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# BEAUTIFUL PATIENCE

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Daniel C. Peterson

**Abstract:** *Believers in the God of Abraham — who include not only Jews and Christians but also Muslims — are exhorted to call upon him every day, as well as in times of need. We are promised that he will respond to petitionary prayers. Moreover, we are assured that, in the end, believers will prosper, that their faith or trust in him will prove justified. But we are not promised that rewards, compensation, or justice will come to us on our mortal timetable — and this raises sometimes burningly acute questions about Providence and even, for more than a few, about either God’s benevolence, his care, or his sheer existence. So we are also exhorted to be patient. And that sets us up for many of mortality’s greatest tests. In the meantime, while faithfully waiting for God’s promises to be fulfilled, we ourselves are to work toward their fulfillment “with all [our] heart, as working for the Lord, not for human masters” (Colossians 3:23, NIV).*

The remarks below are a lightly edited version of what I delivered at the “U.S. Hazāra Conference 2022,” held in Provo, Utah, at the Conference Center of Brigham Young University on 17 December 2022. The program for the meeting described it as “the first ever Hazāra conference.” “The conference aims to gather the Hazāras across the U.S., harmonize with the interfaith groups of Utah, provide them with an interactive platform, strategize about the future of the Hazāras in the U.S., and organize the Hazāra genocide case.”<sup>1</sup>

The Hazāras are a persecuted ethnic group that is native to a region in central Afghanistan known as Hazārīstān or Hazārajāt but who also live throughout Afghanistan as well as, to some extent, in Pakistan and in Iran. Predominantly if not entirely Shī‘ī Muslims, they speak a dialect known as Hazāragī that is very similar to the dialect of Persian or Fārsī that is called Dari.

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1. Printed program in my possession.

The topic that I was asked to address was “The Power of Prayer,” and specifically (curiously enough) to do it from a Latter-day Saint perspective. I tried to take an ecumenical approach to the topic, citing not only uniquely Latter-day Saint material but, even more, the Bible as well as the Qur’ān. There were excellent but challenging questions afterward, but (so far as I’m aware) they weren’t recorded. This is a people who have really suffered. It was humbling to be asked to speak to them.



First of all, welcome to the United States, to Utah, and to the campus of Brigham Young University. You are not only safe here, you are among friends.

As I understand it, my assignment in my remarks today is to set forth some Latter-day Saint thoughts on prayer, and specifically on petitionary prayer, prayer that asks help from God. Roughly, on what Muslims call *du‘ā*; I hope, though, that what I say will express the faith of *all* of those who belong to what I sometimes call the “Abrahamic religions,” to what Muslim writers have traditionally called the *adyān samawiyya* or “heavenly religions” — and, indeed, to all believers in God.

“God,” the Qur’ān says, “is the light of the heavens and the earth” (Qur’ān 24:35).<sup>2</sup>

*Allāhu nūr al-samawāt wa al-arḍ*

In the Qur’ān, he declares, “I answer the call [*da‘wa*] of the suppliant [*dā‘i*] when he calls upon me [*da‘āni*]” (Qur’ān 2:186). “Call upon me [*ud‘ūnī*], and I will answer” (Qur’ān 40:60).

The context for my remarks, of course, is this conference. More specifically, it is the travails, suffering, and persecution of the Hazāra people, not only under the oppressive rule of the Taliban in Afghanistan but in their exile from their native land.

For all our technological progress and even in the most advanced and powerful states, we humans live in a universe far larger than we are, in a universe and a world that we cannot control — it is beyond our power. And, many times, history and politics overwhelm us. We feel powerless. But believers in God know that a Power exists that is greater than the material cosmos, greater than the most oppressive tyrant, greater than the most unjust regime.

And we resort to petitionary prayer when we realize that we are confronted by forces that are beyond our ability to command. We pray

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2. All quotations from the Qur’ān are my translation.



when our loved ones are gravely ill, for example. This does not mean that we abandon efforts to help the situation ourselves. Praying that God will bless someone who is seriously ill certainly doesn't mean that we stop seeking medical help. But it does show our recognition that the final outcome isn't entirely up to us.

Prayer signals that we believe in Someone who *does* control the final outcome, and it *reminds* us that we believe in Someone who will guarantee that the end for the faithful, for those who have loved and sought to do righteousness, will be a good one. I love the Arabic Islamic term *dhikr* or *zikr*, "remembrance," as the word for certain important Muslim worship practices.

We are to trust in God.

In the Old Testament portion of the Christian Bible, the psalmist says:

Whoever dwells in the shelter of the Most High will rest in the shadow of the Almighty.

I will say of the Lord, "He is my refuge and my fortress, my God, in whom I trust." ...

If you say, "The Lord is my refuge," and you make the Most High your dwelling,  
no harm will overtake you, no disaster will come near your tent.

For he will command his angels concerning you to guard you in all your ways;  
they will lift you up in their hands, so that you will not strike your foot against a stone.

You will tread on the lion and the cobra; you will trample the great lion and the serpent.

"Because he loves me," says the Lord, "I will rescue him;  
I will protect him, for he acknowledges my name.  
He will call on me, and I will answer him; I will be with him in trouble,

I will deliver him and honor him." (Psalm 91:1-2, 9-15)<sup>3</sup>

In a different psalm we learn that

God is our refuge and strength, an ever-present help in trouble.

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3. All biblical quotations are from the New International Version.

Therefore we will not fear, though the earth give way and the mountains fall into the heart of the sea,  
though its waters roar and foam and the mountains quake with their surging ...

Nations are in uproar, kingdoms fall; he lifts his voice, the earth melts.

The LORD Almighty is with us; the God of Jacob is our fortress. ...

He makes wars cease to the ends of the earth.

He breaks the bow and shatters the spear; he burns the shields with fire.

He says, "Be still, and know that I am God; I will be exalted among the nations,

I will be exalted in the earth."

The LORD Almighty is with us; the God of Jacob is our fortress. (Psalm 46:1–3, 6–7, 9–11)

The greatest example of this in the Old Testament occurs in the book of Exodus. The children of Israel have escaped from slavery in Egypt, but now the pharaoh, Egypt's king, is chasing them with his army, and they are trapped at the Red Sea. The people are terrified.

Moses answered the people, "Do not be afraid. Stand firm and you will see the deliverance the Lord will bring you today. The Egyptians you see today you will never see again. The Lord will fight for you; you need only to be still." (Exodus 14:13–14)

But, many times, deliverance isn't so dramatic or so immediate. Or it doesn't seem to come at *all*.

In the New Testament, Jesus says to his disciples

I am sending you out like sheep among wolves. ... Be on your guard; you will be handed over to the local councils and be flogged in the synagogues. On my account you will be brought before governors and kings as witnesses to them and to the Gentiles. ... You will be hated by everyone because of me, but the one who stands firm to the end will be saved. When you are persecuted in one place, flee to another. ... So do not be afraid of them. ... Do not be afraid of those who kill the body but cannot kill the soul. Rather, be afraid of the One who can destroy both soul and body in hell. Are not two sparrows sold for a penny? Yet not one of them will fall to the ground

outside your Father's care. And even the very hairs of your head are all numbered. So don't be afraid; you are worth more than many sparrows. (Matthew 10:16–18, 22–23, 26, 28–31)

Yes, God is in charge. Sometimes, though, a good outcome doesn't arrive when we want it to arrive, certainly not on our timetable. Our ways are not necessarily God's ways. It may not even come in this life or in this world. It may not come at *all* in the exact way that we picture it or want it. And, sometimes, evil men seem to succeed and to prosper.

In the Bible, the ancient patriarch Job (*Ayūb*, in Arabic), asks a question that all of us have asked at one time or another:

Why do the wicked live on, growing old and increasing in power?

They see their children established around them, their offspring before their eyes.

Their homes are safe and free from fear; the rod of God is not on them.

Their bulls never fail to breed; their cows calve and do not miscarry.

They send forth their children as a flock; their little ones dance about.

They sing to the music of timbrel and lyre; they make merry to the sound of the pipe.

They spend their years in prosperity and go down to the grave in peace. (Job 21:7–13)

The Old Testament prophet Malachi raises the same issue:

“You have spoken arrogantly against me,” says the LORD.

“Yet you ask, ‘What have we said against you?’

“You have said, ‘It is futile [useless] to serve God. What do we gain by carrying out his requirements and going about like mourners before the LORD Almighty? But now we call the arrogant blessed. Certainly evildoers prosper, and even when they put God to the test, they get away with it.’”  
(Malachi 3:13–14)

But that is not the whole story. Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr., reminded us that “the arc of the moral universe is long but it bends

toward justice.”<sup>4</sup> Moreover, the story isn’t finished when this life comes to a close, when this world ends.

The Qur’ān frequently distinguishes *al-dunyā* (literally, “the near [life]”) from *al-ākhirā* (literally, “the further [life]” or “the latter [life]”). *Al-dunyā* refers to the world of everyday reality around us. And the Qur’ān plainly assigns it less value than *al-ākhirā*.

The life of this world is nothing but a game and a distraction;  
the Home in the Hereafter is best for those who are aware of  
God. (Qur’ān 6:32)

There is good in this present world for those who do good,  
but their home in the Hereafter is far better: the home of the  
righteous is excellent. (Qur’ān 16:30)

Malachi continues:

Then those who feared the LORD talked with each other, and  
the LORD listened and heard. A scroll of remembrance was  
written in his presence concerning those who feared the LORD  
and honored his name.

“On the day when I act,” says the LORD Almighty, “they will  
be my treasured possession. I will spare them, just as a father  
has compassion and spares his son who serves him. And you  
will again see the distinction between the righteous and the  
wicked, between those who serve God and those who do not.”  
(Malachi 3:16–18)

In the Qur’ān’s beautiful telling of the story of Joseph in Egypt, Joseph’s father, Jacob, has been deprived of his favorite son and is being betrayed and lied to by his other sons. But he does not lose faith, either in God or in an eventual good outcome. “Beautiful patience,” he counsels himself (Qur’ān 12:18):

*fa ṣabrun jamīlun*

It is important to understand, and to help Western non-Muslims understand, the significance of the terms *Islam* and *Muslim*. *Islam* means “submission” and *Muslim* refers to someone who “submits.” The idea of humble submission — not to tyrants or injustice, but to God’s will — is fundamental to the religion taught by the Prophet Muhammad (upon whom be peace). It is, in fact, embodied and illustrated and taught

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4. Dr. Martin Luther King Jr., “Remaining Awake Through a Great Revolution,” (speech, Washington National Cathedral, Washington, DC, March 31, 1968).

even in the physical motions of the *salat* prayer, performed five times each day.

In the Bible, when Job has lost everything — his home, his flocks, his wealth, and his family — in a matter of minutes, his initial reaction is sorrowful. Understandably so. But it isn't anger. Consider his response, as it is recorded in the Old Testament:

At this, Job got up and tore his robe and shaved his head. Then he fell to the ground in worship and said: "Naked I came from my mother's womb, and naked I will depart. The Lord gave and the Lord has taken away; may the name of the Lord be praised." In all this, Job did not sin by charging God with wrongdoing. (Job 1:20–22)

Shortly afterward, having already lost everything and been reduced to poverty, Job is stricken with a serious and humiliating illness. Even his wife advises him to "curse God and die." But he doesn't.

"Shall we accept good from God," he replies, "and not trouble?" And, comments the biblical writer, "In all this, Job did not sin in what he said" (Job 2:9–10).

The mid-nineteenth-century Latter-day Saint pioneers, who settled this valley and the Salt Lake Valley to our north, were driven here by religious persecution. They had previously been driven from New York to Ohio, from Ohio to Missouri, and from Missouri to Illinois. Now, they were being pushed beyond the borders of the United States. Their graves line the so-called "Mormon Trail." "We came here voluntarily," one Church leader is said to have joked many years later, "because we *had to*."

On 15 April 1846 — more than a hundred miles from the city of Nauvoo, Illinois, that they had been forced to abandon, but still 1,200 miles from the Valley of the Great Salt Lake beyond the great Rocky Mountains — a Mormon refugee caravan rested at Locust Creek, Iowa. One of those refugees, an English convert to the Church named William Clayton, wrote the words to a hymn that has been called the "anthem" of the Mormon pioneers. Its final two verses, which remind me of the situation not merely of my people then but of the Hazāra people today, read as follows:

We'll find the place which God for us prepared, Far away in  
the West,  
Where none shall come to hurt or make afraid; There the  
Saints will be blessed.

We'll make the air with music ring, Shout praises to our God  
and King;  
Above the rest these words we'll tell — All is well! All is well!  
And should we die before our journey's through, Happy day!  
All is well!  
We then are free from toil and sorrow, too; With the just we  
shall dwell!  
But if our lives are spared again To see the Saints their rest  
obtain,  
Oh, how we'll make this chorus swell — All is well! All is  
well!<sup>5</sup>

Those who are faithful know that the final end will be good — for  
those who are faithful.

As the Qur'ān says, in *Sūrat al-Baqarah*:

*wa lā taqūlū li-man yuqṭalu fī sabīl Allāh amwātun bal  
aḥyā'un wa-lākin lā tash'urūn*

And do not say of those killed in the path of God, 'They are  
dead.' Rather, they are living, but you do not perceive them.  
(Qur'ān 2:154)

In the New Testament Revelation of John, the apostle writes

I saw under the altar the souls of those who had been slain  
because of the word of God and the testimony they had  
maintained. They called out in a loud voice, "How long,  
Sovereign Lord, holy and true, until you judge the inhabitants  
of the earth and avenge our blood?" Then each of them was  
given a white robe, and they were told to wait a little longer,  
until the full number of their fellow servants, their brothers and  
sisters, were killed just as they had been. (Revelation 6:9–11)

Full justice may not come — usually, it doesn't come — until after  
this life. Here, again, is the biblical Job:

I know that my redeemer lives, and that in the end he will  
stand on the earth. And after my skin has been destroyed, yet

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5. "Come, Come, Ye Saints," *Hymns*, no. 360. For the background, see  
Alexa Reimschuessel, "Nine Facts about 'Come, Come, Ye Saints' and Its  
Composer That Might Surprise You," *Church News*, 25 July 2019, <https://www.churchofjesuschrist.org/church/news/nine-facts-about-come-come-ye-saints-and-its-composer-that-might-surprise-you>.

in my flesh I will see God; I myself will see him with my own eyes — I, and not another. How my heart yearns within me!  
(Job 19:25–27)

We are to pray, to ask for God's help. In the meantime, we submit. We show patience. And we can receive divine comfort.

Let me briefly tell you a story about a famous American poet by the name of Henry Wadsworth Longfellow. He lived in New England in the nineteenth century. His story is particularly relevant at this Christmas season.

Longfellow's first wife, Mary, died after a miscarriage. His second wife, Fanny, died in a household fire. While trying to save her, he himself was burned so badly that he couldn't attend her funeral. And, for the remaining decades of his life, he couldn't shave. Still today, the familiar photographs of him feature a long white patriarchal beard.

"How inexpressibly sad are all holidays,"<sup>6</sup> he wrote on the first Christmas after Fanny's death. One year after her passing, he commented, "I can make no record of these days. Better leave them wrapped in silence. Perhaps someday God will give me peace."<sup>7</sup> His journal entry for 25 December 1862 reads: "'A merry Christmas' say the children, but that is no more for me."<sup>8</sup> Late in 1863, his eldest son, Charles, was severely wounded fighting for the Union in the American Civil War. Longfellow made no journal entry at all for Christmas that year.

On 25 December 1864, he wrote one of the most beloved of all American Christmas carols. Here are the words of the song:

I heard the bells on Christmas day  
Their old familiar carols play,  
And wild and sweet the words repeat  
Of peace on earth, good will to men.  
  
I thought how, as the day had come,  
The belfries of all Christendom  
Had rolled along the unbroken song  
Of peace on earth, good will to men.

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6. Chris Fenner, "I heard the bells on Christmas day," Hymnology Archive (website), 17 December 2019, <https://www.hymnologyarchive.com/i-heard-the-bells-on-christmas-day>. A recent biography is Nicholas A. Basbanes, *Cross of Snow: A Life of Henry Wadsworth Longfellow* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 2020).

7. Ibid.

8. Ibid.

And in despair I bowed my head:  
 “There is no peace on earth,” I said,  
 “For hate is strong and mocks the song  
 Of peace on earth, good will to men.”  
 Then pealed the bells more loud and deep:  
 “God is not dead, nor doth he sleep;  
 The wrong shall fail, the right prevail,  
 With peace on earth, good will to men.”  
 Till, ringing, singing, on its way,  
 The world revolved from night to day,  
 A voice, a chime, a chant sublime,  
 Of peace on earth, good will to men!<sup>9</sup>

Julian of Norwich, a fifteenth-century English mystic, summed up her Christian hope in these simple words: “All shall be well, and all shall be well, and all manner of thing shall be well.”<sup>10</sup>

One of the final verses of the Bible promises that

God shall wipe away all tears from their eyes; and there shall be no more death, neither sorrow, nor crying, neither shall there be any more pain: for the former things are passed away.  
 (Revelation 21:4 KJV)

So, until the final judgment comes and final justice is done, we, as believers, are to pray. And we are to be patient, submissive to the will of God. But prayerful and patient believers shouldn’t stop working to make things right. There is a wonderful phrase in Hebrew, *tikkun olam* (תִּיקּוּן עוֹלָם), which means “repair of the world.” And that is our responsibility, too. As the biblical prophet Amos put it, “Let justice roll on like a river, righteousness like a never-failing stream!” (Amos 5:24).

Oleksandra Matviichuk represented the Center for Civil Liberties, in Kyiv, Ukraine, on 10 December 2022, just a few days ago, when that organization was presented the 2022 Nobel Peace Prize. She is a human-rights lawyer and the Center’s executive director. I quote a passage from her Nobel lecture:

War turns people into numbers. We have to reclaim the names of all victims of war crimes. Regardless of who they are, their social status, the type of crime they have suffered,

9. “I Heard the Bells on Christmas Day,” *Hymns*, no. 214.

10. Julian of Norwich, *Revelations of Divine Love*, chapter 27 (various editions).



and whether the media and society are interested in their cases. Because anyone's life is priceless.<sup>11</sup>

At a minimum, it's essential to remember. It's essential to remember our stories. It's essential, in your case, to remember and to record the names and the stories of the Hazāra people who have suffered and died.

Yelena Bonner, widow of the great Russian physicist, dissident, and Nobel Peace laureate Andrei Sakharov, told the journalist Jay Nordlinger that Sakharov disliked talking about human rights in general. That was too abstract for people. He liked to talk about specific cases, especially about political prisoners that he knew personally. In a similar way, this is how Matviichuk ended her lecture:

You don't have to be Ukrainians to support Ukraine. It is enough just to be humans.

Félix Maradiaga is a heroic Nicaraguan political prisoner. His wife, Berta Valle, has a similar slogan: "Be human."<sup>12</sup>

Our shared humanity and our religious commitments oblige us to work for justice and against oppression. In this cause, our religious differences, important as they are, are secondary. The Qur'ān quotes God himself as saying

To each of you we have prescribed a law and a way of life. Had God willed it, he could have made you all one people, but that he might test you by means of what he has given you. So compete with one another in good works. All of you will return to God, so he will inform you regarding the matters about which you used to disagree. (Qur'ān 5:48)

We must join together, as believers and as humans.

I close with a saying that's been attributed to the great fourth/fifth century Latin bishop St. Augustine. He advised us to

Pray as though everything depended on God;  
work as though everything depended on you.




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11. Oleksandra Matviichuk, speech given at the 2022 Nobel Peace Prize Award Ceremony, Oslo City Hall, Oslo Norway, December 10, 2022, <https://www.nobelprize.org/prizes/peace/2022/center-for-civil-liberties/lecture/>.

12. For the foregoing, see Jay Nordlinger, "A Plea for Humanity," *National Review* (14 December 2022); <https://www.nationalreview.com/corner/a-plea-for-humanity/>.

St. Augustine's admonition captures, I think, some of the spirit of The Interpreter Foundation. I express my gratitude here to the authors, reviewers, designers, source checkers, copy editors, donors, and other volunteers who make the work of the Foundation possible. A short while ago, we celebrated our tenth anniversary, and these have been remarkably productive years — especially considering the fact that we started in August 2012 with no journal, no organization, no money, and no bank account. In connection with this particular volume, I thank the authors who have contributed their work, along with its managing or production editors, Allen Wyatt and Jeff Lindsay, both of whom also serve as members of the foundation's Board of Trustees. Like all of the other officers of The Interpreter Foundation, they are volunteers. I'm deeply grateful.

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

# TWENTY YEARS AFTER “PARADIGMS REGAINED,” PART 1: THE ONGOING, PLAIN, AND PRECIOUS SIGNIFICANCE OF MARGARET BARKER’S SCHOLARSHIP FOR LATTER-DAY SAINT STUDIES

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Kevin Christensen

**Abstract:** *Twenty years ago, the Foundation for Ancient Research and Mormon Studies published “Paradigms Regained: A Survey of Margaret Barker’s Scholarship and Its Significance for Mormon Studies” as its second FARMS Occasional Paper. The first part of this essay provides an overview of Doctor Barker’s scholarship and its wider reception through early 2022, and then includes a broad survey of Latter-day Saint interaction with her work to the present. Part 2 of this essay (forthcoming) will address specific criticisms and appreciations of Barker’s work.*

Led by a new paradigm, scientists adopt new instruments and look in new places. Even more important, during revolutions scientists see new and different things when looking with familiar instruments in places they have looked before.<sup>1</sup>

The new paradigm is that the Enoch tradition is ancient, as it claims, and that it was the original myth of the Jerusalem temple, long before Moses became the key figure and the Exodus the defining history. The world of the first temple was the taproot of Christianity, and that is why the young Church treated Enoch as Scripture. Those who preserved the Enoch traditions were a formative influence on Christianity and its key concepts: the Kingdom and the resurrected Messiah.

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1. Thomas S. Kuhn, *The Structure of Scientific Revolutions*, 2nd ed. (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1970), 111.

Since Enoch was a high priest figure, and Jesus was declared to be “a great high priest” (Heb. 4:14), we should also concern ourselves with the high priesthood.<sup>2</sup>

Over twenty years ago, the Foundation for Ancient Research and Mormon Studies (which became the Maxwell Institute) published my essay “Paradigms Regained: A Survey of Margaret Barker’s Scholarship and Its Significance for Mormon Studies.”<sup>3</sup> Doctor Barker is an English biblical scholar and Methodist preacher who had, up to 2001, published seven books, many papers in a range of scholarly journals, and in 1998 had been elected as the President of the Society for Old Testament Study in England. In the wake of “Paradigms Regained,” Barker accepted an invitation to come to BYU for a week-long seminar in 2003, and that led to many interactions and collaborative ventures with Latter-day Saint scholars, including a notable 2005 talk on the Book of Mormon at the Joseph Smith Conference in Washington D.C., the organization of successful Temple Studies groups in London and Logan, and an appearance in the 2020 video *Temples Through Time*,<sup>4</sup> produced by The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints.<sup>5</sup> To date, she has increased the number of her published books to 17,<sup>6</sup> with one more at press for publication and another well underway. Besides her appreciation in Latter-day Saint circles, her wider recognition among many scholars worldwide has also increased, with the Archbishop of Canterbury and the Queen of England awarding her a Lambeth Doctor of Divinity upon the publication of her 2008 book *Temple Themes in Christian Worship*,<sup>7</sup> and the introduction to her 2010 book on *Creation*, by His All Holiness

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2. Margaret Barker, *The Hidden Tradition of the Kingdom of God* (London: Society for Promoting Christian Knowledge, 2007), 33.

3. Kevin Christensen, “Paradigms Regained: A Survey of Margaret Barker’s Scholarship and Its Significance for Mormon Studies,” *FARMS Occasional Papers* 2 (2001), <https://archive.bookofmormoncentral.org/content/paradigms-regained-survey-margaret-barkers-scholarship-and-its-significance-mormon-studies>.

4. See the video by The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, “Temples Through Time,” August 6, 2020, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Y6a10hpWeZA>.

5. Sidney Walker, “Watch: What ancient and present-day temples mean to scholars of other faiths and Latter-day Saints,” *Church News*, August 6, 2020, <https://www.thechurchnews.com/temples/2020-08-06/church-video-temples-interfaith-solomons-temple-190400>.

6. See discussion of her books and other publications on her website, MargaretBarker.com, <http://www.margaretbarker.com/Publications/Default.htm>.

7. Margaret Barker, *Temple Themes in Christian Worship*, (London: T & T Clark, 2008).

Patriarch Bartholomew.<sup>8</sup> Among numerous honors she has received for her scholarship, many of which will be mentioned below, one that might be of interest to Latter-day Saints is that she was asked to write the section on Isaiah in the highly acclaimed *Eerdman's Commentary on the Bible*,<sup>9</sup> where she incorporated some of the revolutionary results of her research on temple traditions in early Judaism, while drawing connections between Isaiah and 1 Enoch.

