P	P
2 Nephi 31:5 (O then, how much more need have we, being unholy, to be baptized, yea, even by water!)						P	P	P
Jacob 2:15 (O that he would show you that he can pierce you, and with one glance of his eye he can smite you to the dust!)						P	P	P
Jacob 2:16 (let not this pride of your hearts destroy your souls!)						P	P	P
Jacob 4:9 (For behold, by the power of his word man came upon the face of the earth!)					P			
Jacob 6:3 (and how cursed are they who shall be cast out into their own place!)	P	P	P	P	P	P	P	P
Mosiah 2:19 (O how you ought to thank your heavenly King!)	P	P	P	P	P	P	P	P
Mosiah 3:12 (But wo, wo unto him who knoweth that he rebelleth against God!)						P	P	P

Reference	1830	1837	1840	1841	1879	1920	1981	2013
Mosiah 8:20 (for they will not seek wisdom, neither do they desire that she should rule over them!)						P	P	P
Mosiah 12:2 (Yea, wo be unto this generation!)						P	P	P
Mosiah 12:26 (I say unto you, wo be unto you for perverting the ways of the Lord!)						P	P	P
Mosiah 15:14 (Thy God reigneth!)	P	P	P	P	P	P	P	P
Mosiah 15:15 (And O how beautiful upon the mountains were their feet!)	P	P	P	P	P	P	P	P
Mosiah 15:16 (And again, how beautiful upon the mountains are the feet of those that are still publishing peace!)	P	P	P	P	P	P	P	P
Mosiah 15:17 (And again, how beautiful upon the mountains are the feet of those who shall hereafter publish peace, yea, from this time henceforth and forever!)	P	P	P	P	P	P	P	P
Mosiah 27:37 (And how blessed are they!)	P	P	P	P	P	P	P	P
Mosiah 29:17 (For behold, how much iniquity doth one wicked king cause to be committed!)	P	P	P	P	P			
Mosiah 29:17 (yea, and what great destruction!)	P	P	P	P	P	P	P	P
Alma 5:31 (Wo unto such an one, for he is not prepared, and the time is at hand that he must repent or he cannot be saved!)						P	P	P
Alma 5:32 (Yea, even wo unto all ye workers of iniquity; repent, repent, for the Lord God hath spoken it!)						P	P	P
Alma 5:37 (Oh/O!) ²¹					P			
Alma 5:37 (but ye will not hearken unto his voice!)						P	P	P
Alma 18:14 (therefore Ammon turned himself unto the king, and said unto him what wilt thou that I should do for thee, O King!)			P					
Alma 19:29 (O blessed Jesus, who has saved me from an awful hell!)	P	P	P	P	P	P	P	P
Alma 19:29 (O blessed God, have mercy on this people!)						P	P	P
Alma 24:15 (Oh, how merciful is our God!)	P	P	P	P	P	P	P	P

21. In the 1879 edition it is spelled *Oh*. In all later editions, it is spelled *O*.

Reference	1830	1837	1840	1841	1879	1920	1981	2013
Alma 26:3 (but behold, how many of them are brought to behold the marvelous light of God!)	P	P	P			P	P	P
Alma 26:5 (yea, all the day long did ye labor; and behold the number of your sheaves!)						P	P	P
Alma 29:1 (O that I were an angel, and could have the wish of mine heart, that I might go forth and speak with the trump of God, with a voice to shake the earth, and cry repentance unto every people!)						P	P	P
Alma 29:15 (Behold, they have labored exceedingly, and have brought forth much fruit; and how great shall be their reward!)						P	P	P
Alma 36:20 (And oh, what joy, and what marvelous light I did behold; yea, my soul was filled with joy as exceeding as was my pain!)						P	P	P
Alma 42:25 (What! do ye suppose that mercy can rob justice?)					P			
Alma 60:8 (ye might have sent armies unto them, to have strengthened them, and have saved thousands of them from falling by the sword!)			P					
Alma 60:32 (while your iniquity is for the cause of your love of glory, and the vain things of the world!)			P					
Helaman 7:14 (Yea, because I have got upon my tower that I might pour out my soul unto my God, because of the exceeding sorrow of my heart, which is because of your iniquities!)						P	P	P
Helaman 7:17 (O repent ye, repent ye!)	P	P	P	P	P	P	P	P
Helaman 7:20 (Oh!)					P			
Helaman 7:25 (Yea, wo be unto you because of that great abomination which has come among you; and ye have united yourselves unto it, yea, to that secret band which was established by Gadianton!)						P	P	P
Helaman 7:26 (Yea, wo shall come unto you because of that pride which ye have suffered to enter your hearts, which has lifted you up beyond that which is good because of your exceedingly great riches!)						P	P	P