To understand who Margaret Barker is and the reasons for both the wide appreciation of her work and the peculiar Latter-day Saint interest, I will begin by offering an overview of her life and work to demonstrate how and why she gained prominence as a biblical scholar. The detailed picture will be important both as a story of interest and because, once established, it provides a check on the accuracy of the picture offered by her critics. The details also demonstrate accumulating points of significance in her scholarship. With the broad picture of Barker's significance established, I will then tell the story of Latter-day Saint interest as a growing and arresting phenomenon.

### **An Overview of Barker's Scholarship and Its Reception**

Born in England in 1944, Margaret Barker was raised as a devoted Christian in “the most Protestant part of the Church of England and became a Methodist and then a Methodist preacher, in 1984.”<sup>10</sup> She attended Sunday school from the age of three, and reports being taught to believe in the Creedal Trinity, occasionally collecting pennies to proselytize Catholics, and enjoying the society of girlfriends through schooling, followed by marriage and the arrival of her own two children.<sup>11</sup> An early indication that she was atypical occurred when, as a young girl, for her thirteenth birthday present she asked for and received a Hebrew grammar and lexicon, which she taught herself to read. She went to Cambridge to study theology. In a recent interview, she stated positive influences of her time there:

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8. Margaret Barker, “Creation: A Biblical Vision for the Environment,” MargaretBarker.com, <http://www.margaretbarker.com/Publications/Creation.htm>.

9. Margaret Barker, “Isaiah,” *Eerdman's Commentary on the Bible*, eds. James D. G. Dunn and John W. Rogerson (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdman's, 2003), 489–542.

10. Margaret Barker, e-mail message to author, May 2022.

11. A bit of fun trivia: Barker reports that among her circle of friends, the first child born to the first marriage grew up to be Jonathon Stroud, author of the noted young-adult fantasy *Bartimaeus* series, and the equally brilliant *Lockwood and Company* series.

I was Hugh Montefiore's last undergraduate in Cambridge, before he was a bishop. We stayed friends for the rest of his life. He taught me how to research: to accept nothing without checking, to trust nobody's translations, to read secondary sources only when you have already worked out your ideas from primary sources, and never to forget what biblical study is really about.<sup>12</sup>

On the other hand, she also reported:

When I had finished my three years there, I was left with a feeling not of elation but in fact of disappointment; I didn't stay to do any postgraduate work because I felt somehow everything we had done had missed the point. Now, this is a terrible thing to say, because I had some wonderful teachers, but it wasn't what I was looking for. And one of the things that struck me most was that in the stuff I was taught — and I may have gone to all the wrong lectures, but I don't think I did — there was no obvious link between the Old Testament, the New Testament, and the life of the early church and its worship. These were separate compartments.<sup>13</sup>

At the end of her studies at Cambridge of the various layers of authorship in the Old Testament, redactors, sources of the Psalms, sources for the Gospels, and whether John knew the gospels, she summed up,

And I thought at the end of this “Goodness me! This is a course in literary criticism.” It wasn't really what I was hoping for. So I didn't stay in Cambridge; I went off and did my own thing.<sup>14</sup>

One thing that did begin for her at Cambridge was her interest in the Temple.

I've been immersed in Temple Studies for nearly 50 years, since I was an undergraduate at Cambridge. It seemed to

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12. Margaret Barker, “Interview: Margaret Barker, Theologian,” interview by Terrence Handley McMath, *Church Times*, Jan. 20, 2017, <https://www.churchtimes.co.uk/articles/2017/20-january/features/interviews/interview-margaret-barker-theologian>.

13. Margaret Barker, “Welcome and Opening Comments by Presenters,” *Mormonism and the Temple: Examining an Ancient Religious Tradition*, ed. Gary N. Anderson (Logan, UT: Academy for Temple Studies, 2013), 11–12, <http://www.templestudies.org/wp-content/uploads/2013/02/MormonismAndTheTemple.pdf>.

14. *Ibid.*, 12

me, even then, that the Temple was neglected, and that this distorted biblical study. I had the modest youthful ambition to redraw the map of biblical studies. It's far too early to say that I have had any influence, but I notice my ideas in several other writers,' not always acknowledged. What matters is to get the Temple worldview restored to the Christian way of thinking.<sup>15</sup>

How her own thing became distinctive occurred not only with respect to her language skills, and what she began to read, but also whom she met.

I discovered the Apocalypses, which aren't taught very much in England — I think not at all at the time. I discovered Enoch in particular and started working on my own on Enoch. It happened that we had living next door to us in the village in Derbyshire, where I was by then married, an elderly Anglican clergyman who was retiring and downsizing his library. He said to me one day, "There are some books, would you like them?" And he gave me R. H. Charles's first edition of the Enoch in English and the three volumes of the Swete Septuagint. And I went off like a squirrel and put these in my treasure place. That's how I got interested, really interested, in Enoch and particularly in different varieties of texts, because I could look at those, such as the Septuagint with all those terrible footnotes that go on forever and ever and get smaller and smaller, and think, "Well, how is it possible that this Greek came from this Hebrew?" And that's when I first started being aware of the varieties of the text.<sup>16</sup>

In the mid-1970s, as a housewife raising two children, as well as working as math teacher at the local Ockbrook school, she managed to publish two academic articles in the *Heythrop Journal*. After a chance/providential meeting on a bus between the then "just a housewife" and a "great Syriac scholar" Father Robert Murray,<sup>17</sup> with his encouragement and support, she published her first book, *The Older Testament*, in 1987. In her introduction, she explains:

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15. Barker, "Interview: Margaret Barker, Theologian."

16. Barker "Opening Comments," 12.

17. See Robert Murray, *The Cosmic Covenant* (London: Sheed and Ward, 1992).

The life and work of Jesus were, and should be, interpreted in the light of something *other* than Jerusalem Judaism. This *other* had its roots in the conflicts of the sixth century BC when the traditions of the monarchy were divided as an inheritance amongst several heirs. It would have been lost but for the accidents of archaeological discovery and the evidence of pre-Christian texts preserved and transmitted *only by Christian hands*.<sup>18</sup>

She followed this with *The Lost Prophet: The Book of Enoch and Its Influence on Early Christianity*,<sup>19</sup> written for a more popular audience than the densely written, very technical and detailed *The Older Testament*.

Her third book, *The Gate of Heaven: The History and Symbolism of the Jerusalem Temple*,<sup>20</sup> appeared in 1991. She explains three points of focus:

First, there will be evidence for the temple as a place of creation and renewal; these themes centre upon the garden of Eden, which the temple was built to represent. Second, there will be evidence for the temple as a place of mediation and atonement, themes associated with the veil of the temple which symbolized the boundary between the material and spiritual worlds. Third, there will be evidence for the temple as a place where some could pass beyond the veil and experience the vision of God, seeing into the essence of all things, past, present and future.<sup>21</sup>

Her fourth book came out in 1992, *The Great Angel: A Study of Israel's Second God*.<sup>22</sup> She described the roots of this book as a question raised by a young woman at a Study Day she had done at Oxford.

And one young lady came up to me afterwards. She had just completed her first class degree from Oxford and she

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18. Margaret Barker, *The Older Testament: The Survival of Themes from the Ancient Royal Cult in Sectarian Judaism and Early Christianity* (London: Society for Promoting Christian Knowledge, 1987), 6–7.

19. Margaret Barker, *The Lost Prophet: The Book of Enoch and its Influence on Early Christianity* (London: Society for Promoting Christian Knowledge, 1988).

20. Margaret Barker, *The Gate of Heaven: The History and Symbolism of the Jerusalem Temple* (London: Society for Promoting Christian Knowledge, 1991).

21. *Ibid.*, 2.

22. Margaret Barker, *The Great Angel: A Study of Israel's Second God* (London: Society for Promoting Christian Knowledge, 1992).



said to me, “You know, the question that worries me is what happened to Yahweh in the New Testament.” And I thought, that’s a very good question, and that’s when I wrote *The Great Angel*. But *The Great Angel* wasn’t the book I set out to write. I set out to write something very different. When I was about a third of the way through the other book that never came to be a book, I realized I was having to reject a lot of evidence. In the end, I used that rejected evidence to write *The Great Angel*. So that was the next step forward.<sup>23</sup>

She writes in *The Great Angel* that

there were many in first-century Palestine who still retained a world-view derived from the more ancient religion of Israel in which there was a High God and several Sons of God, one of whom was Yahweh, the Holy One of Israel. Yahweh, the Lord, could be manifested on earth in human form, as an angel or in the Davidic king. *It was as a manifestation of Yahweh, the Son of God, that Jesus was acknowledged as Son of God, Messiah, and Lord.*<sup>24</sup>

In 1994, she read a paper called “Atonement: Rite of Healing” to the Society for Old Testament Study in Edinburgh, which was later published in the *Scottish Journal of Theology*.<sup>25</sup> Barker made the case that “there was no influx of paganism into the concept of atonement as that was expressed and assumed in the New Testament, and no major reinterpretation. *What was assumed by the New Testament writers was a traditional understanding of the temple rituals and myths of atonement.* When the rituals had ceased and the myths were no longer recognized for what they really were, the key to understanding the imagery of atonement was lost.”<sup>26</sup>

In 1995, she published “The Secret Tradition” in *The Journal of Higher Criticism*, which explored the evidence that “there was far more to the teaching of Jesus than is recorded in the canonical gospels. For

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23. Barker, “Opening Comments,” 12.

24. Barker, *The Great Angel*, 3.

25. Margaret Barker, “Atonement: Rite of Healing,” *Scottish Journal of Theology* 49/1 (1996): 1–20.

26. Barker, “Atonement: The Rite of Healing,” reprinted in Margaret Barker, *The Great High Priest: The Temple Roots of Christian Liturgy* (New York and London, T&C Clark, 2002), 43; also available at <http://www.margaretbarker.com/Papers/Atonement.pdf>.

several centuries a belief persisted among Christian writers that there had been a secret tradition entrusted to only a few of his followers.”<sup>27</sup>

Barker’s next book was *On Earth as It Is in Heaven: Temple Symbolism and the New Testament*.<sup>28</sup> She explains that

all religious belief is expressed, transmitted, and received in code. Even the simplest statements, when they are examined carefully by an outsider, have very little meaning. This is because every religious community has its own way of speaking about faith, and the most effective way to do this is in pictures. People brought up in a Christian community recognize immediately what is meant by the Lamb of God, or by bread and wine; to someone from another culture, however, these are not vivid images but a solid wall which separates those inside, those “in the know,” from everyone else.<sup>29</sup>

She writes that “the images and pictures in which the ideas of the Bible are expressed” are “specific to one culture, that of Israel and Judaism, and until they are fully understood in their original setting, little of what is done with the writings and ideas that came from that particular setting can be understood. Once we lose touch with the meaning of Bible imagery, we lose any way into the real meaning of the Bible.”<sup>30</sup>

She was invited by Dr. Ian Torrance to the University of Aberdeen to deliver the lectures that became the basis of her 1996 book *The Risen Lord: The Jesus of History as the Christ of Faith*.<sup>31</sup> Professor John McDade cited *The Risen Lord* in a paper on “Jesus in Recent Research” for the Catholic Theological Association Conference. He wrote, “A very original contribution to these questions of Jesus’ religious experience, its connection with experiential patterns in first century Jewish religion

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27. Margaret Barker, “The Secret Tradition,” *The Journal of Higher Criticism* 2/1 (1995): 31–67. The essay is also included in Barker, *The Great High Priest*, 1–33, and is available at MargaretBarker.com, <http://www.margaretbarker.com/Papers/SecretTradition.pdf>, page 1.

28. Margaret Barker, *On Earth as It Is in Heaven: Temple Symbolism in the New Testament* (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1995).

29. *Ibid.*, 1.

30. *Ibid.*, 2. Compare 2 Nephi 25:5: “there is none other people that understand the things which were spoken unto the Jews like unto them, save it be that they are taught after the manner of the things of the Jews.”

31. Margaret Barker, *The Risen Lord: The Jesus of History as the Christ of Faith* (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1996).

and the possible value of non-Gospel New Testament writings for Jesus research has come recently from Margaret Barker: her proposals about these three areas go against the grain of much New Testament scholarship and are therefore worth attention.”<sup>32</sup>

A significant honor came when she was elected President of the Society for Old Testament Study in 1998 and began editing the Society’s second Monograph Series, published by Ashgate. Her presidential address to the Society for Old Testament Study at Cambridge that year was “Beyond the Veil of the Temple: The High Priestly Origins of the Apocalypses,” was published in *The Scottish Journal of Theology*.<sup>33</sup>

In the visionary texts, however, the holy of holies is vividly described, suggesting not only that the visionaries knew the holy of holies, but also that they had a particular interest in it. Isaiah saw the throne in the temple with heavenly beings beside it; Enoch entered a second house within the first house, a place of fire where there was a lofty throne surrounded by the hosts of heaven (1 En. 14). The undateable *Similitudes* of Enoch have the same setting: the throne of glory and the hosts of heaven. These images were memories of the cult of the first temple, and it was the visionaries who kept the memory alive: Enoch in the Book of Jubilees is depicted as a priest, burning the incense of the sanctuary (Jub. 4.25) and Ezekiel, who saw the chariot, was also a priest (Ezek. 1.3).<sup>34</sup>

In 2000, she published *The Revelation of Jesus Christ*,<sup>35</sup> her commentary on Revelation, not as the last book of the New Testament, but the first, “the revelation of Jesus Christ, which God gave him to show to his servants what must soon take place” (Revelation 1:1), that is, a revelation that Jesus received at his baptism, and later shared with his disciples, and eventually had John make public. On her website summary of this book she explains,

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32. John McDade, “Jesus in Recent Research,” *The Month: A Review of Christian Thought and World Affairs*, 31 (December 1998): 502–503.

33. Margaret Barker, “Beyond the Veil of the Temple: The High Priestly Origins of the Apocalypses,” *Scottish Journal of Theology* 51/1 (1998): 1–21. This was also published as a chapter in *The Great High Priest*, and is available at MargaretBarker.com, <http://www.margaretbarker.com/Papers/BeyondtheVeil.pdf>.

34. *Ibid.*, 1.

35. Margaret Barker, *The Revelation of Jesus Christ: Which God Gave to Him to Show to His Servants What Must Soon Take Place (Revelation 1.1)* (London: T&T Clark, 2000).

The whole of Jesus' ministry was understood both by him, and later by his disciples, as the ministry of Melchizedek described in the Qumran Melchizedek Text. The great high priest was expected to appear at the start of the tenth Jubilee and to complete the final atonement and renewal of the creation. In the life and death of Jesus, the hopes that had been ritualised in the Day of Atonement were being realised in history. The death of Jesus was the first part of the great atonement, and the expected Second Coming was his return from the holy of holies to complete the atonement and renew the creation.<sup>36</sup>

More books followed. In *The Great Angel* she mentioned the presence in the first temple of the Tree of Life, a symbol of Asherah, lady Wisdom, the Heavenly Mother that was destroyed by Josiah (2 Kings 23:6).<sup>37</sup> In *The Revelation of Jesus Christ* she discussed the "woman clothed with the sun" who would bring "the royal child destined to rule the nations with a rod of iron."<sup>38</sup> She developed these notions further in a paper she read at Cambridge in 2001 on "Wisdom: The Queen of Heaven." It was originally published in the *Scottish Journal of Theology*.<sup>39</sup> Among other things, it shows self-reflective consciousness of the background assumptions that can either open or close a scholar's eyes

1. By giving priority to the evidence of the Hebrew texts, including inscriptions. There is no exact parallel to the phrasing of the Kuntillet 'Ajrud inscriptions, which shows that biblical traditions are not representative of everything about Hebrew language and religion.
2. By allowing for singular and plural forms, and for a variety of names for one figure, and for the undoubted practice of using a singular verb with a plural form for a divinity.
3. By admitting that if conceptions of the male aspect of the deity moved away from anthropomorphism, then the female must have had the same fate. There are unlikely to have been

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36. Margaret Barker, Publications History, MargaretBarker.com, <http://www.margaretbarker.com/Publications/History.htm>. Compare 3 Nephi 12:47: "Old things are done away, and all things have become new." Also see Christensen, "Paradigms Regained," 68–75.

37. Barker, *The Great Angel*, 52–67.

38. Barker, *The Revelation of Jesus Christ*, 200.

39. Margaret Barker, "Wisdom: The Queen of Heaven," *Scottish Journal of Theology* 55, no. 2 (2002): 141–59. This essay also appears in *The Great High Priest*, 229–61.

simultaneous movements away from anthropomorphism for the male but towards personification for the female.<sup>40</sup>

Though Barker has never had a formal academic post, she around this time was invited by the Centre of Advanced Religious and Theological Studies at Cambridge to devise a research project. She later withdrew, and the essays she produced as seed for that project along with six essays that she had previously published in various journals was published in 2002 as *The Great High Priest: The Temple Roots of Christian Liturgy*. In her introduction, she states that

it is no longer wise to consider one form of Judaism as “orthodoxy” and all others as sectarian, it is being recognized that there was a huge difference between Rabbinic Judaism and the varieties of the faith in the second temple period. The Sages had not been preserving the older ways but creating a substantially new system after the destruction of the temple in 70 CE. Part of their method was defining the canon, but the books excluded from that Hebrew canon were preserved by Christian scribes. We now know that even the text of the Hebrew Scriptures was different before the advent of Christianity. *It is becoming increasingly clear that the Old Testament which should accompany the New Testament is not the one usually included in the Bible.* ... All the major elements of Christianity had been part of the earlier temple tradition: incarnation, atonement, covenant, resurrection, and the Messiah.<sup>41</sup>

In an address in 2000 on the state of Biblical Studies in the twentieth century, she broadly surveyed the state of scholarship in the Universities, while noting that

there is a major crisis in biblical studies of which the churches seem unaware, and there is need for urgent action to ensure that at least in theological colleges something is taught that does not simply rely on university departments and replicate their syllabus and interests. Theological colleges and university departments now have very different agendas.<sup>42</sup>

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40. Barker, *The Great High Priest*, 233.

41. *Ibid.*, xi.

42. Margaret Barker, “Reflections on Biblical Studies in the Twentieth Century,” (paper read to the Society of St. Alban and St. Sergius, 2000), 2–3, MargaretBarker.com, <http://www.margaretbarker.com/Papers/ReflectionsOnBiblicalStudies.pdf>.

For example, she reports,

Prof. Philip Davies from Sheffield, who has a completely secular approach to Biblical studies, read a paper entitled “Ownership? Responsibility? What is the Guild to do with the Bible?” He looked at the various disciplines which now have some sort of interest in biblical studies: cultural studies, literary theory, feminist issues, sociology and such like, and hailed this as a great liberation for biblical studies. When asked about the Church he was nonplussed. This implies that there is a need for university departments to make biblical studies relevant to all these latest trends in academe, and therefore, by implication, give it some sort of respectability, but no need to make it relevant to those who are the major users of the texts.<sup>43</sup>

Of her own approach, she says,

Since these are my reflections on biblical studies, I should perhaps say something about my own approach. I favour the use of context materials rather than the currently fashionable approaches such as social scientific or rhetorical studies. I believe that a careful use of the historical critical method is most useful, as it enables us to stand where they stood, look where they looked and even to read what they wrote. What we find is not always expected or even welcome. There have been several times in my own research and writing when I have been forced to abandon the very position I was trying to establish, and with it a great deal of my personal baggage, but this has always led to something even more exciting.<sup>44</sup>

She was invited to deliver the Cardinal Hume lectures at Heythrop College in London in 2003, and these became *Temple Theology: An Introduction*, published in 2004.<sup>45</sup> Here she

shows how the restoration of the original temple and its teaching is the key to understanding the role and teaching of Jesus. It is the best introduction to four key areas of temple

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43. Ibid., 4. Compare Spencer Fluhman, “On Audience and Voice in Mormon Studies Journal Publishing,” *Neal A. Maxwell Institute for Religious Scholarship* (blog), November 21, 2016, <https://mi.byu.edu/intro-msr-v4/>.

44. Ibid., 8.

45. Margaret Barker, *Temple Theology: An Introduction* (London: Society for Promoting Christian Knowledge, 2004).

theology: Creation, with the temple built to represent the creation, the significance of the holy of holies and the veil. Covenant, showing that the Eternal Covenant binding all creation together, was the covenant of the Last Supper and thus the basis of the Eucharist. Atonement explaining the original meaning of atonement, the blood/life of the Lord renewing the broken bonds of the covenant of creation. Wisdom, introducing the symbols of the almost lost Wisdom tradition of the temple: the Bread of the Presence, the Tree of Life and the anointing oil.<sup>46</sup>

This little book was shortlisted for the Michael Ramsey Prize for Theological Writing. Barker was the first woman so honored.

In 2004 she also published *An Extraordinary Gathering of Angels*,<sup>47</sup> like a mini-coffee table art book, beautifully illustrated with more than 170 colorful illustrations, looking at angels in ancient and modern culture. It includes her interviews with scholars from a range of Jewish and Christian traditions, including Bishop Basil of Sergievo, Dr. Richard Baukham, Rabbi Geoffrey Dennis, Dr. Bernard Lang, Father Robert Murray, Phillip Pullman, Dr. Geoffrey Rowell, Reverend Doctor Christopher Rowland, Dr. Alan F. Segal, Father Silouan, and Dr. John W. Welch of BYU.

In 2007, she published *The Hidden Tradition of the Kingdom of God*,<sup>48</sup> in which she “shows how fashions in scholarship have obscured much of the ancient evidence, and then reconstructs the traditions of the high priesthood — Enoch and Melchizedek as well as Aaron — before reading the gospel evidence with this new paradigm.”<sup>49</sup> She also explains that “*the visions of the Book of Revelation underlie the Gospel narratives and explain the choice of biblical texts that accompany events.*”<sup>50</sup> She can show that “memories of the visions that inspired Jesus are found in the

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46. Margaret Barker, *Temple Theology: An Introduction*, Publications History, MargaretBarker.com, <http://www.margaretbarker.com/Publications/History.htm>.

47. Margaret Barker, *An Extraordinary Gathering of Angels* (London: MQ Publications, 2004).

48. Margaret Barker, *The Hidden Tradition of the Kingdom of God* (London: Society for Promoting Christian Knowledge, London, 2007).

49. Margaret Barker, *The Hidden Tradition of the Kingdom of God*, Publications History, MargaretBarker.com, <http://www.margaretbarker.com/Publications/History.htm>.

50. Barker, *Hidden Tradition*, 94.



Book of Revelation and in the Gospels”<sup>51</sup> and that “there are places in his parables where Jesus alludes to the visions of Revelation.”<sup>52</sup>

In 2008, Margaret Barker, Robin Griffith-Jones, Laurence Hemming, Susan Parsons and Bishop Geoffrey Rowell organized a Temple Studies Group to promote “study of the Temple in Jerusalem, believing that the worldview, traditions, customs and symbolism of the Temple were formative influences on the development of Christianity.”<sup>53</sup> The group successfully organized symposia for several years running, up to 2018, with several participants, including Latter-day Saint contributors Professor John Hall, Frederick Huchel, Professor John W. Welch, and Professor William Hamblin. The success of the London Temple Studies group inspired a sister organization, based in Logan, Utah, the Academy for Temple Studies.<sup>54</sup>

In 2007, Barker published *Temple Themes in Christian Worship*.<sup>55</sup> The jacket comment praising the book was written by Dr. Rowan Williams, Archbishop of Canterbury. In July 2008 she was given a Lambeth Doctor of Divinity by the same Archbishop of Canterbury and Queen Elizabeth “in recognition of her work on the Jerusalem Temple and the origins of Christian Liturgy, which has made a significantly new contribution to our understanding of the New Testament and opened up important fields for research.”<sup>56</sup> On March 10, 2008, T&T Clark held a colloquium in London to celebrate the publication of the book.<sup>57</sup> Speakers included:

- His Grace Bishop Basil of Amphipolis
- Dr. Robert Hayward, University of Durham
- Dr. John W. Welch, Brigham Young University
- Rabbi Professor Marc Saperstein, Leo Baeck College, London
- Dr. Crispin Fletcher-Louis, Westminster Theological Centre, London
- Dr. Susan Frank Parsons, Society of St. Catherine of Siena

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51. Ibid, 95.

52. Ibid, 97.

53. Temple Studies Group.com, <http://www.templestudiesgroup.com/index.html>.

54. Academy for Temple Studies.com, <https://www.templestudies.org/>.

55. Margaret Barker, *Temple Themes in Christian Worship* (London: Bloomsbury T&T Clark, 2007).

56. MargaretBarker.com, <http://www.margaretbarker.com/index.html>.

57. “Margaret Barker Colloquium in London,” *Theology and Temple Studies* (blog), T&T Clark, March 10, 2008, <https://tandtclark.typepad.com/ttc/2008/03/margaret-barker.html>.



Soon she also published *Christmas: The Original Story*,<sup>58</sup> in which she reads the gospel accounts, as well as the early Protoevangelium of James, in the context of enlightening temple symbolism throughout. Her case is that reading the nativity stories in light of the temple tradition help us better understand them. Let us think about the obvious temple accounts in the nativity stories, for instance, with Zacharias, serving in the temple in Luke 1:5–9, or Jesus being presented at the temple in Luke 2:22–39, then skipping twelve years to tell another temple story. Barker wants us to learn to see the significance of these and other less immediately obvious temple themes. Consider, for instance, the significance of details that Luke provides:

She wrapped him in swaddling clothes is, literally, “she wrapped him around.” Why mention the baby’s clothes? Because the clothing of the “newly born” high priest was an important part of his becoming the Son. Enoch was taken from his earthly garments — his human body — and clothed with garments of God’s Glory because he had become part of the Glory. The new child is clothed with earthly garments, and so the process is reversed.<sup>59</sup>

In 2009, Barker contributed the essay “The High Priest and the Worship of Jesus” to a volume on *The Jewish Roots of Christological Monotheism*<sup>60</sup> and in 2010 published *Creation: A Biblical Vision for the Environment*, with a forward written by His All Holiness Ecumenical Patriarch Bartholomew. Barker explains that “the biblical world view is a vision of the unity of all things ... into one divinely ordained system known as the eternal covenant, the creation covenant.”<sup>61</sup> That covenant is the one Isaiah 24:5 refers to as broken with dire consequence. (D&C 1:15 again describes this covenant as broken, and D&C 1:22 invites us all to enter into and keep that covenant.)

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58. Margaret Barker, *Christmas: The Original Story* (London: Society for Promoting Christian Knowledge, 2008).

59. *Ibid.*, 75–76.

60. Margaret Barker, “The High Priest and the Worship of Jesus,” in Carey C. Newman, James R. Davila, and Gladys S. Lewis, eds., *The Jewish Roots of Christological Monotheism: Papers from the St. Andrews Conference on the Historical Origins of the Worship of Jesus* (Leiden: Brill, 1999), 93–111.

61. Margaret Barker, *Creation: A Biblical Vision for the Environment* (London: T&T Clarke, 2010), 19.

In 2011 she published *Temple Mysticism: An Introduction*.<sup>62</sup> In a review of her book for *Interpreter*, I wrote that “for Barker, temple mysticism centers on ‘seeing the Lord.’ Her temple mystics, [Isaiah and John] are unquestionably more akin to Lehi, Nephi, Alma, Joseph Smith, and Sidney Rigdon than are Nibley’s mystics.”<sup>63</sup>

In 2012, she published *The Mother of the Lord: Volume 1 The Lady in the Temple*.<sup>64</sup> Again, Dr. Rowan Williams, Archbishop of Canterbury, wrote an appreciative note for the back cover:

Once again, Dr. Barker offers us a massively learned and creative re-reading of what the Bible has to tell us about the religion of ancient Israel, using her wide knowledge of material in Hebrew, Syriac and other Semitic languages, texts from Jewish, Gnostic and Christian sources. She reinforces the case she has made in earlier books that the Hebrew Scriptures represent a deeply conflicted set of traditions, and excavates the lost cult of the divine “Lady of the Temple,” the personification of divine Wisdom and the bearer of the divine Son. Her contention that this alone makes sense not only of tensions within the text of the Hebrew Scriptures but also of persistent and otherwise baffling themes in early Christianity is argued with vigour and comprehensiveness of scope. Controversial as it is, this is a very significant contribution to the fuller understanding of both Christian and Jewish origins.<sup>65</sup>

In January of 2012, she delivered the 29th Annual Father Alexander Schmemmann Memorial Lecture at St. Vladimir’s Orthodox Theological Seminary, Yonkers, New York. Her topic was Jesus as “The Great High Priest.”<sup>66</sup> The talk was very well received by

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62. Margaret Barker, *Temple Mysticism: An Introduction* (London: Society for Promoting Christian Knowledge, 2011).

63. Kevin Christensen, “Book Review: Temple Mysticism: An Introduction, by Margaret Barker” *Interpreter: A Journal of Mormon Scripture* 5 (2013), 192, <https://journal.interpreterfoundation.org/book-review-temple-mysticism-an-introduction-by-margaret-barker/>.

64. Margaret Barker, *The Mother of the Lord*, vol. 1, *The Lady of the Temple* (London: Bloomsbury T&T Clark, 2012).

65. Rowan Williams, Archbishop of Canterbury, back cover of Barker, *The Mother of the Lord*.

66. “LISTEN & READ! Schmemmann Lecture: Dr. Margaret Barker ‘Journeys’ from Solomon’s Temple to Christian Church,” Headlines, St. Vladimir’s Orthodox Theological Seminary, January 29, 2012, <https://www.svots.edu/headlines/listen->

the audience of Orthodox scholars and leaders. St. Vladimir's Seminary published this report:

As Dr. Barker focused on the structure of the first temple and on the figure of the high priest within that temple, she led her audience along “the trail that leads from Solomon’s Temple to the Christian Church,” her premise being that both the first temple and its high priest were restored by the coming of Jesus Christ. “The Christian community was the temple of the Messiah,” she noted, “the original temple restored, and it was a living temple.” Further on, she added, “There is good evidence in the gospels that Jesus did see himself as the great high priest, and that his ministry was shaped by that ideal.”

Upon her closing words, “Christians are the anointed ones of the restored temple, and our covenant is the eternal covenant,” the audience exploded with sustained applause in gratitude for her presentation. At the close of her talk, His Beatitude Metropolitan Jonah, primate of the Orthodox Church in America (OCA), presented Dr. Barker with a beautiful icon of “Christ the High Priest.”

Other hierarchs in attendance at the lecture were His Grace The Right Rev. Benjamin, bishop of San Francisco and the West (OCA), and His Grace The Right Rev. Maxim, bishop of the Western Diocese of the Serbian Orthodox Church of North and South America.<sup>67</sup>

In 2014, she published *King of the Jews: Temple Theology in John’s Gospel*.<sup>68</sup> She explains that according to John, the title written on the cross was “the Nazorean,” which is not the word used elsewhere for Jesus as a man “of Nazareth.”<sup>69</sup> That is, “Nazorean derived from the Hebrew *nsr*, meaning ‘watch, guard,’ and described the LORD watching over his people. ... His Servant restored the *preserved* of Israel (Isa. 49.6). ... The followers of Jesus were called the Nazorenes (Acts 24.5), and the *nosrim*

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read-schmemann-lecture-dr-margaret-barker-journeys-solomons-temple-christian. A recording of the lecture is available, entitled “Our Great High Priest: The Church Is the New Temple,” Voices From St Vladimir’s Seminary (podcast), [https://www.ancientfaith.com/podcasts/svsvoices/our\\_great\\_high\\_priest\\_the\\_church\\_is\\_the\\_new\\_temple](https://www.ancientfaith.com/podcasts/svsvoices/our_great_high_priest_the_church_is_the_new_temple).

67. Ibid.

68. Margaret Barker, *King of the Jews: Temple Theology in John’s Gospel* (London: Society for Promoting Christian Knowledge, 2014).

69. Ibid., 522.

became the Hebrew term for Christians.”<sup>70</sup> The book’s jacket explains that “Jesus’s mission was to restore the ways of the original temple. ... The background to the Fourth Gospel is temple tradition. John shows how Jesus’ debates with the Jews centered on the great difference between the world of the second temple and world of the priest-kings of the first temple from which Christianity emerged. The Johnnine community were the Hebrew disciples of Jesus who saw themselves as the true high priesthood restored.”

In 2014, Barker spoke in Dublin, Ireland on “The Eternal Covenant Between God and Every Living Creature.”<sup>71</sup> She explains,

The covenant underlying all the other covenants in the Old Testament was the everlasting covenant, which depicted heaven and earth bound together in one great system that encompassed the powers of heaven, the visible creation and human society. ... The first book to draw attention to the everlasting covenant was Robert Murray’s *The Cosmic Covenant*, published in 1992. Fr Murray showed how the psalms and the prophets — Isaiah, Jeremiah, Hosea, Joel — all knew about the everlasting covenant. They presented it in forms that suggested temple liturgy, and central to the cosmic covenant was the sacral king who held all things together. The everlasting covenant protected all within it and kept away the chaos and disaster that would otherwise engulf everything. This was the divine wrath. The business of maintaining the covenant was entrusted to the sacral kings, the Melchi-Zedeks, who had rituals of atonement.<sup>72</sup>

In a section of “Paradigms Regained,” on “The Cosmic Covenant” (61–63), I discuss the relevance of this covenant to Latter-day Saint scriptures, including D&C 1, Benjamin’s discourse (where Benjamin is the sacral King holding the Melchizedek priesthood, officiating in the Day of Atonement rituals at the temple, and inviting all to enter the covenant), Moses 7, and 3 Nephi 9–28 with Jesus at the temple, and D&C 88:7–13 as best description of the covenant bonds.

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70. Ibid., 522–23.

71. Margaret Barker, “The Everlasting Covenant Between God and Every Living Creature,” ECO Congregation Ireland (website), <https://www.ecocongregationireland.com/wp-content/uploads/2014/05/The-Everlasting-Covenant-Margaret-Barker-DD.pdf>.

72. Barker, “The Everlasting Covenant,” 2–3.

In 2015, scholar Crispin Fletcher-Louis, in the introduction to the first volume of *Jesus Monotheism*, refers to his influences as his Oxford teachers, mentioning N.T. Wright, Christopher Rowland, John Ashton, Rowan Williams, Kallistos Ware and others, and then mentions Margaret Barker as “a muse to many of us, albeit from beyond the immediate confines of Oxford on the cosmology and religious experiences nurtured by Israel’s Temple.”<sup>73</sup>

In 2015, Margaret Barker was invited to be part of an evaluation panel for the recently discovered Jordan Lead books.<sup>74</sup> After two years of investigating, the panel released their first evaluation in 2017, concluding the books are worthy of further investigation.<sup>75</sup> Their website includes the reports of the metallurgical analysis,<sup>76</sup> detailed responses to a handful of bloggers claiming that the books are modern forgeries,<sup>77</sup> and information on the content and context of the books. The Academy for Temple Studies website includes a 2018 video presentation by Margaret Barker, discussing the books, showing how information is encoded on them.<sup>78</sup> In a recent email to me she reports,

I am now certain that these lead books are [perhaps copies of] first-temple oracle tablets. They have 8th century BCE vocabulary in places, mostly words used by Isaiah, and they reveal all sorts of temple details that occur elsewhere in later texts. My hypothesis is that these represent the earliest iteration of temple theology which later fragmented after the Josiah upheavals and the various exiles to Babylon, Egypt, etc.

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73. Crispin Fletcher-Louis, *Jesus Monotheism: Christological Origins: The Emerging Consensus and Beyond* (Eugene, OR: Cascade Books, 2015), xiii–xiv, [https://www.google.com/books/edition/Jesus\\_Monotheism/EkRgCgAAQBAJ?hl=en&gbpv=1](https://www.google.com/books/edition/Jesus_Monotheism/EkRgCgAAQBAJ?hl=en&gbpv=1).

74. See the website for The Centre for the Study of the Jordanian Lead Books, <https://www.leadbookcentre.com/>.

75. “Report of the Evaluation Panel: May 2017,” The Centre for the Study of the Jordanian Lead Books, <https://www.leadbookcentre.com/downloads/panel-report-june-2017.pdf>.

76. Films, The Centre for the Study of the Jordanian Lead Books, <https://www.leadbookcentre.com/films.php>.

77. Publications, The Centre for the Study of the Jordanian Lead Books, <https://www.leadbookcentre.com/downloads/response-to-the-bloggers.pdf>. Also see *Heritage Daily*, December 9, 2016, <https://www.heritagedaily.com/2016/12/jordan-lead-codices-not-modern-forgeries/113620>.

78. Margaret Barker, “Some Lead Books Found in Jordan,” video recording of presentation given October 11, 2018, sponsored by the Academy for Temple Studies, Logan, Utah, <https://www.templestudies.org/lead-books-found-in-jordan/>.

Memories of this earlier system survive in many later sources, such as the Targums and the pseudepigrapha. There is a lot of material that links the people who devised them to the area around Petra, and much in them that is not in the Bible but passes directly into early Christian hymns and prayers.<sup>79</sup>

Back in 1998, Professor John McDade of Heythrop College had reviewed Barker's work in relation to trends and streams in Life of Jesus Research, including showing how her work strengthened Christian claims, extending beyond arguments by influential believing scholars, such as Ben Myer and N.T. Wright. In 2018, N.T. Wright was invited to give the Gifford Lectures, and there spoke on "Jesus, the Temple, and the Kingdom," noting that in the published version, "Margaret Barker has done remarkable work in alerting scholarly and popular circles to 'Temple' based theological understanding."<sup>80</sup>

Barker continues to write and research, and teaching and preaching in a range of settings. She maintains working contacts with a wide range of scholars from different religious traditions. Her daughter has created a very useful website that includes discussions of her book publications, and a wide range of papers that she has presented and published in various places.<sup>81</sup> She has one book currently close to publication, delayed due to pandemic issues, and another on the Jordan books well underway. There are a few dozen videos of her presentations, interviews, and preaching available on YouTube.<sup>82</sup> With the background of her wide accomplishments and broad appreciation set in a range of scholarly settings, it is time to account for how and why her connection to members of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints arose.

### Weaving in the Latter-Day Saints

Within a few years after the publication of *The Great Angel* in 1992, several different Latter-day Saint scholars began quoting it. The first two

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79. Margaret Barker, e-mail message to author, October 2, 2021.

80. N. T. Wright, *History and Eschatology: Jesus and the Promise of Natural Theology* (Waco, TX: Baylor University Press, 2019), 307n2. The note continues to the next page with squeamishness about early Israelite "non-monotheism."

81. MargaretBarker.com.

82. For example, "The Mother in Heaven and Her Children," 2015 FAIR Conference, Provo UT, August 6, 2015, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=iIF9NXEl6Xs>; and "Restoring Solomon's Temple," Academy for Temple Studies, Utah State University, Logan, UT, October 29, 2012, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=xalAoRGsU7c>.

citations I know of came in responses to an essay on the Christology in the Book of Mormon by Melodie Charles,<sup>83</sup> namely Ross David Baron's "Melodie Moench Charles and the Humanist Worldview,"<sup>84</sup> followed the same year by Martin S. Tanner's review.<sup>85</sup> Both Baron and Tanner quoted this passage from *The Great Angel*:

There were many in first-century Palestine who still retained a worldview derived from the more ancient religion of Israel [that of the First Temple] in which there was a High God and several Sons of God, one of whom was Yahweh, the Holy One of Israel. Yahweh, the Lord, could be manifested on earth in human form, as an angel or in the Davidic king. *It was as a manifestation of Yahweh, the Son of God, that Jesus was acknowledged as Son of God, Messiah and Lord.*<sup>86</sup>

Tanner also quotes this key passage from *The Great Angel*:

*All the texts in the Hebrew Bible distinguish clearly between the divine sons of Elohim/Elyon and those human beings who are called sons of Yahweh.* This must be significant. It must mean that the terms originated at a time when Yahweh was distinguished from whatever was meant by El/Elohim/Elyon. A large number of texts continued to distinguish between El Elyon and Yahweh, Father and Son, and to express this distinction in similar ways with the symbolism of the temple and the royal cult. By tracing these patterns through a great variety of material and over several centuries, Israel's second God can be recovered.<sup>87</sup>

Other Latter-day Saint scholars who began quoting and referencing *The Great Angel* or others of Barker's books and articles in the mid- to late 1990s included Daniel Peterson, William Hamblin, Barry Bickmore, Eugene Seiach, John Tvedtnes, and Mark Thomas. Kevin Barney's

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83. Melodie Moench Charles, "Book of Mormon Christology," *New Approaches to the Book of Mormon: Explorations in Critical Methodology*, ed. Brent Lee Metcalfe (Salt Lake City: Signature Books, 1993), 81–114.

84. Ross David Baron, "Melodie Moench Charles and the Humanist Worldview," *Review of Books on the Book of Mormon 1989–2011* 7, no. 1 (1995): 91–119, <https://scholarsarchive.byu.edu/msr/vol7/iss1/8/>.

85. Martin S. Tanner, "Review of Melodie Moench Charles, 'Book of Mormon Christology,'" *Review of Books on the Book of Mormon 1989–2011* 7, no. 2 (1995): 6–37, <https://scholarsarchive.byu.edu/msr/vol7/iss2/5/>.

86. Barker, *The Great Angel*, 3.

87. *Ibid.*, 10.



2001 FAIR essay on “Do We Have a Mother in Heaven?” also included a reference to *The Great Angel*.<sup>88</sup>

During a 1999 visit to a Dallas Half Price Books, when I chanced upon a shelf with several copies of *The Great Angel*, I recognized the book as of interest. I bought a copy, took it home to Kansas and began to read. Before I was halfway done, I called my brother near Dallas, and asked him to go back and buy up all the remaining copies of the book and send them to me. When I finished reading *The Great Angel*, I searched for copies of her other books and several journal essays, tracking some down via Amazon and Bookfinder.com. During my first visit to the Kansas University Library, I found a rare copy of her first book, the then out-of-print *The Older Testament*.<sup>89</sup> This was crucially important for my study.<sup>90</sup>

Whereas the other Latter-day Saint writers who quoted *The Great Angel* did so to emphasize pre-exilic theology, the passages that struck me most in *The Great Angel* concerned the history and the key themes of Deuteronomist Reform, launched in the days of King Josiah, the father of King Zedekiah, named in 1 Nephi 1:4. Because Latter-day Saint culture and pedagogy have traditionally had little to say about Josiah, it is necessary to first sketch the story of King Josiah and the Reform.

### A Brief Overview of King Josiah

2 Kings 22–23 and 2 Chronicles 34–35 give accounts of Josiah and his reform, with some important differences. Both accounts describe how King Josiah’s father Amon became King at 22 and was killed during the

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88. Kevin L. Barney, “Do We Have a Mother in Heaven?” The Foundation for Apologetic Information & Research, 2001, 7n17, <https://www.fairlatterdaysaints.org/wp-content/uploads/2014/04/Kevin-Barney-MotherInHeaven.pdf>.

89. This was reprinted by Sheffield Phoenix Press in 2005 and has been in print ever since.

90. For Latter-day Saint readers starting out with Barker, the best place to begin depends on your background. If you begin as an established Nibleyophile, then *The Great Angel* is an excellent place to start. Five different top Latter-day-Saint scholars independently gave me the same one-word review of that book: “Wow!” For readers to whom this kind of scholarship is a new world, then the little *Temple Theology: An Introduction* would work best. I also recommend reading Barker’s “Text and Context” essay alongside 1 Nephi 13, <http://www.margaretbarker.com/Papers/TextAndContext.pdf>. Also see Margaret Barker, “Joseph Smith and Preexilic Israelite Religion,” *BYU Studies* 44, no. 9 (2005): 69–82, <https://byustudies.byu.edu/article/joseph-smith-and-preexilic-israelite-religion/>.



second year of his reign. “And the people of the land slew all them that had conspired against king Amon; and the people of the land made Josiah his son king in his stead.” (2 Kings 21:24; compare 2 Chronicles 33:25).

Josiah was eight when he became king and reigned for 31 years. Lehi would have been an eyewitness to a part of his reign, and his four oldest sons were likely born during the last years of Josiah’s reign.<sup>91</sup> After Josiah’s unexpected death in battle at the hands of the Egyptians at age 39, Lehi’s older sons variously grew to adolescence and early manhood during the eleven-year reign of Josiah’s son Jehoiakim, who was installed as king by the Egyptians. Then the Babylonians defeated the Egyptians and installed Zedekiah, another son of Josiah, when the Book of Mormon begins.<sup>92</sup>

During Josiah’s reign, according to 2 Kings 22:8, the high priest Hilkiah “found the book of the law in the house of the Lord.” Many scholars associate this found book with Deuteronomy,<sup>93</sup> and the account in 2 Kings 22 reports that the discovery of this book prodded Josiah to launch his reform. The account in 2 Chronicles 34: 3, 8, 14 reports that the book was discovered during a renovation of the temple as part of reforms Josiah had already begun. Both accounts emphasize that Josiah held a notable Passover (2 Kings 23:22 and 2 Chronicles 35:18). Both accounts depict Josiah as a uniquely good king, which led to some issues in trying to account for his unexpected death at the hands of the Egyptians when righteousness is supposed to lead to prosperity, as well accounting for Josiah dying in battle when Huldah had prophesied that he would die in peace (2 Kings 22:14–20). 2 Kings 23:20 describes Josiah’s reforms as openly violent, including his slaying “all the priests of the high places” as well as Josiah sending the high priest into the temple to the Holy of Holies to remove and destroy the Asherah, the tree of life, then in the form of a Menorah (2 Kings 23:6). The account of Josiah’s death in 2 Chronicles 35 differs from the one in 2 Kings 23 in that it includes a type-scene with a “disguise” narrative. “These biblical narratives typically depict a contest or conflict between God and an earthly king, and in each

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91. Lehi would not likely have been an adult at the start of Josiah’s 31-year reign because Nephi is probably around 14 at the start of Zedekiah’s reign, which comes after Jehoiakim’s 11-year reign. And Lehi and Sarah must be young enough to have Joseph and Jacob after eight years in the wilderness before setting out on the ocean voyage (1 Nephi 18:7, 19). I see Lehi as coming of age and marrying and having his first four sons during the last few years of Josiah’s reign.

92. See 1 Nephi 1:4; 2:12.

93. A famous example is Richard Elliott Friedman, *Who Wrote the Bible?* (New York: Harper Row, 1987), 101.

case, they don't end well for the king. As explained by Alan Goff, 'All of the kings or their heirs in the biblical disguise stories meet with brutal deaths, and in each case the dynasty fails.'"<sup>94</sup> That is, while the 2 Kings account idealizes Josiah, the disguise scene in 2 Chronicles 35 allusively associates Josiah with Saul, Jeroboam, and Ahab, which at the very least demonstrates an unresolved tension.

While Jeremiah was called as a prophet during Josiah's reign, the relationship of between Jeremiah and the reform is not as straightforward as we might expect. The accounts we have make it clear that it was King Josiah's reform, not Jeremiah's, and that Jeremiah was called the year after the reform began.<sup>95</sup> Notably, Jeremiah is called "against the kings of Judah, against the princes thereof, against the priests thereof, and against the people of the land" (Jeremiah 1:18), that is, against the very people who installed the eight year old Josiah as king — and who doubtless saw to his upbringing and education from that point — and against the people who were at the time advancing the reform.<sup>96</sup>

Before I read *The Great Angel*, everything I knew about King Josiah and Deuteronomists had come from reading Richard Elliott Friedman's popular explanation of the Documentary Hypothesis, *Who Wrote the Bible?* Friedman and other biblical scholars have shown how crucial Josiah's reign was for the construction of much of the Old Testament as we have it, showing that an edition of what is called the Deuteronomist History, the books of Joshua through 2 Kings, was compiled and edited to honor Josiah during his lifetime.<sup>97</sup> Then after the calamities of Josiah's defeat and death and the subsequent destruction of the temple and the experience of the exile, additions were made to report events

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94. As quoted in "Book of Mormon Evidence: Abinadi's Disguise," *Evidence Central*, <https://evidencecentral.org/recency/evidence/abinadis-disguise>, from "Abinadi's Disguise and the Fate of King Noah" (article based on research done by Alan Goff), *Insights* 20/12 (2000): 2, <https://archive.bookofmormoncentral.org/content/insights-vol-20-no-12-december-2000>.

95. See 2 Chronicles 34:3 on Josiah beginning his purge in the twelfth year of his reign (at age 20) and Jeremiah being called in the thirteenth year in Jeremiah 1:2. Margaret Barker's *The Mother of the Lord*, vol. 1, *The Lady in the Temple*, 54–75, provides her most extensive commentary on Jeremiah and the reform.