Reference	1830	1837	1840	1841	1879	1920	1981	2013
Helaman 7:27 (Yea, wo be unto you because of your wickedness and abominations!)						P	P	P
Helaman 12:4 (yea, how quick to hearken unto the words of the evil one, and to set their hearts upon the vain things of the world!)						P	P	P
Helaman 12:5 (yea, how slow to walk in wisdom's paths!)	P	P	P	P	P	P	P	P
Helaman 13:39 (O ye people of the land, that ye would hear my words!)						P	P	P
3 Nephi 9:2 (and it is because of their iniquity and abominations that they are fallen!)						P	P	P
3 Nephi 9:13 (O all ye that are spared, because ye were more righteous than they!)	P							
3 Nephi 11:17 (Hosanna!)	P	P	P	P	P	P	P	P
3 Nephi 11:17 (Blessed be the name of the Most High God!)	P	P	P	P	P	P	P	P
3 Nephi 13:23 (But if thine eye be evil, thy whole body shall be full of darkness. If, therefore, the light that is in thee be darkness, how great is that darkness!)	P	P	P	P	P	P	P	P
3 Nephi 20:40 (Thy God reigneth!)	P	P	P	P	P	P	P	P
3 Nephi 22:11 (O thou afflicted, tossed with tempest, and not comforted!)	P	P	P	P	P	P	P	P
3 Nephi 24:14 (Ye have said, it is vain to serve God, and what doth it profit that we have kept his ordinance, and that we have walked mournfully before the Lord of Hosts!)				P				
3 Nephi 29:5 (Wo unto him that spurneth at the doings of the Lord; yea, wo unto him that shall deny the Christ and his works!)						P	P	P
3 Nephi 29:6 (Yea, wo unto him that shall deny the revelations of the Lord, and that shall say the Lord no longer worketh by revelation, or by prophecy, or by gifts, or by tongues, or by healings, or by the power of the Holy Ghost!)						P	P	P
3 Nephi 29:7 (for he that doeth this shall become like unto the son of perdition, for whom there was no mercy, according to the word of Christ!)						P	P	P
4 Nephi 1:18 (And how blessed were they!)						P	P	P

Reference	1830	1837	1840	1841	1879	1920	1981	2013
Mormon 5:22 (And then, O ye Gentiles, how can ye stand before the power of God, except ye shall repent and turn from your evil ways!)		P	P	P	P			
Mormon 6:17 (O ye fair ones, how could ye have departed from the ways of the Lord!)	P	P	P	P	P	P	P	P
Mormon 6:17 (O ye fair ones, how could ye have rejected that Jesus, who stood with open arms to receive you!)	P	P	P	P	P	P	P	P
Mormon 6:19 (O ye fair sons and daughters, ye fathers and mothers, ye husbands and wives, ye fair ones, how is it that ye could have fallen!)	P	P	P	P	P	P	P	P
Mormon 9:4 (Behold, I say unto you, that ye would be more miserable to dwell with a holy and just God, under a consciousness of your filthiness before him, than ye would to dwell with the damned souls in hell!)					P			
Ether 14:18 (Behold, he sweepeth the earth before him!)	P	P	P	P	P	P	P	P
Moroni 8:12 (for how many little children have died without baptism!)						P	P	P
Moroni 9:15 (Come out in judgment, O God, and hide their sins, and wickedness, and abominations from before thy face!)						P	P	P
Moroni 9:18 (O the depravity of my people!)	P	P	P	P	P	P	P	P