96. Ezekiel 22:6–21 is an extended diatribe against these same groups. Zephaniah 1 also comments. Also consider Gerald Smith's insightful discussion of the account of Jeremiah and the Rechabites, "Book of Mormon Gospel Doctrine Lesson 1: 'The Keystone of Our Religion,'" *Joel's Monastery*, (blog), December 12, 2011, <https://joelsmonastery.blogspot.com/2011/12/book-of-mormon-gospel-doctrine-lesson-1.html>

97. Friedman, *Who Wrote the Bible?* 130–32.

and assign blame for what went wrong.<sup>98</sup> Friedman can show social connections between Jeremiah and key figures in the accounts of the reform and discovery of the book of the law, and he shows that Jeremiah and Deuteronomy both use very similar language in places.<sup>99</sup> Indeed, Friedman suggests that Jeremiah, perhaps with help of his scribe Baruch, was the Deuteronomist historian. Friedman reports that Jeremiah favored Josiah,<sup>100</sup> although I noticed that of sixteen verses naming Josiah in Jeremiah, most are prefaced by “son of” and refer to Josiah’s sons, Jehoiakim, Shallum, and Zedekiah. Only Jeremiah 22:15–16 contains a clear positive reference to Josiah as a contrast to his third son, Shallum (also known as Jehoahaz), as doing “justice and judgement” and having “judged the cause of the poor and needy.” Due to those specific qualities, Jeremiah says of Josiah, “then it was well with him.” Even that passage leaves an unresolved question as to what happened with Josiah in other areas of concern that ultimately caused things to not go well with him.

Friedman had declared that Jeremiah agrees with the Deuteronomic history on “practically every important point”<sup>101</sup> and agrees with Deuteronomy “on virtually every major point.”<sup>102</sup> Such statements contain a hidden assumption that we do not have to think any further about what is most important. In *The Great Angel*, Barker observed of the reformers that

First, they were to have the Law instead of Wisdom (Deuteronomy 4:6). ... What was the Wisdom which the Law replaced? Second, they were to think only of the formless voice of God sounding from the fire and giving the Law (Deuteronomy 19:12). Israel had long had a belief in the vision of God, when the glory had been visible on the throne in human form, surrounded by the heavenly hosts. What happened to the visions of God? And third, they were to leave the veneration of the host of heaven to peoples not chosen by Yahweh (Deuteronomy 4:19–20). Israel had long regarded Yahweh as the Lord of the hosts of heaven, but the

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98. Ibid., 114–16.

99. Ibid., 125–27.

100. Ibid., 125. Friedman emphasizes that Chronicles notes that Jeremiah “composed a lamentation for Josiah when he was killed.”

101. Ibid., 146.

102. Ibid., 209.

title Yahweh of Hosts was not used by the Deuteronomists.  
What happened to the hosts, the angels?<sup>103</sup>

In *The Revelation of Jesus Christ*, Barker added references to two other Deuteronomic proscriptions. The Jews were not to “enquire after secret things which belonged only to the Lord (Deuteronomy 29:29). Their duty was to obey the commandments bought down from Sinai and not to seek someone who would ascend to heaven for them to discover remote and hidden things (Deuteronomy 30:11).”<sup>104</sup>

Regardless of how often Jeremiah cited Deuteronomy and agreed with the Deuteronomistic History, he disagreed on these crucial points, *which Barker sees as key to the nature of Josiah’s Reform*.<sup>105</sup> And so did Lehi and Nephi disagree on these same crucial points, regardless of how often they agreed with or quoted Deuteronomy.<sup>106</sup> That should be telling. But none of the other dozen or so books by other scholars that I have read on the Reform have commented on either these specific passages in Deuteronomy or on the notable absence of the Day of Atonement from the sacred calendar in Deuteronomy 16.<sup>107</sup>

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103. Barker, *The Great Angel*, 13.

104. Margaret Barker, *The Revelation of Jesus Christ Which God Gave to Him to Show to His Servants What Must Soon Take Place (Revelation 1.1)* (London: T&T Clark, 2000).

105. Kevin Christensen, “Prophets and Kings in Lehi’s Jerusalem and Margaret Barker’s Temple Theology,” *Interpreter: A Journal of Mormon Scripture* 4 (2013), 177–93, <https://journal.interpreterfoundation.org/prophets-and-kings-in-lehis-jerusalem-and-margaret-barkers-temple-theology/>. Also see Barker’s most detailed examination of Jeremiah in *The Mother of the Lord*, 54–75.

106. For agreement, see Noel Reynolds, “Lehi as Moses,” *Journal of Book of Mormon Studies* 9, no. 2 (2000): 35, <https://scholarsarchive.byu.edu/jbms/vol9/iss2/5/>. Reynolds had not yet read *The Great Angel*.

107. For the Day of Atonement, compare Deuteronomy 16 and Leviticus 23:27–32. It is important that D. John Butler mapped the content of Nephi’s vision in 1 Nephi 11–14 to the Day of Atonement, that Professor William Hamblin mapped the content of Jacob’s discourse in 2 Nephi 6–11 to the Day of Atonement rituals, and that John Welch and Terrence Szink mapped King Benjamin’s temple discourse to the Day of Atonement, with Benjamin acting in the role of high priest. See D. John Butler, *Plain and Precious Things: The Temple Religion of the Book of Mormon’s Visionary Men*, (self-published, 2012), 133–54. See also “William Hamblin on ‘Jacob’s Sermon and the Day of Atonement,’” The Interpreter Foundation, YouTube video at 26:17, September 22, 2012, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Ls4Pt5S25xk>; John W. Welch, Terrence L. Szink, “King Benjamin’s Speech in the Context of Ancient Israelite Festivals,” *King Benjamin’s Speech: That Ye May Learn Wisdom*, eds. John W. Welch and Stephen D. Ricks, (Provo, UT: FARMS, 1998), <https://scholarsarchive.byu.edu/mi/45/>. I have

After I finished *The Great Angel* and started collecting Barker's books and essays, for broader perspective and balance I found other books, such as William Doorly's *Obsession with Justice: The Story of the Deuteronomists*, John Bright's Anchor volume on Jeremiah, and others, and read them as well. Excited by what I was learning, and how that changed what I was seeing in both the Bible and the Book of Mormon while using Barker's paradigm, I approached Daniel Peterson after a talk he gave during the St. Louis Temple open house, preceding the temple dedication. I asked him if he knew whether anyone had been doing anything with Barker's work. Already a fan of *The Great Angel*, he encouraged me to contact William Hamblin, who had by then started the FARMS *Occasional papers* series. I spent the next year working on a paper, and after Hamblin critiqued an early draft, I spent another year working to improve it.

### First Contact

In the fall of 1999, Margaret Barker received and answered a letter from an obscure English major and technical writer in Lawrence, Kansas (that is, me) who had, as an introduction, sent her a copy of Hugh Nibley's *Enoch the Prophet*, which I thought she might find of interest, due to her own publications on Enoch. I also sent a copy of Nibley's essay on "The Forty Day Mission of Christ,"<sup>108</sup> since it was comparable in themes and sources to her essay on "The Secret Tradition," published in *The Journal of Higher Criticism*.<sup>109</sup> She asked what I was working on, and I wrote that I intended to compare her work to the Book of Mormon. This was her first contact, as far as she knew, with a member of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints. The next important contact came in early 2002 when I got a box of author's copies and sent her a copy of

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argued that Lehi's first public discourse in 1 Nephi 1:19, on the "Messiah, and also the redemption of the world," addresses the implications of the absence of the Day of Atonement from Deuteronomy. See my "Prophets and Kings in Lehi's Jerusalem and Margaret Barker's Temple Theology," *Interpreter: A Journal of Mormon Scripture* 4 (2013): 177–93, <https://journal.interpreterfoundation.org/prophets-and-kings-in-lehis-jerusalem-and-margaret-barkers-temple-theology/>.

108. Hugh Nibley, "Evangelium Quadraginta Dierum: The Forty-day Mission of Christ — The Forgotten Heritage," reprinted in *Mormonism and Early Christianity*, eds. Todd M. Compton and Stephen D. Ricks (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book and Provo, UT: FARMS, 1987), 10–44.

109. Margaret Barker, "The Secret Tradition" in *The Journal of Higher Criticism* 2, no. 1 (1995): 31–67, reprinted in Barker, *The Great High Priest*, 1–33. Also online at her website, <http://www.margaretbarker.com/Papers/SecretTradition.pdf>.

“Paradigms Regained: A Survey of Margaret Barker’s Scholarship and Its Significance for Mormon Studies.”

She emailed back, “It came about five hours ago. I have read it already. ... I HAD NO IDEA that my work would be of such significance for Mormon Studies. Thank you for sending me a copy, and for that matter, thank you for writing the book.”<sup>110</sup>

I would soon notice that if I went to Amazon books and looked at “What other books have readers of this book purchased” sections for *The Great Angel*, and others of her books, prominent among the titles were things like Terryl Givens’s *By the Hand of Mormon*, Richard Bushman’s *Rough Stone Rolling*, and Hugh Nibley’s *Temple and Cosmos*. The opposite was true as well. Those who read Givens, Nibley and Bushman were also buying *The Great Angel* and *The Lost Prophet* and others. This conspicuous Latter-day Saint association continued for well over a decade. The pattern is not as evident in the past few years, I believe, not because Latter-day Saint interest has diminished, but because broader interest in Barker has substantially increased.

In early 2002, Professor Noel Reynolds of BYU had been working on a project at the Vatican Library in Rome, and on the flight home, had decided to read *The Great Angel*. Profoundly impressed, he went to the FARMS offices and asked Louis Midgley if anyone had heard of her. Midgley responded that they had just published *Paradigms Regained*. Reynolds read it and contacted me and asked if I had been in touch with Barker. I said yes and provided him with her email and address. He soon contacted her and arranged for an in-person visit in her Derbyshire home. He spent about five hours with her, discussing her work and her interest in the temple. One of the direct outcomes of that visit was that she was invited to come to BYU for a week-long seminar in May of 2003. Reynolds informed me that the Dean of Religion at BYU had given copies of my book to most of his faculty. Reynolds also told me that my writing *Paradigms Regained* had saved him the trouble of doing so.

I have mentioned that by the mid-1990s, a few Latter-day Saint scholars, such as Barry Bickmore, David Baron, Martin Tanner, John Tvedtnes, Eugene Seaich and Daniel Peterson had begun quoting *The Great Angel*. Some of our critics took enough notice of a few of those quotes, especially those by Barry Bickmore, that in *The New Mormon Challenge*, a 2002 collection of essays by Evangelical scholars responding to Latter-day Saint claims, Paul Owen spent a fifth of his essay attempting

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110. Margaret Barker, e-mail message to author in early 2002.

to debunk her work.<sup>111</sup> Several Latter-day Saint scholars responded to the book in volumes of *The FARMS Review*,<sup>112</sup> and I was invited to respond to Owen. While I was working on the essay, she sent me an email with some useful advice. I asked if she minded if I quoted her, and she replied that I could quote anything I wanted. We included her response as an appendix in my response to Owen's essay.<sup>113</sup> This was the first time she was published in a Latter-day Saint journal. In a subsequent edition of *The FARMS Review* in 2003, Barry Bickmore offered another wide-ranging and more detailed response to Owen, citing Barker, along with many others, in defending Latter-day Saint theology and our use of Barker's books.<sup>114</sup>

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111. Paul Owen, "Monotheism, Mormonism, and the New Testament Witness" *The New Mormon Challenge: Responding to the Latest Defenses of a Fast-Growing Movement*, eds. Francis J. Beckwith, Carl Mosser, Paul Owen, (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2002) 301–08.

112. See *Review of Books on the Book of Mormon 1989–2011* 14, no. 1–2, <https://scholarsarchive.byu.edu/msr/vol14/iss1/> and *Review of Books on the Book of Mormon 1989–2011* 15/1, <https://scholarsarchive.byu.edu/msr/vol15/iss1/>.

113. Kevin Christensen, "A Response to Paul Owen's Comments on Margaret Barker," *Review of Books on the Book of Mormon 1989–2011* 14, no. 1–(2002): 193–221, <https://scholarsarchive.byu.edu/msr/vol14/iss1/1-2/>.

114. Barry Bickmore, "Of Simplicity, Oversimplification, and Monotheism" *Review of Books on the Book of Mormon 1989–2011* 51, no. 1 (2003): 215–58, <https://scholarsarchive.byu.edu/msr/vol15/iss1/14/>. Another offshoot of Bickmore quoting from *The Great Angel* occurred in 2002 when second-generation Japanese American student Andre Ishii, who had been researching Mormonism for a personal study and encountered Barry Bickmore's "Early Christianity and Mormonism Page," which included several articles on similarities "between [Latter-day Saint] doctrines and practices and those of the Early Christian Church." Bickmore's quotation from *The Great Angel* led Ishii to Barker's books. Speaking of himself in third person, he writes: "One of the things he began to notice as he continued to read Barker's research was that many of the elements Barker writes in her books regarding ancient Israelite Temple not only fit decently with many of the ancient Japanese traditions and religion, but also solved some of the problems he had in making sense of the theory as presented by some of the researchers of this subject. The world knows of it as the 'Japanese-Jews Common Origin Theory.' It is a theory proposed by some that in ancient times, there was a migration (or series of migrations) of Israelites on the vast Eurasian continent — from Western Asia to the Japanese archipelago at the other side of the Silk Road — who ultimately became the Japanese people." Andre Ishii, "Shinto-Judaism Common Origin Theory in Light of Margaret Barker's Scholarship," 2004, 80 pages, p 3. Unpublished paper in my possession, courtesy of Andre Ishii. For a time, Ishii's work led him to attempt to translate *The Great Angel* into Japanese.



Shortly before the seminar, I got an email from BYU Professor M. Catherine Thomas, wanting to know about a Barker source for a paper she was writing. She commented on the circumstance that Barker had spent years working against tides of opinion and established thinking in order to gain respect and acceptance, making the climb from obscure housewife and math teacher to President of the Society for Old Testament Study, and at that moment when she had “arrived,” we show up. How would she react? Would she treat the possible association with the Latter-day Saints as a threat to her career and reputation? When John Welch first discovered chiasmus in the Book of Mormon while on his mission in Germany in 1967, he also reported that he had gone and asked the scholar who had given the lecture on chiasmus the previous week whether the example he discovered in Mosiah was valid. That man had first read the chiastic passage, commented that it was very good, then realized that it was in the Book of Mormon, closed the book and would not say another word. When Hugh Nibley showed Matthew Black the Book of Moses Mahujah/Enoch story, paralleling the one that Black had found in the Qumran Enoch, Black refused to comment, except to say “Someday we will find out the source that Joseph Smith used.”<sup>115</sup> In contrast, Barker’s open response clearly stands out. Despite some critics fretting over the Latter-day Saint connection, as Paul Owen had done, she has never shied away from it. And as is demonstrated by her subsequent Lambeth Doctor of Divinity Degree and ongoing publications and more invitations to speak than she can possibly accept, the connection has not hurt her scholarly career. It is a simple but convincing demonstration that she does not fear man more than God.

### **Barker Comes to BYU in 2003**

In May 2003, Barker arrived in Provo for a five-day seminar which she presented to a room full of Latter-day Saint scholars, mostly from BYU, but also including Alyson Von Feldt, Brant Gardner, and myself. She used a Hebrew Bible that she translated on the fly, the two volumes of Charlesworth’s *The Old Testament Pseudepigrapha* which she navigated with notable facility, and a brief outline for the topics she wanted to cover in each session.

Before the seminar came, I had been invited to write an essay on Barker’s work for the upcoming *Glimpses of Lehi’s Jerusalem* volume, edited by David and Jo Ann Seely and John W. Welch. On the first day

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115. See *Hugh Nibley Observed*, eds. Jeffery M. Bradshaw, Shirley S. Ricks, Stephen T. Whitlock (Orem, UT: Eborn Books, 2021), 426.



of the seminar, I met with Professor Welch to discuss edits to an essay I had in the volume. On that first occasion, Welch seemed to be reserving judgement about Barker. On the third day of the seminar, she went through the material on the transmission of Hebrew scripture akin to her “Text and Context” essay, included in *The Great High Priest*.<sup>116</sup> At the end of her presentation, he bounded down from the back row, opened her monogrammed Triple Combination to 1 Nephi 13, and excitedly asked if she had seen this. (1 Nephi 13 and “Text and Context” tell essentially the same story regarding the transmission of scripture and the loss and restoration of plain and precious things.) He reported that she wanted to talk with him about the Narrative of Zosimus. In a presentation almost ten years later, in Logan for the Academy for Temple Studies, Welch recalled another important moment during Barker’s first visit to Provo:

She came here ten years ago to give a seminar at BYU, and I had the pleasure of driving her through Utah County. As we drove by Mount Timpanogos, we started talking about mountains and the mountain of the Lord, and she started making connections. Then I told her I had done a lot of work on the Sermon on the Mount as a temple text. She wouldn’t let me stop talking about it. We corresponded about it, and eventually I received an invitation to present the topic at Temple Studies Group in London and elsewhere in London. The book was published by Ashgate in 2009.<sup>117</sup> You’ll see that it is in the series Society for Old Testament Studies, and Margaret was the head of that series at the time. I’m grateful that she encouraged me through all of this.<sup>118</sup>

Besides encouraging Welch to write *The Sermon on the Mount in Light of the Temple* for the larger Christian community, Welch later

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116. Barker, “Text and Context,” <http://www.margaretbarker.com/Papers/TextAndContext.pdf>.

117. John W. Welch, *The Sermon on the Mount in the Light of the Temple*, (Burlington, VT: Ashgate, 2009).

118. John W. Welch, “The Temple, The Sermon on the Mount, and the Gospel of Matthew,” *Mormonism and the Temple: Examining an Ancient Tradition*, ed. Gary N. Anderson (Logan, UT: Academy for Temple Studies, 2013), 61, <http://www.templestudies.org/wp-content/uploads/2013/02/MormonismAndTheTemple.pdf>. For more details of their discussion, see John W. Welch, “The Sermon on the Mount in the Light of the Temple,” interview by Alan Taylor Farnes, *Religious Educator* 12, no. 1 (2011): 21–37, <https://rsc.byu.edu/vol-12-no-1-2011/sermon-mountain-light-temple>.

told me that Barker had insisted that he mention in that book that the temple-context thesis had originally come from the Book of Mormon.<sup>119</sup> Welch has compared Barker's impact on his life and scholarship to that of Hugh Nibley.<sup>120</sup>

During the seminar, attendee Alyson Von Feldt heard BYU Professor C. Wilfred Griggs say, "She puts our scholarship to shame." As part of her time at BYU, for lunches and dinners, Barker met with small groups, to give people a chance for more intimate conversations than was possible in the seminars. John Tvedtnes later told me that during his dinner with her, she told him that one of the things that turned her towards the temple when she was at Cambridge was her reading an essay in *Jewish Quarterly Review*, "Christian Envy of the Temple," by one Hugh Nibley.<sup>121</sup> During that first visit to Provo, Barker also began a close friendship with Professor John F. Hall and his wife that led to Hall's repeated participation in her London-based Temple Studies group.<sup>122</sup>

She gave two public talks while at BYU in 2003. For a devotional, she spoke on "What King Josiah Reformed." This talk was later included in *Glimpses of Lehi's Jerusalem*. Brant Gardner told me that listening to that one talk caused one of the most important paradigm shifts in his life. Gardner incorporated many of Barker's notions in his 2003 FAIR presentation on "Monotheism, Messiah, and Mormon's Book,"<sup>123</sup> and he refers to her work often in his important six-volume commentary on the Book of Mormon, *Second Witness*.<sup>124</sup> The talk also changed my thinking on Josiah. In *Paradigms Regained*, influenced by Friedman, I approached the Deuteronomist Reform as occurring in layers and waves over time,

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119. Welch, *The Sermon on the Mount in the Light of the Temple*, xii, 220–21.

120. Welch, "Welcome and Opening Comments by the Presenters," *Mormonism and the Temple*, 17, <http://www.templestudies.org/wp-content/uploads/2013/02/MormonismAndTheTemple.pdf>.

121. Also see Louis Midgley's report of the same information: Louis Midgley, "The Nibley Legacy" *Review of Books on the Book of Mormon 1989–2011*, 20, no. 2 (2008): 294n3, <https://scholarsarchive.byu.edu/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=1758&context=msr>.

122. For example, see Hall's presentation at the Temple Studies Group's Symposium VII Mary and the Temple, "The Lady in the Temple before the Hebrews: Hathor of Egypt," June 15, 2013, <http://www.templestudiesgroup.com/Symposia/Symposium7.htm>.

123. Brant Gardner, "Monotheism, Messiah, and Mormon's Book," paper delivered at FAIR Conference, August 2003, Orem, Utah, <https://www.fairlatterdaysaints.org/conference/august-2003/monotheism-messiah-and-mormons-book>.

124. See the publisher's description of the first of six volumes of *Second Witness*, <https://gregkofford.com/collections/scripture/products/second-witness-volume-1>.

as different kings and events occurred up to the exile and return. In her “What Did King Josiah Reform?” talk I was struck by her crucial insight that “Josiah’s changes concerned the high priests, and were thus changes at the very heart of the temple.”<sup>125</sup> I began rereading Jeremiah and the Book of Mormon in that light, and my subsequent Barker essays reflect a changed perspective.<sup>126</sup> On Friday evening, she spoke to a smaller audience on Jesus as “The Great High Priest.” This talk was later published in *BYU Studies*.<sup>127</sup> While she was not able to meet Hugh Nibley due to his ill health at the time of her visit, she encountered Tom Nibley in the audience after her talk, and spoke to him of her admiration for Hugh Nibley’s scholarship.

### Ripples after BYU

Periodically, I would hear that this or that Latter-day Saint scholar had contacted Barker. For instance, Kevin Barney sent her a copy of his *BYU Studies* article on “Examining Six Key Concepts in Joseph Smith’s Understanding of Genesis 1:1.”<sup>128</sup> He reported that she approved and commented that “The key to everything is in what is missing from Genesis.”

As the 2004 publication process for *Glimpses of Lehi’s Jerusalem* progressed, I sent Barker a near-final draft of my essay for the volume, “The Temple, The Monarchy, and Wisdom: Lehi’s World and the Scholarship of Margaret Barker.” She read it and reported that doing so led to her deciding to read the Book of Mormon, Doctrine and Covenants, and the Pearl of Great Price, all in one day. She described it as a “big job,” and commented, “I was amazed at how much I recognized.”<sup>129</sup>

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125. Margaret Barker, “What Did King Josiah Reform?,” *Glimpses of Lehi’s Jerusalem*, eds. John W. Welch, David Rolph Seely, Jo Ann H. Seely (Provo, UT: FARMS, 2004), 526, <https://archive.bookofmormoncentral.org/content/what-did-king-josiah-reform>.

126. Christensen, “Prophets and Kings,” <https://journal.interpreterfoundation.org/prophets-and-kings-in-lehis-jerusalem-and-margaret-barkers-temple-theology/#fn2-2695>. I wrote my essay in response to William Hamblin’s “Vindicating Josiah” in same volume of the *Interpreter: A Journal of Mormon Scripture*, <https://journal.interpreterfoundation.org/vindicating-josiah/>.

127. See Margaret Barker “The Great High Priest” (lecture given at Brigham Young University, May 9, 2003), *BYU Studies* 42, no. 3–4 (2003): 65–84, <https://byustudies.byu.edu/article/the-great-high-priest/>.

128. Kevin L. Barney, “Examining Six Key Concepts in Joseph Smith’s Understanding of Genesis 1:1,” *BYU Studies* 39, no. 3 (2000): 107–24, <https://scholarsarchive.byu.edu/byusq/vol39/iss3/7/>.

129. Margaret Barker, e-mail message to author, 2004.

In 2004, I also published another essay in the *FARMS Review*, “The Deuteronomist De-Christianizing of the Old Testament,”<sup>130</sup> as a response to my reading an essay by Melodie Moench Charles called “The Mormon Christianizing of the Old Testament.”<sup>131</sup> Her essay charged that Latter day Saint commentaries on the Old Testament tended to rely on an overlay of modern revelation, rather than “reading the text as it is.” Barker’s first book, *The Older Testament*, began making her case that “a fundamental misreading of the Old Testament” had been forced upon present readers “by those who transmitted the texts.”<sup>132</sup> I was able to show that “on exactly those points on which Charles asserts that Mormonism is irreconcilable with the Old Testament, Barker finds shifts in Israelite thought during the exile and beyond. At every point, the original picture corresponds to what we have in the Book of Mormon.”<sup>133</sup>

Incidentally, the same issue of *The FARMS Review* that contained my “The Deuteronomist De-Christianizing of the Old Testament” included a review of *Glimpses of Lehi’s Jerusalem* by Terrence L. Szink that disputed Barker’s take on Josiah and defending a traditional view and asserting that Jeremiah and Lehi supported the reform. Though I did not see his essay in advance, my essay happened to include arguments that both Jeremiah and Lehi were opposed to the reform. Readers can compare and weigh arguments for themselves.<sup>134</sup>

### Barker and the 2005 Joseph Smith Conference

In 2005, Margaret was invited to the planned Joseph Smith Conference to be held at the Library of Congress in Washington, D.C. The conference would include Latter-day Saint scholars and those from a range of backgrounds, exploring the life of Joseph Smith on the bicentennial of his birth. Barker would be responding to a talk by Terryl Givens on

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130. Kevin Christensen, “The Deuteronomist De-Christianizing of the Old Testament,” *Review of Books on the Book of Mormon 1989–2011* 16, no. 2 (2004): 59–90, <https://scholarsarchive.byu.edu/msr/vol16/iss2/5/>.

131. Melodie Moench Charles, “The Mormon Christianizing of the Old Testament” in *The Word of God: Essays on Mormon Scripture*, ed. Dan Vogel (Salt Lake City: Signature Books, 1990), 131–42.

132. Barker, *The Older Testament*, 1.

133. Christensen, “Deuteronomist De-Christianizing,” 89.

134. See Terrence L. Szink, “Jerusalem in Lehi’s Day” *Review of Books on the Book of Mormon 1989–2011* 16, no. 2 (2004): 149–59, <https://scholarsarchive.byu.edu/msr/vol16/iss2/10/>.

“Joseph Smith: Prophecy, Process, and Plentitude.”<sup>135</sup> For her visit to Washington, John Welch talks about how

I picked Margaret up at the airport; she was hobbling because she was in great pain, so we put her in a wheelchair and brought her to the hotel. That kind of dedication is the sign of a dedicated life, ... I appreciate that Margaret would have come under those conditions. I picked her up the next morning when we were on the way right over to the Library of Congress to have her speak, and one of the parts of her paper dealt with the tree of life and the white fruit mentioned in 1 Nephi 8 in Lehi’s vision. True to form, Margaret had been up early in the morning rereading 1 Nephi 8 to be sure she had all of this fresh in mind. As we were going over to the Library of Congress, she said, “I saw something very interesting I’d never seen before as I read through this. There it talks about an iron rod that leads to the tree of life. And all of a sudden it connected in my mind that in Psalms 2:9, the King James says that God will there ‘[beat people] with a rod of iron,’ but the Hebrew can just as well be ‘leads people with a rod of iron.’”<sup>136</sup>

My wife and I arrived at the conference hall early and found reasonable seats.<sup>137</sup> I spotted Margaret and introduced her to my wife. Shauna greeted Margaret with the comment that it seemed that this was going to be the “start of something important,” and both she and Margaret teared up in a moment of spiritual connection. We had no idea what she would say before she spoke. She spoke on the Book of Mormon in a talk that remains by far the single most insightful and appreciative talk by any non-LDS scholar.<sup>138</sup>

What I offer can only be the reactions of an Old Testament scholar: are the revelations to Joseph Smith consistent with the situation in Jerusalem in about 600 BCE? Do the revelations to

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135. Terryl L. Givens, “Joseph Smith: Prophecy, Process, and Plentitude,” *BYU Studies* 44, no. 4 (2005), <https://scholarsarchive.byu.edu/byusq/vol44/iss4/8/>.

136. Welch, “Opening Comments,” 17.

137. In 2004, my family had relocated from Lawrence, Kansas, to a suburb of Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania, which meant that we could conveniently drive to Washington, DC, to attend Margaret’s talk.

138. Compare papers on the Book of Mormon by James H. Charlesworth and Krister Stendahl in *Reflections on Mormonism: Judaean-Christian Parallels*, ed. Truman G. Madsen, (Salt Lake City: Religious Studies Center, Brigham Young University, 1978).

Joseph Smith fit in that context, the reign of King Zedekiah, who is mentioned at the beginning of the First Book of Nephi, which begins in the “first year of the reign of Zedekiah” (1 Nephi 1:4)? Zedekiah was installed as king in Jerusalem in 597 BCE.<sup>139</sup>

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The divine Son, the priest of the order of Melchizedek, was born in the glory of these “holy ones,” or so it seems. Psalm 110 is an enigmatic text, but it seems to describe the birth of an angel priest after the order of Melchizedek in the Holy of Holies of the temple, which represented heaven, which evokes related ideas in Alma 13:1–16 in the Book of Mormon.

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The tree of life made one happy, according to the Book of Proverbs (Proverbs 3:8), but for detailed descriptions of the tree we have to rely on the noncanonical texts. Enoch described it as perfumed, with fruit like grapes (1 Enoch 32:5), and a text discovered in Egypt in 1945 described the tree as beautiful, fiery, and with fruit like white grapes. I do not know of any other source that describes the fruit as *white* grapes. Imagine my surprise when I read the account of Lehi’s vision of the tree whose *white fruit* made one happy, and the interpretation that the Virgin in Nazareth was the mother of the Son of God after the manner of the flesh (1 Nephi 11:14–23). This is the Heavenly Mother, represented by the tree of life, and then Mary and her Son on earth. This revelation to Joseph Smith was the ancient Wisdom symbolism, intact, and almost certainly as it was known in 600 BCE.<sup>140</sup>

During a question-and-answer period after the four-speaker session, it became evident that all the questions were directed to Barker. Speaking in her direct and unassuming way, she had electrified the large audience in a way that few scholars ever do. For instance, in a 2013 interview, Latter-day Saint scholar Fiona Givens talked about the impact that talk had on her:

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139. Margaret Barker, “Joseph Smith and the Pre-exilic Religion of Israel,” *BYU Studies* 44, no. 4 (2005) 69, <https://scholarsarchive.byu.edu/byusq/vol44/iss4/9/>.

140. *Ibid.*, 76.

Barker has probably had the most powerful impact on my theological evolution. It would take me too long to go into detail, so I shall enumerate some areas as briefly as I can (yes, I know I'm sounding like Polonius).

- 1) I was first introduced to her at the Joseph Smith Bicentennial Conference in Washington, D.C. I was enthralled by the paper she delivered on whether it was possible that *The Book of Mormon* could, in fact, be a 600 BCE text. Barker's fascinating explication of Lehi's vision illustrated that *The Book of Mormon* could be just that. I bought all her books and started ploughing through them.
- 2) I am impressed, foremost, by her honesty as a scholar. She is careful to presage her works by admitting that it is a challenge to support her claims, given the paucity and the quality of the manuscripts with which she is working.
- 3) I find her argument, that an earlier Hebrew faith tradition that revolved around the Temple and the Atonement was replaced by the Deuteronomist focus on Moses and the law during King Josiah's reform, compelling. "Reform" is a two-edged sword — great if you are on the "right" side of it, disastrous if you are not. The "Temple Priesthood" which espoused a belief in a Heavenly Father and a Heavenly Son was ousted in favour of monotheism. The Book of Mormon introduces the prophet, Lehi, during this reform. The fact that he was being hunted strongly suggests that he was on the wrong side of the reform movement. When I read the first few chapters of the Book of Mormon I now see historical figures depicted rather than mythical ones.
- 4) I find Barker's extra-canonical research on the Feminine Divine in the First Temple tradition fascinating. I am currently reading her two-volume work: *The Mother of the Lord*, which is both rich with detail and resonant.<sup>141</sup>

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141. Fiona Givens, "Nothing Can Separate Us From the Love of God: An Interview with Fiona Givens, co-author of *The God Who Weeps*" interview by William Morris, *A Motley Vision*, April 7, 2013, [https://motleyvision.org/2013/04/07/nothing-can-separate-us-from-the-love-of-god-an-interview-with-fiona-givens-co-author-of-the-god-who-weep\\_](https://motleyvision.org/2013/04/07/nothing-can-separate-us-from-the-love-of-god-an-interview-with-fiona-givens-co-author-of-the-god-who-weep/_/)/.



Gary Anderson, later an organizer of the Academy for Temple Studies group in Logan, reported, “My interest increased when she spoke at the Worlds of Joseph Smith Symposium in 2005 at the Library of Congress. Through some friends, I started sending emails to her on items about temple studies.”<sup>142</sup>

### A Widening Influence, Interest and Collaborations

Also in 2005, Orson Scott Card connected with me Katherine Kidd, then an editor at *Meridian* magazine. Thanks to Card’s introduction, and Katherine Kidd’s editorship, *Meridian* published twelve essays from me, seven of which discussed Barker’s work and books.<sup>143</sup> Latter-day Saint biblical scholar David Larsen later told me that these essays were his first introduction to her work.<sup>144</sup> He then published on Barker’s work, responding to a Barker talk on “The Lord is One” in *BYU Studies*.<sup>145</sup>

In 2006, Barker wrote a paper for a Tree of Life conference at BYU. This was published as “The Fragrant Tree” and published in *The Tree of Life: From Eden to Eternity*.<sup>146</sup>

In 2006, Dean Collingwood and James R. McConkie reviewed Barker’s *Temple Theology: An Introduction for BYU Studies*.

In the past two decades, Margaret Barker has managed a miracle: in a prodigious output of a dozen scholarly books and book chapters, as well as numerous articles and conference addresses, Barker, a Cambridge-educated independent scholar, Methodist lay preacher, and former president of the Society for Old Testament Study, has successfully shaken the very foundations of Old Testament and early Christian

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142. Gary Anderson, “Welcome and Opening Comments by Presenters,” *Mormonism and the Temple*, 10, <http://www.templestudies.org/wp-content/uploads/2013/02/MormonismAndTheTemple.pdf>.

143. For example, Kevin Christensen, “Plain and Precious Things Restored: Spiritual Blindness,” *Meridian Magazine*, October 4, 2005, <https://latterdaysaintmag.com/article-1-4165/>.

144. Larsen studied with Andrei Orlov at Marquette, who uses Barker’s work, and completed his Ph.D. in Biblical Studies at St. Andrews in Scotland.

145. David J. Larsen, “Response to Margaret Barker’s ‘The Lord is One,’” *BYU Studies Quarterly* 56, no. 1 (2017), <https://byustudies.byu.edu/article/response-to-margaret-barkers-the-lord-is-one/>. Other respondents in the same issue included Daniel C. Peterson and Andrew C. Skinner.

146. *The Tree of Life: From Eden to Eternity*, eds. John W. Welch and Donald W. Parry (Provo, UT: Maxwell Institute, and Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 2011), 55–79.



scholarship. Is it not obvious that the Christianity of Jesus's day and shortly thereafter was heavily influenced by Greek culture? Is it not clear that Jesus' teachings were a product of the Jewish culture, especially the synagogue culture, of his day? "No," says Barker to these claims; it is neither obvious nor clear that Christianity had its origin in these influences. A careful reading of noncanonical sources such as the Enoch literature and the Dead Sea Scrolls suggests that Jesus was influenced by something much more ancient than Hellenistic or synagogue culture. He seemed to have in mind the theology and ordinances of the first Jewish temple, the temple as it had existed before the accretions of paganism and the "reforms" of King Josiah in the seventh century BCE. Indeed, if Barker's thesis holds up to scholarly scrutiny, everyone will be forced to redefine Jesus as a restorer of a religion that had been lost rather than as an inventor of something new.

Such a reworking of centuries of scholarship will not be easy. Think of the scores of German Protestant scholars whose work constituted the academic foundation of intertestamental scholarship throughout the twentieth century and whose labors are now being called into question. Think of the millions of Christians of all stripes who have been taught to believe in a strict trinitarian monotheism — a belief Barker claims is inconsistent with both ancient Jewish religion and the religion Jesus restored. Despite these formidable obstacles, the Germans are diligently reading Barker and are finding much of value, as are the Catholics, the Russian Orthodox, and many others. At least sixty reviews of Barker's works have already been published (including the lead review in the *Times Literary Supplement* of 2003), and Barker has been asked to speak at conferences and symposia in Europe, Turkey, and the United States, including at a Brigham Young University devotional in 2003 and at the Joseph Smith Conference in Washington, D.C., in 2005.<sup>147</sup>

In 2006 in *BYU Studies*, David Paulsen published a long essay called "Are Christians Mormon? Reassessing Joseph Smith's Theology in his

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147. Dean W. Collinwood, James W. McConkie, review of "Temple Theology: An Introduction," by Margaret Barker, *BYU Studies* 45, no. 2 (2006): 173, <https://byustudies.byu.edu/article/temple-theology-an-introduction/>.

Bicentennial.” In the section on the rising notice of the divine feminine in Christian thought and Biblical study, Paulsen included a discussion of how “Margaret Barker has explored the issue in depth”; two pages discussed her work.<sup>148</sup>

In 2007, Alyson Von Feldt published two important essays that drew on Barker’s work in places. The first is her review of William Dever’s important book on the evidence for a Heavenly Mother in ancient Israel, *Did God Have a Wife? Archaeology and Folk Religion in Ancient Israel*, in which she made fresh observations on “what Dever believes is the most remarkable artifact of ancient Israelite religion found to date. It is an elaborate terra-cotta rectangular pillar from 10<sup>th</sup> century BC Ta’anach (p. 154). I believe that Dever’s archaeology and Barker’s reconstruction of wisdom theology come together to elucidate this artifact, also bringing light to our own Latter-day Saint temple tradition.”<sup>149</sup> Von Feldt goes beyond Dever to suggest that “*that Ta’anach stand is a plausible model of the creature in Ezekiel’s visions.*”<sup>150</sup>

Her essay included a very good photograph of the offering stand. She continues to explain the importance and implications.

I have suggested that the Ta’anach offering stand represents the throne of God. I have discussed its two Asherah icons and possible Yahweh symbol. I have considered that the offerings associated with this stand may have been invocation offerings rather than memorial offerings. I infer that the mencherubim wearing the Hathor wigs could be understood to be mortals who have received wisdom and been transformed into angels. So, taken all together and understood in light of the wisdom tradition, *the Ta’anach stand may well be physical evidence of a theology of apotheosis.* In the countryside of Israel in family shrines, ordinary men and perhaps women sought heavenly wisdom. They may have believed they could become holy ones, ascend to the throne of Yahweh, and receive cosmic knowledge. They may have understood

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148. David L. Paulsen, “Are Christians Mormon? Reassessing Joseph Smith’s Theology in his Bicentennial” *BYU Studies* 45, no. 1 (2006): 105–107, <https://byustudies.byu.edu/article/are-christians-mormon-reassessing-joseph-smiths-theology-in-his-bicentennial/>.

149. Alyson Skabelund Von Feldt, “Does God Have a Wife?” review of *Did God Have a Wife? Archaeology and Folk Religion in Ancient Israel*, by William G. Dever, *Review of Books on the Book of Mormon* 1989–2011 19, no. 1 (2007): 100, <https://scholarsarchive.byu.edu/msr/vol19/iss1/10/>.

150. *Ibid.*, 103.

that the power to bestow this experience was in the hands of Asherah, and their offerings of invocation were symbols of her life-giving essence. If we add a Book of Mormon text to the interpretation, we can see that the stand, like others of its kind, may also have encoded the incarnation of Yahweh. Because the Ta<sup>c</sup>anach stand is so productively interpreted by Ezekiel's vision, it is possible that apocalyptic has found new roots — in the ancient religion of the countryside.<sup>151</sup>

Von Feldt's other 2007 essay was just as groundbreaking and insightful as her review of Dever:

With a goal of identifying instructional wisdom in the Book of Mormon, we will quickly study the composition of Proverbs 1–9, and we will look at the literary forms, terms, and motifs of instructional wisdom in general.

Proverbs 1–9 is composed of ten *instructions*, also known as *lectures*, *discourses*, or *admonitions*, which are interspersed with five *interludes* or *hymns*. The interludes, with the exception of C, elaborate a similar theme: the persistence and excellence of wisdom. The whole collection is introduced by a prologue.

Like Near Eastern instructions in general, most of the instructions of Proverbs have a tripartite structure. They are introduced by (1) an *exordium* in which a father (a) *addresses* his son, (b) *exhorts* him to pay attention, and (c) *motivates* him by emphasizing the value or rewards that will flow from heeding his teachings. Following the *exordium* is (2) a *lesson*, summed up by (3) a *conclusion*.

In almost all cases of both Hebrew and Near Eastern instructional wisdom where the teacher's gender can be identified, it is male — a father or wise man. In some cases, such as instructions I and IX of Proverbs, the mother who stands behind the teachings is also mentioned. We have no sure indication that the voice is ever hers, but we might imagine that the parents take turns offering the counsel — the father giving the instruction, with the mother speaking the interludes or dramatizing the voice of the wisdom woman. Proverbs 31:1–9 is the only instance in extant wisdom

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151. Ibid., 109–10.

documents where the lesson is clearly taught by a woman, in this case the queen mother of the Old Testament king Lemuel. Instructional lectures are sometimes called *patriarchal admonitions* when the setting is that of a Hebrew patriarch/prophet addressing his sons at the end of his life.<sup>152</sup>

Von Feldt explores the patterns and themes of the ancient wisdom literature, and then demonstrates that the Book of Mormon contains examples and the patterns and themes throughout. For example, after a detailed survey, she can conclude:

So to sum up, the thematic and literary similarities between Mosiah 1–5 and Proverbs 1–9 lend weight to the possibility that Proverbs 1–9 has ritual significance. The instructions, like King Benjamin’s speech, may have been part of a cultic liturgy that was spoken at an ancient temple ceremony. In this scenario, Wisdom is depicted as a high priestess inviting the spiritually famished to partake of a ritual feast at her temple table — a feast of ordinances, knowledge, and blessings.<sup>153</sup>

In both of her essays, Von Feldt refers to Margaret Barker’s work on restoring the ancient wisdom tradition. She was later invited to present at the Academy for Temple Studies at their 2013 Conference on “The Lady of the Temple: Examining the Divine Feminine in the Judeo-Christian Tradition.”<sup>154</sup>

In the wake of Barker’s presentation at the Washington, D.C. Joseph Smith Conference, Terryl Givens emailed and told me that he was planning, with Reid L. Neilson, to edit a collection of essays from a broad selection of scholars who offer their reappraisals of Joseph Smith after two centuries. He asked if I thought that Margaret Barker would

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152. Alyson Skabelund Von Feldt, “‘His Secret is with the Righteous’: Instructional Wisdom in the Book of Mormon,” *FARMS Occasional Papers* #5 (2007): 51–52, archived at <https://web.archive.org/web/20130701164749/http://maxwellinstitute.byu.edu/publications/papers/?paperID=9&chapterID=74>. The document is also available at <https://drive.google.com/file/d/1FglzuabUj5r156AhrIRIGAfUgBzdQpQL/view>.

153. *Ibid.*, 72.

154. See Alyson Skabelund Von Feldt, “Wisdom and the Spirit in Resoration Scripture,” Lady of the Temple 2013 Conference, Academy for Temple Studies, Utah State University, Logan Utah, October 23, 2013, listed here, <http://www.templestudies.org/2013-the-lady-of-the-temple-conference/conference-schedule/>. For a video of Von Feldt’s presentation, see <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=bZOYpXp79h4>.

be interested. I provided contact information. This ended up as a collaborative essay in which Barker wrote on the theme of “Seeing the face of the Lord” in the ancient temple tradition, and I wrote a section on how this related to Joseph Smith and the Latter-day Saint scriptures. This was published in 2009 by Oxford University Press in *Joseph Smith Jr.: Reappraisals after Two Centuries*, as “Seeking the Face of the Lord: Joseph Smith and the First Temple Tradition.”

In 2007, Barker again presented at the Society of Biblical Literature in San Diego, this time on the theme of “Who was Melchizedek and Who was His God?”<sup>155</sup> In the version available on her website, she includes this introductory comment:

The translation history of Melchizedek’s few lines in Genesis raises important issues as to how and why the variants occurred. These need to be evaluated in the light of Melchizedek’s role in early Jewish-Christian debate, and how he is portrayed in the Apocalypse of Abraham, Psalm 110 and Hebrews. This paper was originally written without reference to LDS materials, and I am very grateful to John Welch and Kevin Christensen who showed me how my conclusions were relevant to and found in LDS material.<sup>156</sup>

For example, in this paper on Melchizedek, she writes:

What both the Jewish and the Enochic traditions are saying is that the Melchizedek priesthood was the priesthood of Enoch and the generation before the flood. The Book of Jubilees claims that many of the prescriptions of the Torah were far older than Moses, and had been given to Noah by his ancestors, the ancient priests (Jubilees 7.34–9; 10.13). We cannot just dismiss this as fiction. *These are all claims to a more ancient religion than that of Moses, an ancient religion represented in the biblical texts by the figure of Melchizedek.* The link to the Enoch tradition has to be important, not least because the oldest “history” of Jerusalem in 1 Enoch has no place for Moses. The so-called *Apocalypse of Weeks* describes the law being given, but there is no mention of Egypt or the Exodus (1 Enoch 93.6). There was a vision of the holy and righteous and

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155. Margaret Barker, “Who was Melchizedek and Who was His God?,” transcript at MargaretBarker.com, <http://www.margaretbarker.com/Papers/SBLMelchizedek.pdf>.

156. Ibid., 1.

the law was given. Compare here the Joseph Smith Genesis, which has a significantly longer text for the Melchizedek episode, and links him to the covenant with Enoch which is not mentioned in Masoretic Hebrew text. Melchizedek “was ordained an high priest after the order of the covenant which God made with Enoch.” *Who was this Melchizedek? This brief introductory survey shows that claims about him were disputed, and that the evidence is not always easy to evaluate. Earlier Jewish sources described him as a priest and a heavenly being, Christian texts say he was a priest and a heavenly being. Post Christian Jewish texts, however, say he was neither priest nor angel. The most likely explanation of this is the claims made for Jesus: that he was Melchizedek.* Melchizedek, as we shall see, described the spiritual being who appeared in or as various people, a condition that corresponds to the LDS concept of pre-mortal and mortal beings.<sup>157</sup>

Also in 2007, Latter-day Saint scholars William Hamblin and David Rolf Seely produced a book on *Solomon’s Temple: Myth and History*, for Thames and Hudson press, which cited Barker’s *The Gate of Heaven* in the Bibliography and included an appreciative jacket comment by Margaret Barker.

In 2008, Latter-day Saint scholar Ronan Head interviewed me regarding Barker’s work for a four-part series on the *By Common Consent* blog.<sup>158</sup> Parts 2, 3, and 4 include some interesting discussions, with objections, reservations, and appreciation being offered by a handful of Latter-day Saint scholars.

Latter-day Saint scholar Kevin Barney published “How to Worship our Heavenly Mother (Without Getting Excommunicated)” in *Dialogue* in 2008. Barney writes that “what I am going to suggest is that knowledge of Her is available in our canonized scripture, particularly in the Old Testament. Although information about Her is preserved in the Old Testament and associated literature, it is hidden in such a way that it requires scholarship to excavate it. And Mormonism is one of the few traditions, if not the only one, that has the resources within itself to take

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157. Ibid., 4.

158. Kevin Christensen, “Kevin Christensen on Margaret Barker,” interview by Ronan J. Head, *By Common Consent*, (blog) October 2, 2008. Links to part 4 with links to parts 1, 2, and 3, <https://bycommonconsent.com/2008/10/02/barker-part-4/>.

advantage of this knowledge for contemporary religious purposes.”<sup>159</sup> Though he draws on a wide range of biblical scholars, he cites Barker’s *The Great Angel* as having been his introduction to “a more recent trend in the scholarship of ancient Israel of seeing the monotheism we associate with Israelite theology as coming only at the end of a long line of development.”<sup>160</sup>

In 2009, two separate reviews of Barker’s *Temple Theology in Early Christianity* appeared in *The FARMS Review* by Frederick Huchel and John W. Welch. Both Huchel and Welch later presented papers at the London Temple Studies Group. Welch’s article is the transcript of the talk he gave for the London colloquium that was organized for the book’s publication.<sup>161</sup> In his review in that issue, Huchel writes:

Margaret Barker is an unassuming British scholar whose primary engagement is with the Old Testament. Her expertise and research have also embraced the New Testament ... and, more recently, a consideration of Mormon sources. When I say she is unassuming, I mean that her personal manner is utterly devoid of pomposity. By contrast, her writing is bold and direct — she has not hesitated to turn the world of biblical scholarship on its head. And when she speaks, her crisp, direct delivery takes charge of the audience from the very first sentence. Well trained, she writes and speaks with authority, but she has chosen to be an independent scholar, free from the constraints of mainstream academia.<sup>162</sup>

He continues,

The First Temple theology that Barker teases out of pre-Deuteronomist sources gives a vastly different picture of the early Old Testament than has been believed in both Catholic and Protestant scholarly circles. “Were anyone to demonstrate

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159. Kevin L. Barney, “How to Worship our Heavenly Mother (Without Getting Excommunicated),” *Dialogue* 41/4 (2008): 122, <https://www.dialoguejournal.com/articles/how-to-worship-our-mother-in-heaven-without-getting-excommunicated/>.

160. *Ibid.*, 123.

161. Margaret Barker Colloquium in London,” *Theology and Temple Studies*, (blog), *T&T Clark*, March 10, 2008 <https://tandtclark.typepad.com/ttc/2008/03/margaret-barker.html>.

162. Frederick M. Huchel, “Antecedents of the Restoration in the Ancient Temple,” *Review of Books on the Book of Mormon 1989–2011* 21, no. 1 (2009): 9, <https://scholarsarchive.byu.edu/msr/vol21/iss1/5/>.

these hypotheses,” one writer has pointed out, “it could have the potential to cause a seismic shift in the way we read and interpret the Bible.” In addition, “Barker paints a picture of the era from the reform of Josiah and Hilkiah to the visions of John the Apostle that is radically different from what we learned in seminary.” Mainstream scholars, it is true, tend not to like the implications of such a radical shift, but they find it difficult to refute her.<sup>163</sup>

In surveying her significant contributions, he continues,

It is in the interface between Barker’s biblical studies and Joseph Smith’s restoration that the book *Temple Themes in Christian Worship* (along with her other books and articles) has relevance for Latter-day Saints. In effect, much of her work can be viewed as a witness to important aspects of the restoration. Many doctrinal facets of the restoration that have been the most annoying to mainstream Christian scholars are also the very things now shown by Barker’s research to have come from the older tradition of the First Temple, whereas the mainstream Christian tradition rests on the Deuteronomist textual tradition.<sup>164</sup>

In 2009, LeGrand L. Baker and Stephen D. Ricks published *Who Shall Ascend into the Hill of the Lord: The Psalms in Israel’s Temple Worship in the Old Testament and in the Book of Mormon*, citing Barker twenty-one times.<sup>165</sup>

In 2009, John Welch reviewed Barker’s *Christmas: The Original Story*.<sup>166</sup> He notes that

Barker uses two main quarries of building blocks in reconstructing the original Christmas story (or stories). As most New Testament commentators also do, Barker weaves into her analysis a rich array of threads — drawn from evidences about cultural backgrounds, political contexts, and biblical prophecies — as she gives form and sense to the segmented elements contained in the traditional Christmas

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163. Ibid., 11.

164. Ibid., 12.

165. LeGrand L. Baker, Stephen D. Ricks, *Who Shall Ascend into the Hill of the Lord*, 2nd ed. (Salt Lake City: Eborn Books, 2011).

166. Margaret Barker, “Christmas: The Original Story,” <http://www.margaretbarker.com/Publications/Christmas.htm>.



accounts. But in addition, as she does in all of her signature works, Barker adds information from two distinctive spheres:

1. Temple Themes ... 2. Temple Readings.<sup>167</sup>

In 2010, for another Society of Biblical Literature Meeting, Margaret Barker wrote a paper on Hugh Nibley's essay "Christian Envy of the Temple":

The Temple is an aspect of biblical studies that impacts on the most sensitive issues of our time, and yet when Hugh Nibley wrote his paper 'Christian Envy of the Temple,'<sup>168</sup> scholars were paying little attention to this topic. The state of Israel was 13 years old at that time and did not include the traditional site of the Temple. We have only to think of the role the Temple plays in contemporary politics to realise, with the wisdom of hindsight, how great was the gap in biblical scholarship when Nibley took up his pen. And the Temple is not only important as the most contested piece of real estate on the planet; it is also the common heritage of all branches of the Christian Church, and the sooner this is realised, the sooner we shall have some real basis for Church unity.

Hugh Nibley's paper "Christian Envy of the Temple" opened up a new approach to the subject and is far too rich to consider in any detail in this short presentation. He set out to consider three aspects:

- That many Christian writers have expressed the conviction that the Church possesses no adequate substitute for the temple and have yearned for its return. They had a sense of loss without the Temple.
- That determined attempts have been made from time to time to revive in the Church practices peculiar to the Temple. They had a sense of inadequacy without the Temple.
- That the official Christian position, that Church and

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167. John W. Welch, "Christmas Stories" *Review of Books on the Book of Mormon 1989–2011* 21, no. 2 (2009), 34–35, <https://scholarsarchive.byu.edu/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=1774&context=msr>.

168. Hugh W. Nibley, "Christian Envy of the Temple," *The Jewish Quarterly Review* 50, no. 2 (October 1959): 97–123. Reprinted in Hugh W. Nibley, *Mormonism and Early Christianity* (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book and FARMS, 1987), 391–434.

Temple cannot co-exist and hence the latter has been abolished forever, has always been weakened by the persistent fear that the Temple might be restored. They [the churches] had a sense of misgiving.

Nibley was correct to identify the ambiguity in the Church's relationship with the Temple, and I shall suggest a possible solution to the problem he implied in his paper.<sup>169</sup>

In 2010, I published a response to a 1982 paper by William D. Russell, "A Further Inquiry into the Historicity of the Book of Mormon." My title was "Hindsight on a Book of Mormon Historicity Critique,"<sup>170</sup> and in responding to Russell, I had occasion to cite Barker on a range of issues, including Messianic expectations in pre-exilic Israel and the Isaiah issue. It was here that I called attention to Barker's important essay "The Original Setting of the Fourth Servant Song,"<sup>171</sup> which made the case that Isaiah 53, on the Suffering Servant, was directly inspired by Hezekiah's bout with the plague as interpreted in light of the temple rituals. If Barker's interpretation of the evidence, both archeological and textual, is correct, then Isaiah 53 is pre-exilic and therefore, available to Abinadi via the Brass Plates.

Also in 2010, Jeffery M. Bradshaw published his huge and ambitious book, *In God's Image and Likeness: Ancient and Modern Perspectives on the Book of Moses*.<sup>172</sup> The jacket comment for this 1100-page commentary was provided by Margaret Barker, who wrote:

This is not just a book for Mormons. Dr. Bradshaw draws on a wide range of material from many cultures and eras: Jewish, Christian, Muslim. He shows how to read and understand the stories of a prephilosophical culture, and reveals them as sophisticated insights into the human condition. He

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169. Margaret Barker, "Christian Envy of the Temple: Revisiting Hugh Nibley's Landmark Paper after 50 Years," SBL (2010), 1. Copy in author's possession, courtesy of Margaret Barker.

170. Kevin Christensen, "Hindsight on a Book of Mormon Historicity Critique," *Review of Books on the Book of Mormon 1989–2011* 22, no. 2 (2010): 155–94, <https://scholarsarchive.byu.edu/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=1828&context=msr>.

171. Margaret Barker, "The Original Setting of the Fourth Servant Song," <http://www.margaretbarker.com/Papers/FourthServantSong.pdf>. Also see Christensen, "Paradigms Regained," the section on "Open Questions and Suggestions Regarding Isaiah in the Book of Mormon," 77–81.

172. Jeffery M. Bradshaw, *In God's Image and Likeness: Ancient and Modern Perspectives on the Book of Moses* (Salt Lake City: Eborn Books, 2010).

takes as his starting point the Genesis material in Mormon tradition, and then sets it in a wider context than many would have thought possible, exploring the human and spiritual state of humanity, the nature of our knowledge about the Creation, the nature of revelation itself. He has wise words on the creationism debate. This remarkable book makes an important contribution to understanding not only the material in Genesis, but also the way in which that heritage has been shared among all the Peoples of the Book.<sup>173</sup>

In January of 2012, when Barker spoke at the Orthodox Seminary in Yonkers, New York, my wife and I drove from Pittsburgh to listen. Before the audience was seated, Margaret approached us, saying that “The first thing I said to them when I got here was that if they were serious about studying the temple, they would have to swallow their pride and ask the Mormons, because they have the best scholars on the topic.” The talk she gave, on Jesus as “The Great High Priest,” was very well received by the audience of Orthodox scholars and leaders. The talk needed to be re-recorded for broadcast, and for that recording, the first of two questions Barker was asked concerned Latter-day Saint interest in her work. She noted for the public broadcast, “I have developed a very happy relationship with many top Mormon scholars, really good biblical scholars, who know their temple stuff. And what they come up with and what I’ve come up with is just about identical. So I work with Mormons because, in terms of temple scholarship, they are the best available. Full stop.”<sup>174</sup>

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173. Ibid., back jacket.

174. For the quotation on Latter-day Saint scholars, on February 13, 2012 on the Mormon Dialogue and Discussion Board, William Hamblin posted a portion of the transcript from the version re-recorded for radio broadcast. It occurs in the Q&A at time 59:00:30 and provides the context for the portion I quoted above:

“Q. Why [are] people of the Mormon faith interested in your work? Maybe again you can explain their attraction to temple worship.

“A. Well, you never know whose going read your books. And many years ago now, I was contacted by a leading scholar of the Latter-day Saints and he came to see me when he was in England. And he said when had read this particular book, *The Great Angel*, he couldn’t believe it hadn’t been written by one of their community. And he was intrigued how somebody working outside their community, just using the conventional tools of scholarship, could come up with something very, very similar — usually identical — to their teachings.”

Another aspect of that talk was that though my wife Shauna had put up with my writing about Barker, and years of my dazzling young missionary dinner guests with my promotion of her books, and had sat beside me during Barker's 2005 Washington, D.C. talk on the Book of Mormon, it was this talk that really got through to her. At the end, Shauna tearfully told Margaret, "We have no idea what we have!"

In 2012, Joseph Spencer published the first edition of his close reading of the Book of Mormon, *An Other Testament: On Typology*.<sup>175</sup> He sees the underlying structure of 1 and 2 Nephi as follows:

- Part 1: Creation (1 Nephi 1–18)
- Part 2: Fall (1 Nephi 19–2 Nephi 5)
- Part 3: Atonement (2 Nephi 6–30)
- Part 4: Veil (2 Nephi 31–33)

He says that this structure "effectively reproduces what the Book of Mormon elsewhere calls 'the plan of redemption.' Moreover, it reproduces what Nephi takes to be the basic pattern of his own life, as he summarizes it in the famous first verse of First Nephi."

- Creation: "born of goodly parents"
- Fall: "many afflictions"
- Atonement: "highly favored of the Lord"
- Veil: "a great knowledge of ... the mysteries of God."<sup>176</sup>

A few pages later, Spencer comments that "Margaret Barker's work expresses both the spirit and the letter of Nephi's pattern. In a book simply titled *Temple Theology*, Barker has assembled a definitive introduction to what she divides into a fourfold pattern: creation, (broken) covenant, atonement, and (divine) wisdom. The correspondence between what Margaret Barker describes as temple theology and the pattern Nephi uses to structure his record is striking. This correspondence suggest[s] that Nephi's record might have been written in association with the newly constructed Nephite temple."<sup>177</sup> In a footnote, Spencer comments that this pattern was "all the more striking for me, because I had been working with the creation/fall/atonement/veil interpretation of Nephi's

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<https://www.mormondialogue.org/topic/56779-margaret-barker-in-yonkers-january-29/>.

175. Joseph M. Spencer, *An Other Testament*, 2nd ed. (Provo, UT: Maxwell Institute, 2016).

176. *Ibid.*, 42

177. *Ibid.*, 49.

record for several years before I came across Margaret Barker's work for the first time."<sup>178</sup>

Also in 2012, D. John Butler published *Plain and Precious Things: The Temple Religion of the Book of Mormon's Visionary Men*. He makes a detailed case that Lehi's dream "is set within the temple and expressed in terms of temple architecture and furniture,"<sup>179</sup> and that "the key to understanding 1 Nephi 11:14, and the Day of Atonement teachings of the visionary men, is realizing that this is a visionary account of what a *spectator* would see on the Day of Atonement."<sup>180</sup> Butler comments that Margaret Barker's "readings of the Old Testament and ancient Christian books are what inspired me to see the Book of Mormon in this light."<sup>181</sup> The Academy for Temple Studies website includes an appreciative review by Latter-day Saint scholar David Larsen of this book and of Butler's follow-up volume, *The Goodness and the Mysteries: On the Path of the Book of Mormon's Visionary Men*.<sup>182</sup>

In 2012, Zina Nibley Peterson, an English professor at BYU, reviewed *The Mother of the Lord*:

To a nonspecialist reader like me, the problems with the critics' rejecting out-of-hand what Barker has found are first, the sheer number of "speculations" that support her conclusions; second, the consistency and sensibleness of the patterns they reveal; and third, that there are extra-biblical texts and archeological evidence to support her claims. To refute a single word-change as fanciful is reasonable; to refute *all* of them and then reject the textual and archaeological external witnesses as well seems overwhelming and even a bit petulant. In *The Mother of the Lord*, Barker uses her methods of emendation and multiplying examples to show that the Deuteronomic and Josiah reforms resulted in the rejection of the council of gods idea and the expulsion of the divine family in favor of the One God, in an effort to maintain

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178. Ibid., 65n19.

179. Butler, *Plain and Precious Things*, 155.

180. Ibid., 134.

181. Ibid., 210.

182. David J. Larsen, "Review of D. John Butler, *Plain and Precious Things* and *The Goodness and the Mysteries*," Academy for Temple Studies (website), May 13, 2013, <https://www.templestudies.org/review-of-d-john-butler-plain-and-precious-things-and-the-goodness-and-the-mysteries/>. Butler self-published "The Goodness and the Mysteries" October 25, 2012.

(or retroactively create) a “history” of consistent, correlated monotheism. To me, four hundred pages of example and explanation (*of volume 1!*) are convincing.

Though the specifics of Barker’s methodology are challenging for some, especially traditionalist religious teachers preaching the orthodox tenets of their heritage, scholars of the ancient world are largely in agreement that religion of the Hebrews in its earliest iteration was closer to the polytheistic religion of the Canaanites and other neighbors/rivals than the Bible-as-received has allowed. They also acknowledge that female deities, specifically Wisdom as expressed by Asherah the Mother of the Lord, were lost after the sixth century BCE.<sup>183</sup>

### The Academy for Temple Studies and FAIR

I have mentioned that Latter-day Saint scholars began participating in Barker’s Temple Studies group in London, from 2008 on, and that in 2012, scholars in Logan formed a sister group. Barker presented several important papers for the Logan group.<sup>184</sup>

In 2013, Barker presented “The Lady Known to Isaiah” at the Temple Studies Group and included a reference to D. John Butler’s *The Goodness and the Mysteries: On the Path of the Book of Mormon’s Visionary Men*.<sup>185</sup>

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183. Zina Nibley Peterson, “Where Shall Wisdom Be Found?,” review of *Mother of the Lord, Vol 1: The Lady in the Temple* by Margaret Barker, *Interpreter: A Journal of Mormon Scripture* 7 (2013): 101–102, <https://journal.interpreterfoundation.org/where-shall-wisdom-be-found/>.

184. For instance, in 2012, she presented on “Restoring Solomon’s Temple.” In 2013, for an Academy for Temple Studies Conference on the theme of “The Lady of the Temple,” Barker presented “The Woman Clothed with the Sun in the Book of Revelation,” and Alyson Von Feldt presented on “Wisdom in Restoration Scripture,” <https://www.templestudies.org/2013-the-lady-of-the-temple-conference/papers/>. Other presenters included William Dever (noted Biblical scholar and author of the important book *Did God Have a Wife?*), John Thompson, and Valerie Hudson. Also see Margaret Barker, “Restoring Solomon’s Temple,” *Mormonism and the Temple: Examining an Ancient Religious Tradition*, ed. Gary N. Anderson (Logan, UT: Academy for Temple Studies, 2013), 19–30, <https://archive.bookofmormoncentral.org/content/restoring-solomons-temple>, with the video at *YouTube*, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=xalAoRGsU7c>. Other videos from the 2013 Conference are available at Conference Videos, Academy for Temple Studies (website), <https://www.templestudies.org/2013-the-lady-of-the-temple-conference/conference-videos/>.

185. Margaret Barker, “The Lady Known to Isaiah,” Academy for Temple Studies (website), [http://www.templestudiesgroup.com/Papers/Barker\\_](http://www.templestudiesgroup.com/Papers/Barker_)

Also in 2013, William Hamblin and I published essays in the same volume of *Interpreter*, offering differing takes on King Josiah. Hamblin is a good example of how a scholar can differ with Barker's take on King Josiah while appreciating her overall views. He was my editor for *Paradigms Regained*. Hamblin's piece was "Vindicating Josiah" and my counterpoint was "Prophets and Kings in Lehi's Jerusalem and Margaret Barker's Temple Theology." Benjamin McGuire provided an introduction.<sup>186</sup>

In 2014, Jeffery Bradshaw and David Larsen published *In God's Image and Likeness 2: Enoch, Noah, and the Tower of Babel*. An imposing follow-up volume to Bradshaw's earlier volume on the Book of Moses, this one again includes Barker's works among those of the broad range of scholars listed in their bibliography.

In 2015, she was invited to speak at the FAIR conference in Provo, where she spoke on "The Mother in Heaven and Her Children."<sup>187</sup> My wife and I were able to attend this one, and I was invited to provide a brief introduction. Many years before, Barker had asked me whether members of the Church were interested in the Divine Feminine. I answered in the affirmative and sent her the text of Eliza R. Snow's popular hymn "Oh My Father."

In 2015, Neal Rappleye published an important essay on "The Deuteronomist Reforms and Lehi's Family Dynamics." Drawing on a wide range of Latter-day Saint scholars, as well as on Margaret Barker's work, Rappleye makes several fresh observations on how the reforms provide a background that fleshes out the personalities of Laman and Lemuel. For instance:

At various points in his narrative, Nephi uses allusions to the conflict between Joseph and his brothers to set himself up as a type of Joseph, a younger brother chosen to rule over his older siblings. The Deuteronomists opposed traditions grounded in the old "wisdom literature," which portrayed prophets as men

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TheLadyknowntoIsaiah.pdf, citing Butler's *The Goodness and the Mysteries* on page 7.

186. Benjamin L. McGuire, "Josiah's Reforms: An Introduction," *Interpreter: A Journal of Mormon Scripture* 4 (2013): 161–63, <https://journal.interpreterfoundation.org/josiahs-reform-an-introduction/>.

187. Barker, "The Mother in Heaven and Her Children," FAIR Conference, Provo, Utah, August 6, 2015, <https://www.fairlatterdaysaints.org/conference/august-2015/the-mother-in-heaven-and-her-childrenmother-in-heaven-and-her-children>. Also available at *YouTube*, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ilF9NXEl6Xs>.



of visions and dreams. Joseph is one of two biblical figures (the other is Daniel) most prominently portrayed as “wise men” (the prophets of the wisdom tradition).

That Joseph was a prominent figure in an ideology opposed by the Deuteronomists perhaps adds a layer of subtext to Nephi’s use of Joseph, particularly in the narrative of 1 Nephi 7. Here, parallels are most pronounced during Laman and Lemuel’s first rebellion, in which his older brothers take him and bind him with the intent to kill him and let his body “be devoured by wild beasts” (1 Nephi 7:16). Joseph’s older brothers also bound him with the intent to kill him, and told their father he had been devoured by an “evil beast” (see Genesis 37:20, 33). Thus, in the height of his opposition with his brothers, Nephi portrays himself as a second Joseph, one of the heroes of the old wisdom tradition. Laman’s and Lemuel’s affiliation with the Deuteronomists and their opposition to that tradition heightens the symbolism of Nephi’s allusions and imbues them with further meaning: not only Nephi’s brothers, but the movement which they represent, the Deuteronomic reforms, are likened unto Joseph’s brothers and thus given a negative connotation.<sup>188</sup>

Rappleye concludes:

I have attempted to illustrate how the social context surrounding the Deuteronomic reforms, as reconstructed by Margaret Barker, not only explains the actions of Lehi and Nephi, as other commentators have observed, but also illuminates our understanding of Laman and Lemuel and their interactions with the prophetic duo formed by their father and younger brother. To be clear, it must be remembered that Nephi and Lehi are *not* anti-law nor anti-Deuteronomy nor even anti-Josiah. Rather, they stand in contrast to parts of the *ideological agenda* of the Deuteronomists. Laman and Lemuel appear to have adopted, perhaps deliberately as rebellious and resentful teenagers often do, the very parts of that ideology that

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188. Neal Rappleye. “The Deuteronomist Reforms and Lehi’s Family Dynamics: A Social Context for the Rebellions of Laman and Lemuel,” *Interpreter: A Journal of Mormon Scripture* 16 (2015): 94–95, <https://journal.interpreterfoundation.org/the-deuteronomist-reforms-and-lehis-family-dynamics-a-social-context-for-the-rebellions-of-laman-and-lemuel/>.



their father rejected. Many of the same conflicts going on in Jerusalem at the time emerge as points of tension between the older brothers and their father and obnoxious little brother. The paradigm juxtaposing Lehi and Nephi as “wise men” of the old tradition and Laman and Lemuel as supporters of the Deuteronomic ideology might thus be used to explain some of the dynamics of Lehi’s family. In saying this, I do not wish to justify Laman’s and Lemuel’s actions — Nephi and Lehi, after all, were true, not false, prophets. Yet this view helps make sense of their actions against Nephi and Lehi.<sup>189</sup>

Also in 2015, Val Larsen published an important essay on “Hidden in Plain View: The Mother in Heaven in Scripture” at *Square Two*, the online Latter-day Saint journal edited by Valerie Hudson. Larsen incorporates observations by both Margaret Barker and Daniel Peterson:

While the destruction of the Asherah statue is celebrated by the Deuteronomist authors of 2 Kings, objectively speaking, the fruits of this rejection were disastrous. In the immediate aftermath of its rejection of Mother in Heaven, Israel suffered the greatest calamity of its ancient history — the destruction of the temple and captivity in Babylon. On the other hand, the promise in verse 33 that “whoso hearkeneth unto me shall dwell in safety, and shall be quiet from fear of evil” seems to have been fulfilled in the lives of Lehi, Nephi, and Jacob, who, as we shall see, rejected the policy and theology changes made by the royal and priestly elites of their day.<sup>190</sup>

He makes a fascinating observation about the implications of the Hebrew traditions behind the English translation we have:

Having read the book, Lehi exclaims “Great and marvelous are thy works, O Lord God Almighty [Yahweh El Shaddai]!” (1 Nephi 1:14). In the King James Old Testament, the word *Almighty*, which occurs forty-eight times, is always a translation of *Shaddai*, a name for God that, in the Bible, is associated with fertility and that may signify breasts, being thus the God with breasts or the divine female. So Lehi seems to open the Book of Mormon by glorifying the divine Son,

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189. Ibid., 98–99.

190. Val Larsen, “Hidden in Plain View: Mother in Heaven in Scripture,” *Square Two* 8, no. 2 (Summer 2015), <https://squaretwo.org/Sq2ArticleLarsenHeavenlyMother.html#backfrom104>.

Father, and Mother. As he invokes Son Yahweh (the Good Shepherd), Father (El), and Mother (Shaddai), he may have in mind Jacob's blessing of Joseph, Levi's progenitor (1 Nephi 5:14), for all three divine beings are mentioned in Joseph's patriarchal blessing, which is about to be fulfilled through Levi: "Joseph is a fruitful bough ... whose branches run over the wall: ... his hands were made strong by the hands of the mighty God of Jacob; (from thence is the shepherd, the stone of Israel). Even by El [אֱל translated *God*] ... who shall help thee; and by Shaddai [שַׁדַּי translated *the Almighty*], who shall bless thee with ... blessings of the breasts [שָׁדַי, shaddaim in Hebrew], and of the womb" (Genesis 49: 22, 24–25).<sup>191</sup>

In 2016 at a conference of the Academy for Temple Studies, with an impressive range of joint sponsors, Barker spoke on "Theosis and Divinization" in Provo,<sup>192</sup> and on "Entering Sacred Space: Beholding the Wonders of Temple Theology" at the Los Angeles Temple Visitor's Center;<sup>193</sup> she also participated in a discussion of "Teaching Religion, Living Religion: Religion in a Secular Age in the Academy" in Logan.<sup>194</sup>

The 2016 issue of *Studies in the Bible and Antiquity* included an article by David R. Seely on "'We Believe the Bible to Be the Word of God, as Far as It Is Translated Correctly': Latter-day Saints and Historical Biblical Criticism."<sup>195</sup> Seely refers favorably to Barker's work and its reception among Latter-day Saints in a passage I will quote later.

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191. Ibid.

192. Margaret Barker, "Theosis and Divinization," (lecture at Brigham Young University, Provo, Utah, November 9, 2016), <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=nOnHDQgIoCU>.

193. Jan Hemming, "Noted Theologian Shares Insights of Ancient Temple Worship at Conference," *Church News*, November 17, 2016, <https://www.churchofjesuschrist.org/church/news/noted-theologian-shares-insights-of-ancient-temple-worship-at-conference>.

194. "Sacred Space Sacred Thread: A Global Conference at USC," (lecture at Utah State University, November 10, 2016), Academy for Temple Studies (website), <https://www.templestudies.org/conferences/sacred-space-sacred-thread-a-global-conference-at-usc/>.

195. David R. Seely, "'We Believe the Bible to Be the Word of God, as Far as It Is Translated Correctly': Latter-day Saints and Historical Biblical Criticism," *Studies in the Bible and Antiquity* 8 (2016): 64–88, [https://www.academia.edu/34550207/Studies\\_in\\_the\\_Bible\\_and\\_Antiquity\\_8\\_2016\\_](https://www.academia.edu/34550207/Studies_in_the_Bible_and_Antiquity_8_2016_).

### Barker in and on Latter-day Saint Temples

In 2017, while the Paris Temple was having its open house before the dedication, John Welch invited Barker to come and have a personal tour with the Temple president and matron. Welch told me that she was tremendously impressed, saying, when they showed the anointing rooms, “You have that too!” As she left the temple, she said, “Everything was ancient except the electric lights.” She was so impressed that later, for the 2019 Rome Temple open house, she asked Welch, if it wasn’t too much of an imposition, could she do it there too? I heard these stories from Welch during a presenter’s lunch during the 2019 Conference on Hebrews.<sup>196</sup>

During the same conference, two different audience members approached me and told me of their experiences attending sessions of Margaret Barker’s summer schools in Derbyshire. One of these was Dianna Webb, who had written a book called *Biblical Lionesses: Protectors of the Covenant*. They said that about a third of the attendees in the classes were Latter-day Saints, and that Barker likes having them because “they know what I am talking about.”

In 2020, the Church-produced *Temples Through Time* video included interviews with a range of scholars, including Margaret Barker.<sup>197</sup> In a *Church News* article discussing the video she also gave her impressions of the Paris Temple open house.<sup>198</sup>

### LDS Scholars Explore in Further Depth

In 2020, Val Larsen published “First Visions and Last Sermons: Affirming Divine Sociality, Rejecting the Greater Apostasy,” in which he details the “kinship between Lehi and Joseph Smith. They are linked to each other by similar first visions, and they faced roughly the same theological problem. Resisted by elites who believe God is a Solitary Sovereign, both prophets affirm the pluralistic religion of Abraham, which features a *sôd ’êlôhim* (Council of Gods) in which the divine Father, Mother, and Son sit.”<sup>199</sup>

Larsen adopts Barker’s view of the Deuteronomist reform:

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196. I gave a presentation on “In and Behind Hebrews: Temple, Atonement, Covenant of Peace,” for which I again had occasion to cite Barker.

197. “Temples Through Time,” <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Y6a10hpWeZA>

198. Walker, “Watch: What ancient and present-day temples mean to scholars of other faiths and Latter-day Saints.”

199. Val Larsen, “First Visions and Last Sermons: Affirming Divine Sociality, Rejecting the Greater Apostasy,” *Interpreter: A Journal of Latter-day Saint Faith and*

In their conception of God and emphasis on the Law, the Deuteronomists exhibited a centralizing, monist impulse at odds with the pluralism inherent in the council ethos. The implementation of their vision required an earthly analogue of their heavenly Solitary Sovereign, a Yahwist monarch. Thus the most important Deuteronomist was Josiah, the king. Without his leadership, the Deuteronomist revolution would have been impossible. Worship of the Abrahamic Gods of the *Sôd* was too entrenched and widespread to be eliminated without a strong monarch leader. This is apparent from the fact that a large number of Asherah figurines have been discovered in and around Jerusalem from the time and just before the time of Josiah and Lehi. But Josiah had attributes that made him the perfect revolutionary: “like unto him was there no king before him, that turned to Yahweh with all his heart, and with all his soul, and with all his might, according to all the law of Moses; neither after him arose there any like him” (2 Kings 23:25). Josiah was precisely the kind of honest, idealistic, incorruptible, energetic, uncompromising, puritanical, relentless, pitiless ideologue that must take the lead if massive social change is to be forced on an unwilling populace in a short period.

In a multidimensional push to centralize theology, ritual, worship, and governance, Josiah took things in hand (2 Kings 23:4-20). The Jerusalem temple was full of things associated with members of the *Sôd*. He destroyed them. He dragged the Asherah statue — in the temple for at least 236 of its 370 years — down into the Kidron valley and burned it. He destroyed all the ancient temples and sacred groves in the high places, Shechem, Bethel, etc., where the patriarchs had worshipped the Gods of the *Sôd*. As Deuteronomy 12:19 required, he centralized all public ritual in one place, Jerusalem, where he could oversee and control it. As Deuteronomy 3:1-11 mandated, he killed all the priests who facilitated the worship of *Sôd* members and all the prophets who taught that there was any God with God. There is a nontrivial possibility that he killed Zenos and Zenock. Zenock taught that there was

a God with God, a ben Elohim who would come down to redeem humanity from its sins (Alma 33:13–16). Zenos taught that and also emphasized the importance of humanity being closely, rather than distantly, connected with the “mother tree” (Jacob 5:54–60). If Josiah didn’t kill Zenos and Zenock, he would have if they had been alive teaching these things during his reign.<sup>200</sup>

The next year, 2021, Larsen produced an insightful follow-up essay, “Josiah to Zoram to Sherem to Jarom and the Big Little Book of Omni,” in which he traced the pattern of thought associated with Josiah’s Reform through generations of Book of Mormon characters who opposed the teaching of the prophets.<sup>201</sup>

In early 2022, *Interpreter* also published Neal Rappleye’s careful study “Serpents of Fire and Brass”:

According to Leslie S. Wilson, “during or just after the period of King Josiah and the Deuteronomist reporter(s),” the “serpentine (*nḥš*) traditions became the symbol of all things evil and abhorrent to YHWH.”

In contrast, ancient metallurgists such as Lehi and Nephi — especially given their ties to the northern kingdom of Israel — likely viewed the brazen serpent as a legitimate Yahwistic symbol and an authentic and integral part of Israelite worship. Both serpent symbolism and the metallurgical arts were traits of the ancient “wisdom” tradition — a tradition that the Deuteronomists disapproved of and sought to change. This controversy over the origin and legitimacy of the brazen serpent may very well be lurking in the background of Nephi’s expansion and commentary on the brazen serpent narrative.<sup>202</sup>

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200. Ibid., 52–54.

201. Val Larsen, “Josiah to Zoram to Sherem to Jarom and the Big Little Book of Omni,” *Interpreter: A Journal of Latter-day Saint Faith and Scholarship* 44 (2021): 217–64, <https://journal.interpreterfoundation.org/josiah-to-zoram-to-sherem-to-jarom-and-the-big-little-book-of-omni/>.

202. Neal Rappleye, “Serpents of Fire and Brass: A Contextual Study of the Brazen Serpent Tradition in the Book of Mormon,” *Interpreter: A Journal of Latter-day Saint Faith and Scholarship* 50 (2022): 228, <https://journal.interpreterfoundation.org/serpents-of-fire-and-brass-a-contextual-study-of-the-brazen-serpent-tradition-in-the-book-of-mormon/#footnote99anc>.

Rappleye's wide-ranging scholarship includes 20 Barker citations in his essay.

In 2022 Victor and Sheri Worth published a 500-page study called *Heavenly Mother: An Initial Compendium of Echoes and Evidences*.<sup>203</sup> This broadly surveys the Old Testament, wisdom literature, the Apocrypha and Old Testament Pseudepigrapha, the New Testament and writings of various religious movements, including Latter-day Saint scriptures. The Latter-day Saint authors give Barker due credit for inspiring their efforts.

That brings us to 2022. I have not included every detail of either Barker's career, journal and book publications, nor more than some glimpses of her significant editorial work in Biblical studies, nor of every Latter-day Saint interaction with her, but this provides a picture of sufficient detail and resolution as to be broadly instructive and a fair representation. Nibley has commented:

We frankly prefer the Big Picture to the single-shot solution, having found it to be far more foolproof than any little picture. Composed as it is of thousands of little images, the big one can easily dispense with large numbers of them without suffering substantially. It is a huge overall sort of thing, supported by great masses of evidence, but nonetheless presenting a clear and distinct image. No one can be sure of a little picture, on the other hand; at any moment some new discovery from some unexpected direction may wipe it out.<sup>204</sup>

In considering the details of Margaret Barker's career, the big picture is of receiving increasingly close attention from many well-informed and well-placed scholars, beginning with her teachers at Cambridge, then those who accepted her first articles at the *Heythrop Journal*, and the crucial connection with Father Robert Murray, which eventually opened the path for her first book. With additional peer-reviewed journal articles, her presenting papers in conspicuous places, the appearance of her books, and them being reviewed in a range of journals, she was elected President of the Society for Old Testament Studies, and her lectures as such are published in journals. She was invited to head up a research project at Cambridge.<sup>205</sup> A noted scholar like Andrei Orlov at Marquette

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203. Victor and Sheri Worth, *Heavenly Mother: An Initial Compendium of Echoes and Evidence*, Motherinheaven.com, <https://www.motherinheaven.com>.

204. Hugh W. Nibley, "A New Look at the Pearl of Great Price: Conclusion: Taking Stock," *ImprovementEra* 73, no. 5 (May 1970): 86, <https://archive.bookofmormoncentral.org/content/new-look-pearl-great-price-conclusion-taking-stock>.

205. Barker, *The Great High Priest*, xii.

incorporated her journal articles into the syllabus for his classes.<sup>206</sup> She was invited by different professors to speak at different universities in London and Scotland, and her lectures became the basis of books that attracted more attention. The nomination of *Temple Theology: An Introduction* for the Michael Ramsey Prize for best theological writing raised her profile further, and the 2008 publication of *Temple Themes in Christian Worship* leads to not only a colloquium being held to honor the book, but the Archbishop of Canterbury and the Queen of England bestowed on her a Doctorate. Not only do notable publications and accolades keep coming, but she becomes a person whose knowledge and reputation is such that she was invited to participate on a committee that looked into a potentially important archeological discovery, the Jordan Lead books.<sup>207</sup> Important scholars at Oxford refer to her as their “muse.”<sup>208</sup> One of the most noted theologians in the world, N. T. Wright, refers to her work on the temple worldview as “remarkable.”<sup>209</sup> And she is featured in the *Temples through Time* video produced by The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, speaking first after a modern apostle, and last before he closes.<sup>210</sup>

This is not the story of a person who has joined the common stream and embraced conformity to orthodox thought as the most reliable path to a successful career. Rather, she has been seeking further light and knowledge. She has created a new stream that has attracted more and more respect and attention. She is not mainstream, relative to the secular universities or Evangelical orthodoxy; she deliberately challenges those streams. She is not alone, a fringe individual, but now has close ties with a wide range of top scholars from several different denominations, and she travels with a significant and substantial stream of collaborators.

And the Latter-day Saint connection with her work has become an arresting and notable phenomenon. She is not just telling us what we already know, she encourages us to see more in what we have. It’s not a light smattering of parallels, but an elaborate and in-depth convergence rooted in Lehi’s time and place, and the first temple before 600 BCE, which Lehi knew firsthand, if he lived at all. And she has not just been giving to us, she has accepted and gratefully learned from us to see things she had

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206. See “Welcome to the interdisciplinary seminar Jewish Roots of Eastern Christian Mysticism” at <https://www.marquette.edu/maqom/>.

207. See <https://www.leadbookcentre.com/>.

208. Fletcher-Louis, *Jesus Monotheism*, xiii-xiv.

209. Wright, *History and Eschatology*, 307n2.

210. “TemplesThroughTime,” <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Y6a10hpWeZA>.



not imagined before. She had encouraged the writing and publication of a book like John W. Welch's *The Sermon on the Mount and the Temple*, not only to share the temple worldview with wider Christianity, but to do so with notice that the notion of seeing the Sermon on the Mount as a temple discourse came originally from the Book of Mormon. It's not just the most conspicuous surface aspects of Latter-day Saint traditions, such as the grand council, Jesus as Yahweh, the son of El/Elyon, God Most High, the Heavenly Mother, and the Melchizedek priesthood — it's the light that comes to smaller details that we have rarely thought about.

Why does Lehi's initial public preaching of "a Messiah, and also the redemption of the world" (1 Nephi 1:19) land him in so much trouble? What was the nature of Jacob's mark (Jacob 4:14)? What tradition does Sherem represent, with his denial of prophecy that a Messiah would come, yet his reverence for the Law and Moses (Jacob 7)? What or who was Wisdom in ancient Israel, and would it cast light on the Book of Mormon? And what are the implications of the revelation in Doctrine and Covenants 93:11–17 that Jesus did not receive of the fulness until his baptism? And beyond this, consider the fact that her work, by drawing on discoveries that have mostly come through non-Latter-day Saint scholars after the publication of the Book of Mormon (1 Nephi 13:39), impressively signals fulfillment of the prophecy of the loss and restoration of specific plain and precious things centered on "the Lamb of God" as "the son of the Eternal Father, and the Savior of the world" (1 Nephi 13:40), which is the exact argument of Barker's *The Great Angel* and *The Risen Lord*.

In dealing with Barker's critics, it will be important not only to have that clear picture in mind, but also to understand what happens during paradigm debates and to understand why new wine seldom fits in old bottles (Luke 5:38–39).

### Conclusion

As we look back on Margaret Barker's impact on scholarship and knowledge in The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, it seems that she and her work have become more relevant and more significant, not less, compared to the scene 20 years ago during the initial wave of excitement over a noted non-Latter-day Saint scholar seeing connections between her discoveries and the claims of the Restoration. Her appeal is not merely to amateur enthusiasts but also to many solid scholars in the Church and, of course, far beyond. She has made lasting contributions that have gained attention and respect from many scholars. Casual dismissal of her work is unjustified.



There is yet much to learn about what she is unveiling as she explores the early roots of Judaism and Christianity, as well as many additional issues of direct interest to Latter-day Saints, especially with respect to the Temple, the Book of Mormon, the Books of Moses and Enoch, and other aspects of the Restoration.

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# RETHINKING THE ENCOUNTER BETWEEN JACOB AND SHEREM

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Loren Spendlove

**Abstract:** *The Book of Mormon story of Jacob and Sherem has been evaluated and interpreted from many different viewpoints over the years. In his retelling of the story, Jacob crafted a cautionary tale of religious hubris and self-importance that can serve as an important lesson for members of the church today. In this paper I use various methodologies to examine the interaction between Jacob and Sherem — including comparative scriptural analysis, semantics, and Hebraic syntax and structural elements — in an attempt to increase our understanding of the relationship between Jacob and Sherem.*

In this paper I endeavor to interpret the interaction between Jacob and Sherem in novel ways. I explore various elements of the story through comparative scriptural study, semantic analysis, and examination of Hebraic semantics and parallel structures. I demonstrate that Sherem was probably a resident of Jacob's Nephite community, that likely the two rivals knew each other well and engaged in repeated conversations with other, and that Jacob employed the use of Hebrew word repetition and parallel structures in his retelling of the story. While Sherem rebuked Jacob by accusing him of leading the people away from "the right way," we can observe that Sherem was the guilty party and not Jacob. Although Sherem demanded a sign from God, an act that culminated in his own death, I demonstrate that it was Sherem himself who became "a sign and a proverb" to the Nephites (see Ezekiel 14:8).

## There Came a Man

The final chapter of the book of Jacob describes an encounter between Jacob and a man named Sherem, who came "among the people of Nephi."

And now it came to pass that some years had passed away and there came a man among the people of Nephi whose name was Sherem. And it came to pass that he began to preach among the people and to declare unto them that there should be no Christ. (Jacob 7:1–2)<sup>1</sup>

Keith Thompson asked: “Who was Sherem, and where did he come from? Was he a Nephite, a Lamanite, or someone else, perhaps a wandering Jaredite or a Mulekite?”<sup>2</sup> Some Latter-day Saint scholars have proposed that the wording of this passage — “there came a man among the people of Nephi” — indicates that Sherem possibly came from outside the local Nephite community.<sup>3</sup> Others have argued that Sherem did not belong among Jacob’s people even though he was also not “an outsider in any culturally or ethnically substantial way:”

Jacob introduces Sherem as someone who does not belong. “There came a man among the people of Nephi,” Jacob tells us, “whose name was Sherem.” Describing Sherem as someone who “came among” the Nephites, Jacob implies that Sherem was not, in some sense, already among them (Jacob 7:1). It seems unlikely, though, that Sherem is an outsider in any culturally or ethnically substantial way. Sherem arrives fully informed about Jacob, the law of Moses, and the doctrine of Christ, and he arrives with a clearly defined mission in relation to all three. More, Sherem arrives on the scene with “a perfect knowledge of the language of the people,” something unlikely for a foreigner (v. 4). Either way, the rhetorical force of Jacob’s implication is to position Sherem antagonistically as “not one of us.”<sup>4</sup>

I believe that a comparative analysis of select Book of Mormon passages supports the idea that Sherem was a Nephite from Jacob’s local community, and that the episode recounted in Jacob 7 represents an overt attempt by Sherem to overthrow Jacob’s authority in the community.<sup>5</sup> The opening line of the story of Jacob and Sherem can be separated into the following three divisions:

- A) *Time*: “And now it came to pass that some years had passed away,”
- B) *There came X*: “and there came a man among the people of Nephi whose name was Sherem.”

- C) *Spoken Communication*: “And it came to pass that he began to preach among the people and to declare unto them that there should be no Christ.”

This same tripartite classification schema can be observed in other passages in the Book of Mormon as well:

#	Passage	Time	There Came X / X Came	Spoken Communication
1	1 Nephi 1:4	For it came to pass in the commencement of the first year of the reign of Zedekiah, king of Judah	and in that same year there came many prophets	<i>prophesying unto the people</i> that they must repent or the great city Jerusalem must be destroyed
2	Mosiah 12:1	And it came to pass that after the space of two years	that Abinadi came among them in disguise, that they knew him not	and began again to prophesy among them
3	Alma 30:6	But it came to pass in the latter end of the seventeenth year	there came a man [Korihor] into the land of Zarahemla and he was anti-Christ,	for he began to preach unto the people against the prophecies which had been spoken by the prophets concerning the coming of Christ
4	Ether 7:23	And also in the reign of Shule	there came prophets among the people, which were sent from the Lord,	prophesying that the wickedness and idolatry of the people was bringing a curse upon the land, in the which they should be destroyed if they did not repent
5	Ether 11:1	And there came also in the days of Com	many prophets	and prophesied of the destruction of that great people
6	Ether 11:12	And it came to pass in the days of Ethem	there came many prophets	and prophesied again unto the people

These six examples conform to the same tripartite classification schema as Jacob 7:1–2. First, some *measurement of time* is given by the author of the text. This measurement is expressed as either the passage of years or as occurring during the reign of a specific king. Second, we are told that an individual or group of individuals *came among* the people. Third, these individuals are described as engaging in *spoken communication* with their audiences, variously described as prophesying, preaching, and declaring. Including Jacob 7:1, five of these

passages describe the preaching of divinely authorized messengers while two introduce false messengers, the anti-Christ<sup>s</sup> Sherem and Korihor.<sup>6</sup>

Several conclusions can be drawn from a comparison of these passages. First, when we are told that “there came X” among the people, there is little reason to believe that X was an outsider or new to the community. For example, the wording in Ether 7:23 — “there came prophets among the people” — is functionally identical to the language in Jacob 7:1 — “there came a man among the people.” Since the Book of Mormon is only aware of one group of people in the promised land throughout the book of Ether — the Jaredites — it is unreasonable to assume that the prophets mentioned in Ether 7:23 came from a community foreign to them. As such, I propose that the phrase “there came X among the people” in Ether 7:23 can serve as a type of messenger motif<sup>7</sup> and that the identical formula in Jacob 7:1 adheres to this same motif, albeit of a false messenger.<sup>8</sup>

In like manner, the passage in 1 Nephi 1:4 that describes the “many prophets” who came “prophesying to the people” in the land of Jerusalem follows this same messenger motif. Almost certainly these “many prophets” were Israelites rather than foreigners, and were members of the community in which they preached. Likewise, the wording of Mosiah 11:20 — “there was a man among them whose name was Abinadi” — seems to indicate that Abinadi was one of king Noah’s subjects rather than an outsider.<sup>9</sup> Based on these textual comparisons there is no reason to presume from the wording of Jacob 7:1 that Sherem came from outside the small Nephite community that existed during the time of Jacob.<sup>10</sup> Rather than being sent by God to reclaim the Nephites, it appears that Jacob intentionally employed the messenger motif to introduce Sherem as a false messenger who came among the people. Jacob’s goal throughout the story seems to be to disprove that Sherem was a divinely authorized messenger, and to restore the people to a belief in the doctrine of Christ.

### Sought Much Opportunity

The focal point of Jacob 7 is Jacob’s retelling of his *final* encounter with Sherem, a self-avowed anti-Christ. I use the word *final* because I propose that the specific phrase used by both Jacob and Sherem — “sought much opportunity” — reveals that the two engaged in a succession of doctrinal debates and discussions. I propose that this phrase — *sought much opportunity* — can have two mutually exclusive interpretations in Jacob’s account:

1. With the exception of the encounter recorded in Jacob 7, Sherem sought repeatedly, but unsuccessfully to talk with Jacob; or,
2. Sherem successfully sought out Jacob on multiple occasions, and the two had repeated conversations with each other.

Apparently accepting this first interpretation, but also expressing puzzlement over it, John Sorenson commented:

Upon first meeting Jacob, he [Sherem] said, “Brother Jacob, I have sought much opportunity that I might speak unto you; for I have heard ... that thou goest about much, preaching” (Jacob 7:6). Now, the population of adult males descended from the original group could not have exceeded fifty at that time. This would have been only enough to populate one modest-sized village. Thus Sherem’s is a strange statement. Jacob, as head priest and religious teacher, would routinely have been around the Nephite temple in the cultural center at least on all holy days (see Jacob 2:2). How then could Sherem never have seen him, and why would he have had to seek “much opportunity” to speak to him in such a tiny settlement? And where would Jacob have had to go on the preaching travels Sherem refers to, if only such a tiny group were involved. Moreover, from where was it that Sherem “came ... among the people of Nephi” (Jacob 1:1)?<sup>11</sup>

Likewise, Adam Miller in a more recently published work commented:

Sherem, we’re told, “lead away many hearts” from the doctrine of Christ (Jacob 7:3). But Jacob doesn’t seek Sherem out. In fact, Sherem has to go looking for Jacob and, apparently, has a hard time finding him. Sherem, Jacob says, “sought much opportunity that he might come unto me” (v.3). Where is Jacob? Why is he so hard to find? Why isn’t he actively seeking out Sherem?<sup>12</sup>

The first interpretation — Sherem repeatedly but unsuccessfully sought to speak with Jacob — seems to be a logical reading of this passage. However, I propose that the second interpretation — Sherem successfully sought out Jacob on multiple occasions, and the two had repeated conversations with each other — is a more plausible reading of the text.

## Nineteenth Century Usage of “Sought Opportunity”

A search of Google Books, limited to nineteenth century texts, resulted in dozens of relevant passages utilizing the phrase *sought opportunity*.<sup>13</sup> In the body of the paper I only provide five examples, but in the Appendix I have included an additional ten citations.

In a memoir about the late Bishop George from 1830, the following example recounts his conviction and devotion:

Bishop George was a man of devotion, both in private and in public. In the sloop, the steamboat, the canal boat, the barn, the woods, as well as in the closet, he *sought opportunity* to pour out his soul to God in secret prayer. He lived not for himself only, but for Christ and his cause. When that cause prospered he rejoiced and gave thanks, and when it was wounded he mourned and wept.<sup>14</sup>

As demonstrated by this citation, Bishop George frequently *sought opportunity* to pray in varied locations and circumstances. Based on context, these were not missed or thwarted opportunities. Rather, they represent successfully completed prayers.

In a second example, William Wirt, who had previously served as U.S. Attorney General, delivered an address at Rutgers College in 1830. This address, along with an introduction authored by Theodore Frelinghuysen, was later published as a pamphlet. Referencing Wirt’s commitment to the “cause of temperance,” Frelinghuysen wrote:

He took great interest in the promotion of moral and religious institutions, in the missionary labors of the churches, in the extension of the Sunday-schools, in the success of the Bible societies; and was, at the time of his death, the President of the State Bible Society of Maryland. He was a most effective friend of the cause of temperance, and *often sought opportunity* to testify to the great importance which he attached to the labors of the societies connected with it.<sup>15</sup>

Frelinghuysen’s usage of the phrase *often sought opportunity* closely parallels Jacob’s use of *sought much opportunity*. Based on Frelinghuysen’s employment of this phrase it is apparent that the author intended to convey the idea that Wirt repeatedly testified on the “cause of temperance.”

Regarding Jacob’s and Sherem’s joint use of “sought much opportunity,” Stanford Carmack wrote: “I think much is an adverb in this sentence, modifying the verb sought. It doesn’t modify opportunity.”<sup>16</sup>



If Carmack's assessment is correct then the Book of Mormon's use of "sought much opportunity" can be understood as Sherem *often* or *frequently* seeking opportunity to speak with Jacob rather than seeking *many* opportunities. This interpretation of *often sought opportunity* matches the above usage by Frelinghuysen.<sup>17</sup>

The next example recounts the conversion of Stephen Bamford to the gospel of Christ, and his subsequent preaching to his fellow soldiers:

He became anxious for the conversion of his comrades, and *sought opportunity* to instruct and exhort them. For this he often suffered violent persecution, until his integrity and the purity of his motives secured for him the favour of many among his companions in arms.<sup>18</sup>

As this passage explains, once converted to Christ, Bamford preached to his fellow soldiers, even through persecution, until many of them began to accept his preaching. Again, this author's use of *sought opportunity* adheres to Interpretation Two.

In a fourth example, Bishop James Otey wrote the following concerning the late Reverend Hamble J. Leacock:

But it was not in his pulpit ministrations only that he *sought opportunity* to preach Christ. Whenever we stopped at night, during a tour of several hundred miles, and sought lodging in the log-cabin of the pioneer settlers, he never failed, either in the evening or morning, to call the members of the family, as well as the sojourners present, around the domestic altar, to read a portion of God's word, comment on it, and then invite all to unite with him in prayer.<sup>19</sup>

Otey's usage of *sought opportunity* clearly expresses the view that Reverend Leacock not only preached Christ from the pulpit but also "never failed" to preach while traveling. As with the other examples, Otey's usage of *sought opportunity* also conforms to the second interpretation.

The final example comes from *The Quiver*, a Christian magazine. In this essay by Reverend Everard we are told of a female missionary who was a passenger aboard a ship headed to China:

But she did not wait till she reached China. Amongst the large ship's company she lived for Christ, and witnessed for Him. She presented a Bible to the captain, and had many long conversations with him on the forgiveness of sins and the claims of the Lord Jesus. She *sought opportunity* from time

to time of speaking to the sailors individually, pleading with them to seek the Saviour at once.<sup>20</sup>

Everhard's statement that this missionary "sought opportunity from time to time" is a clear reference to her repeated preaching to the sailors aboard the ship. These were not failed attempts but represent successful preaching opportunities.

All five examples cited above, as well as those included in the Appendix, support Interpretation Two over Interpretation One.<sup>21</sup> In fact, I was able to find only a few examples in Google Books that could be understood as supporting Interpretation One.<sup>22</sup> As a result, Jacob's and Sherem's use of *sought much opportunity* can be reasonably understood as Sherem approaching Jacob on multiple occasions, resulting in repeated conversations between the two.<sup>23</sup>

If we accept that the phrase *sought much opportunity* in Jacob 7 should be understood following Interpretation One — Sherem sought repeatedly, but unsuccessfully to talk with Jacob — then Sorenson is correct: "Sherem's is a strange statement." On the other hand, if we accept Interpretation Two — Sherem sought out Jacob on multiple occasions, and the two had repeated conversations with each other — then Sherem's statement is no longer a strange one. Interpretation Two also provides answers to the questions that Miller posed:

- Question: Where is Jacob? Answer: Where he should have been; most likely he was teaching at the temple and going about his small community ministering to the people, probably as high priest over the church.
- Question: Why is he so hard to find? Answer: He wasn't. Sherem had ready access to Jacob and the two had many conversations.
- Question: Why isn't he actively seeking out Sherem? Answer: First, we do not know that Jacob did not seek out Sherem. Second, since Sherem actively sought out Jacob it would not have been necessary for Jacob to seek out Sherem.

### **Additional Support for Interpretation Two**

There is a second reason to accept Interpretation Two over Interpretation One. Jacob wrote: "And he [Sherem] knowing that I Jacob had faith in Christ, which should come, wherefore he sought much opportunity that he might come unto me" (Jacob 7:3).<sup>24</sup> If we assume that Interpretation

One is correct then we would not be wrong in judging Jacob's behavior as less than Christlike:

Much of Jacob's treatment of Sherem feels shortsighted and unfair. And though Jacob successfully defends the doctrine of Christ, he doesn't seem to do it in a very Christlike way. In fact, he defends the doctrine of Christ against the letter of the Mosaic law in a way that, in itself, seems in lockstep with the letter of the law.<sup>25</sup>

In my opinion, the portrait painted by this interpretation of Jacob's interaction with Sherem is that of a small, uncaring, and authoritarian ruler. On the contrary, if we accept Interpretation Two, this negative portrayal of Jacob disappears, and he emerges as a patient leader who actively engaged with Sherem over an extended period of time.

In addition, one reviewer observed that Jacob's usage of "might come unto me" in Jacob 7:3 — "he sought much opportunity that he might come unto me" — could mean that Sherem "hoped to come unto me," implying a single encounter between the two. In the KJV there is only one usage of this phrase "might come unto me." 2 Samuel 15:4 reads: "Absalom said moreover, Oh that I were made judge in the land, that every man which hath any suit or cause might come unto me [יבוא ויעלי *ve'alai yavo*], and I would do him justice!" The Hebrew verb in this phrase יבוא (*yavo*), rendered "might come" in the KJV, is expressed as an imperfect, or *yiqtol*, in Hebrew. This verb form "generally designates an action which is continuous, incomplete, or open-ended. Rather than depicting an action as a single event, the imperfect depicts it as a continuing process."<sup>26</sup> Based on this definition, the use of the imperfect in this biblical passage expresses Absalom's desire for repetitive opportunities for judgment. It is likely that the phrase "might come unto me" in Jacob 7:3 follows this same pattern of usage. This interpretation strengthens the idea that Jacob and Sherem met repeatedly.<sup>27</sup>

Finally, it can be observed that Jacob 7:3 begins and ends with parallel constructions: "And he labored diligently that he might lead away the hearts of the people ... wherefore he sought much opportunity that he might come unto me." *Labored diligently* and *sought much opportunity* can be seen as having parallel meanings. Both can be understood as representing the constancy of Sherem's efforts. Likewise, *that he might lead away* is grammatically parallel with *that he might come*. As such, his diligent labors to "lead away the hearts of the people" can be properly understood as Sherem's repeated, successful exertions, especially since Jacob confirmed that Sherem "did lead away many hearts." The parallel

nature of these beginning and ending phrases lends credence to the idea that Jacob and Sherem engaged in many repeated conversations with each other.

### The Right Way

Jacob accused Sherem of “labor[ing] diligently that he might lead away the hearts of the people, insomuch that he did lead away many hearts” (Jacob 7:3). Sherem, likewise, made the counter claim that it was Jacob who was leading the people away from *the right way*.<sup>28</sup>

And ye have led away much of this people, that they pervert *the right way* of God and keep not the law of Moses, which is *the right way*, and convert the law of Moses into the worship of a being which ye say shall come many hundred years hence. (Jacob 7:7)

Sherem contended that *the right way* was the law of Moses, and that Jacob was leading the people away through the worship of an unknown and unknowable being, Jesus Christ. While Jacob did not record his words of rebuttal to Sherem’s claim, his response could have mirrored the words of his brother, Nephi:

And the words which I have spoken shall stand as a testimony against you, for they are sufficient to teach any man *the right way*. For *the right way* is to *believe in Christ* and *deny him not*, for *by denying him* ye also *deny the prophets and the law*. And now behold, I say unto you that *the right way* is to *believe in Christ* and *deny him not*. And Christ is the Holy One of Israel; wherefore ye must bow down before him and worship him with all your might, mind, and strength, and your whole soul. And if ye do this, *ye shall in no wise be cast out*. (2 Nephi 25:28–29)

Nephi’s words, which seem tailored for Sherem, either foreshadow this future encounter of Jacob and Sherem, or they witness that Nephi had similar difficulties during his ministry. In this passage, Nephi twice tells us that “the right way is to believe in Christ and deny him not.” He also adds that by denying Christ we deny the prophets and the law of Moses. He finishes by telling us that if we worship Christ “with all [our] might, mind, and strength, and [our] whole soul” we “shall in no wise be cast out.”<sup>29</sup> This sermon seems aptly fashioned to counter Sherem’s accusation that Jacob was leading the people down the wrong path.

## I Did Confound Him

Confronted by Sherem's accusations of blasphemy, Jacob tells us that "the Lord God poured in his Spirit into my soul, insomuch that I did confound him in all his words" (Jacob 7:8). Just as the Lord *confounded* [בלל *balal*, mixed up, confused] the language of the people while building the tower of Babel, being filled with the Spirit, Jacob was able to confound Sherem in all his arguments. Jacob's wording in this passage is similar to Lehi's and Nephi's encounters with Laman and Lemuel. As with Jacob and Sherem, Nephi tells us that Lehi confounded Laman and Lemuel using similar verbiage:

And it came to pass that my father did speak unto them in the valley of Lemuel with power, *being filled with the Spirit*, until their frames did shake before him. And *he did confound them* that they durst not utter against him. (1 Nephi 2:14)

Nephi also wrote of his own experience with his brothers:

And it came to pass that I Nephi said many things unto my brethren, insomuch that *they were confounded* and could not contend against me, neither durst they lay their hands upon me nor touch me with their fingers, even for the space of many days. Now they durst not do this lest they should wither before me, *so powerful was the Spirit of God*. And thus it had wrought upon them. (1 Nephi 17:52)

Like Lehi and Nephi, Jacob was able to confound Sherem, not through his own power, but through the power of the Spirit of God.<sup>30</sup> This contrasts sharply with Jacob's description of the source of Sherem's power: "And he was learned, that he had a perfect knowledge of the language of the people; wherefore he could use much flattery and much power of speech according to the power of the devil" (Jacob 7:4).

## Deceiving, Denying, Lying, and Pretending

Among its varied meanings, the Hebrew verb כחש (*kachash*) can be translated as to *deceive*, *deny*, *lie*, *pretend obedience*, or *act falsely*.<sup>31</sup> The following examples from the Bible demonstrate these varied meanings:

- Sarah *denied* [תכחש *tekhachesh*] it, however, saying, "I did not laugh"; for she was afraid. And He said, "No, but you did laugh" (Genesis 18:15 NASB20).
- Also it will come about on that day that the prophets will each be ashamed of his vision when he prophesies, and

they will not put on a hairy robe in order to *deceive* [כחש *kachesh*] (Zechariah 13:4 NASB20).

- Or has found what was lost and *lied* [כחש *khichesh*] about it and sworn falsely, so that he sins regarding any of the things that people do (Leviticus 6:3 NASB20).
- Foreigners *pretend obedience* [יתכחשו *yitkachashu*] to me; As soon as they hear, they obey me. (2 Samuel 22:45 NASB95).
- You shall not steal, nor *deal falsely* [תכחשו *tekhachashu*], nor lie to one another (Leviticus 19:11 NASB20).

As in the biblical examples above, the Sherem narrative in Jacob 7 repeats these same English constructions. I propose that Jacob used this Hebrew verb, כחש (*kachash*), to create intentional repetitive wordplay for each of the following italicized English verbs:<sup>32</sup>

- And I saith unto him: *Deniest* thou the Christ, which should come? And he saith: If there should be a Christ, I would not *deny* him (v. 9).
- And I said unto him: What am I that I should tempt God to shew unto thee a sign in the thing which thou knowest to be true? Yet thou wilt *deny* it because thou art of the devil (v. 14).
- And it came to pass that on the morrow that the multitude were gathered together, and he spake plainly unto them and *denied* the things which he had taught them (v. 17).
- And he spake plainly unto them that he had been *deceived* by the power of the devil (v. 18).
- And he saith: I fear lest I have committed the unpardonable sin, for I have *lied* unto God. For I *denied* the Christ and said that I believed the scriptures — and they truly testify of him. And because that I have thus *lied* unto God, I greatly fear lest my case shall be awful (v. 19).

After listening to Sherem's initial grievance, Jacob began his response by asking Sherem "Deniest thou the Christ, which should come?" Sherem responded that "if there should be a Christ" he would not *deny* him. Later, when Sherem asked for a sign, Jacob responded that Sherem would surely *deny* it. Finally, Jacob tells us that shortly before his death Sherem "denied the things which he had taught" to the people. These four occurrences of the English verb *deny* are followed by Sherem's claim "that he had been deceived by the power of the devil," and Sherem

twice added that he had “lied unto God.” Each of these English verbs can be properly derived from the Hebrew verb כחש (*kachash*).

While this narrative does not include any overt statement by Jacob that Sherem was *feigning obedience* or *acting falsely*, it seems apparent that this was Jacob’s overall attitude toward him. In verse 14 Jacob stated that Sherem was “of the devil,” and in the final line of the narrative, even following his alleged contrition and confession, Jacob still referred to Sherem as “this wicked man” (v. 23). Jacob’s multiple uses of כחש (*kachash*) — *deny* (4 times), *deceive* (1 time), and *lie* (2 times) — lead us to Jacob’s conclusion: Sherem was not sincere in his actions but was a *false actor*. Even as Sherem approached death Jacob appears to judge that Sherem had *acted falsely* [כחש *kachash*] in his public confession and alleged contrition.

As with many elements of the Sherem story, Jacob’s attitude relative to Sherem closely parallels Alma’s response in the story of Korihor. After he was struck dumb, Korihor “besought that Alma should pray unto God that the curse might be taken from him. But Alma said unto him: “If this curse should be taken from thee, thou wouldst again lead away the hearts of this people” (Alma 30:54–55). Like Jacob, Alma appears to judge Korihor to be a *false actor*, even in the face of his alleged contrition and public confession.

### From Knowing (ידע *Yada*) to Confessing (ידיה *Yadah*)

The principle meaning of the Hebrew verb ידע (*yada*) is to *know* something or someone. It can also mean to be *learned* (literally, *knowing*) or to *understand*. As a noun, דעת (*daat*), it is rendered *knowledge*. Another noun derived from this same root is ידעני (*yiddoni*), and means to have the “spirit of divination,” or to be a soothsayer or fortune teller.<sup>33</sup> The following passages detail these interpretations:

- For God doth *know* [ידע *yodea*] that in the day ye eat thereof, then your eyes shall be opened, and ye shall be as gods, *knowing* [ידעי *yodei*] good and evil (Genesis 3:5 KJV).
- And the vision of all is become unto you as the words of a book that is sealed, which men deliver to one that is *learned* [יודע *yodea*], saying, Read this, I pray thee: and he saith, I cannot; for it is sealed (Isaiah 29:11 KJV).
- *Understand* [ידעת *yadatta*] therefore, that the LORD thy God giveth thee not this good land to possess it for thy righteousness; for thou art a stiffnecked people

(Deuteronomy 9:6 KJV).

- But of the tree of the *knowledge* [דעת *daat*] of good and evil, thou shalt not eat of it: for in the day that thou eatest thereof thou shalt surely die (Genesis 2:17 KJV).
- A man also or woman that hath a familiar spirit, or that is a *wizard* [ידעני *yiddoni*], shall surely be put to death: they shall stone them with stones: their blood shall be upon them (Leviticus 20:27 KJV).

In addition, the verb ידה (*yadah*), a near homonym of ידע (*yada*), carries the connotation of to *praise* or *confess*. The passages below demonstrate this understanding:

- And she conceived again and gave birth to a son, and said, “This time I will praise [אודה *odeh*] the Lord.” Therefore she named him *Judah* [יהודה *yehudah*] (Genesis 29:35 NASB20).
- I acknowledged my sin to You, and I did not hide my guilt; I said, “I will confess [אודה *odeh*] my wrongdoings to the Lord”; and You forgave the guilt of my sin (Psalm 32:5 NASB20).

In the back-and-forth dialogue between Jacob and Sherem, I propose that these two Hebrew roots — ידע (y-d-‘a) and ידה (y-d-h) — were used in significant ways (see below):

- And he *knowing* that I Jacob had faith in Christ, which should come, wherefore he sought much opportunity that he might come unto me. And he was *learned*, that he had a perfect *knowledge* of the language of the people (Jacob 7:3–4).
- Brother Jacob, I have sought much opportunity that I might speak unto you, for I have heard and also *know* that thou goest about much, preaching that which ye call the gospel or the doctrine of Christ (v. 6).
- And now behold, I Sherem declare unto you that this is blasphemy, for no man *knoweth* of such things; for he cannot *tell of things to come* (v. 7).
- I *know* that there is no Christ, neither hath been nor never will be (v. 9).
- And I saith unto him: Believest thou the scriptures? And he saith: Yea. And I saith unto him: Then ye do not *understand* them, for they truly testify of Christ (vv. 10–11).



- It hath been made manifest unto me — for I have heard and seen and it also hath been made manifest unto me by the power of the Holy Ghost — wherefore I *know* if there should be no atonement made, all mankind must be lost (v. 12).
- Shew me a sign by this power of the Holy Ghost, in the which ye *know* so much (v. 13).
- What am I that I should tempt God to shew unto thee a sign in the thing which thou *knowest* to be true? (v. 14).
- he spake plainly unto them and denied the things which he had taught them, and *confessed* the Christ and the power of the Holy Ghost and the ministering of angels (v. 17).
- I greatly fear lest my case shall be awful but I *confess* unto God (v. 19).

In the initial use of the root  $\text{יָדַע}$  (*y-d-‘a*) we are told that Sherem *knew* that Jacob had faith in Christ, that Sherem was *learned*, and that he had a perfect *knowledge* of the language. Following Jacob’s triple usage of this root, Sherem stated that he *knew* that Jacob was going about preaching “the gospel or the doctrine of Christ.” In Sherem’s next declaration — “no man knoweth of such things; for he cannot tell of things to come” — he essentially accused Jacob of being a  $\text{יִדְּוֹנִי}$  (*yiddoni*), also from the root  $\text{יָדַע}$  (*y-d-‘a*), and best rendered as *soothsayer* or *fortune teller* in English.<sup>34</sup> As outlined in Leviticus 20:27, being a  $\text{יִדְּוֹנִי}$  (*yiddoni*) was a capital offense. Oddly, in Sherem’s next use of this root he stated that he *knew* “that there is no Christ, neither hath been nor never will be.” In other words, Sherem gave his own prediction of the future even though he had just stated that no one “can tell of things to come.”<sup>35</sup> In essence, Sherem self-identified as a  $\text{יִדְּוֹנִי}$  (*yiddoni*), or fortune teller, with his counterclaim that the Christ would not come. Jacob then asked Sherem if he believed the scriptures to which he answered in the affirmative. Jacob responded that Sherem did not *understand* them, which can also be understood as “you do not know them.”

At this point the dialogue between the two became even more confrontational. Jacob told Sherem that he *knew* by “the power of the Holy Ghost” that the atonement of Christ was necessary. In return, Sherem mockingly demanded a sign “by this power of the Holy Ghost, in the which ye *know* so much.” Jacob responded that it would not be right for him to ask God for a sign about something that Sherem already *knew*. Jacob’s next statement handed the fate of Sherem over to God: “Nevertheless not my will be done; but if God shall smite thee, let that be

a sign unto thee.” As we all know, God smote Sherem with a debilitating affliction that caused him to fall to the earth, and which eventually led to his death.

After “the space of many days” Sherem requested that the people gather themselves together because he had something to tell them. Jacob informs us that Sherem “confessed the Christ and the power of the Holy Ghost and the ministering of angels.” “Confessed the Christ” can also be understood as “praised the Christ.” Jacob adds that Sherem’s final words were: “I greatly fear lest my case shall be awful; but I confess unto God.” Unlike the verb to *know*, from the root ידע (y-d-‘a), *confess* is from the root הוד (y-d-h), a near homonym. This shift from *knowing* to *confessing* is more than just a semantic switch. Sherem’s outward arrogance, his *knowing*, disappeared and a seemingly newfound humility, his *confessing*, was on public display. However, as discussed in the prior section, whether right or wrong in his final judgment of Sherem, Jacob was not convinced by this latent show of humility and contrition, and still viewed Sherem as a “wicked man.” In other words, Jacob considered Sherem’s public *confession* (הוד y-d-h) to be a *false act*, or *lie* (שח k-ch-sh).<sup>36</sup>

### Show Me a Sign (אוֹת ot)

After appearing to him in the burning bush, God told Moses to “Go, and gather the elders of Israel together, and say unto them, The Lord God of your fathers, the God of Abraham, of Isaac, and of Jacob, appeared unto me” (Exodus 3:16 KJV). Fearful of the elders’ response, Moses replied: “But, behold, they will not believe me, nor hearken unto my voice: for they will say, The Lord hath not appeared unto thee” (Exodus 4:1 KJV). In reassurance, God provided Moses with two *signs* that he could perform before the elders: turning his rod into a snake and then back into a rod, and making his hand become leprous and then restoring it to health. And, just in case the elders did not believe either of those signs, God provided one additional sign that Moses could perform for them:

And it shall come to pass, if they will not believe also these two *signs* [אוֹת otot], neither hearken unto thy voice, that thou shalt take of the water of the river, and pour it upon the dry land: and the water which thou takest out of the river shall become blood upon the dry land. (Exodus 4:9 KJV)

Kevin Christiansen has plausibly hypothesized that Sherem was a Deuteronomist: “Sherem talks like a Deuteronomist, just as Jacob talks like a First Temple priest.”<sup>37</sup> Thompson added:

There are also “markers” in Jacob’s account of his meeting with Sherem which suggest that Sherem more likely was a Nephite than anyone else. Those markers include Sherem’s eloquence in the Nephite language, his familiarity with the law of Moses, and the resonance of Sherem’s doctrines with the ideas of the deuteronomists who some scholars say may have been part of the reason for Lehi’s flight from Jerusalem.<sup>38</sup>

As a Deuteronomist,<sup>39</sup> Sherem would have revered Moses as the great lawgiver and deliverer of Israel. And just as Moses provided signs for the elders of Israel, Sherem may have felt entitled to a sign from Jacob. Sherem demanded: “Show me a sign [אוֹת *ot*] by this power of the Holy Ghost, in the which ye know so much” (Jacob 7:13). Jacob, on the other hand, viewed Sherem’s demand for a sign as tempting God, and he refused to comply.<sup>40</sup> However, perhaps reconsidering, Jacob added: “Nevertheless not my will be done; but if God shall smite thee, let that be a sign [אוֹת *ot*] unto thee that he hath power both in heaven and in earth and also that Christ shall come” (Jacob 7:14).

The prophet Ezekiel who was deported from Jerusalem to Babylon about 597 BCE, around the time that Lehi and his family left Jerusalem, wrote:

For anyone of the house of Israel, or of the strangers who reside in Israel, who *deserts Me, sets up his idols in his heart, puts in front of his face the stumbling block of his wrongdoing, and then comes to the prophet to request something of Me for himself*, I the LORD will let Myself answer him Myself. I will *set My face against that person and make him a sign and a proverb, and I will eliminate him* [הִכְרַתִּי *hikhrativ*]<sup>41</sup> *from among My people*. So you will know that I am the LORD. (Ezekiel 14:7–8 NASB20).

The Lord’s words to Ezekiel are a good fit for Sherem. Jacob could have judged that Sherem had:

- *Deserted* the Lord since Sherem openly denied the Christ (Jacob 7:7, 9);
- Set up the law of Moses as an *idol*, as a substitute for Christ. Sherem considered the law of Moses to be “the right way” (Jacob 7:7) and “the doctrine of Christ” to be blasphemy (Jacob 7:6–7);
- Spread his false teachings to create a *stumbling block* for himself and for the people. Jacob wrote that Sherem

“labored diligently that he might lead away the hearts of the people, insomuch that he did lead away many hearts (Jacob 7:3); and,

- Asked Jacob, the Lord’s prophet, for a *sign* from God. However, as Jesus would later teach, “An evil and adulterous generation seeketh after a sign” (Matthew 12:39 KJV).

As if in response to Sherem’s apostasy, the Lord told Ezekiel, “I the LORD will let Myself answer him Myself.” And answer him He did. As Ezekiel prophesied, the Lord *set his face against* Sherem: “the power of the Lord came upon him, insomuch that he fell to the earth” (Jacob 7:15). And rather than receiving his *desired sign* from the Lord, Sherem himself became a *sign* and a *proverb* to the people. Further verifying Ezekiel’s prophecy, Sherem’s story ends with his *elimination from among God’s people*. In the shadow of Sherem’s dramatic demise the people of Nephi returned to the correct worship of the Lord, and “peace and the love of God was restored again among the people” (Jacob 7:23).

### Parallelisms

At the peak of their contentious encounter, Sherem demanded a sign from Jacob: “Shew me a sign by this power of the Holy Ghost, in the which ye know so much” (Jacob 7:13). Jacob’s response to Sherem and his recounting of the events that followed Sherem’s demand (verses 14 through 23) can be arranged into several parallel structures.

Jacob’s response to Sherem in verses 14–15 parallels the people’s reaction to the death of Sherem in verses 21–23:

- |    |   |
|----|---|
| A  | thou art of <i>the devil</i> (v. 14).   |
| B  | Nevertheless <i>not my will be done</i> ; but <i>if God shall smite thee, let that be a sign unto thee</i> that he hath power both in heaven and in earth and also that Christ shall come. And <i>thy will, O Lord, be done and not mine</i> (v. 14). |
| C  | <i>the power of the Lord came upon him</i> (v. 15),   |
| D  | insomuch that he <i>fell to the earth</i> (v. 15).  |
| C’ | <i>the power of God came down upon them</i> (v.21)  |
| D’ | and they were overcome, that <i>they fell to the earth</i> (v. 21).   |
| B’ | Now this thing was pleasing unto me Jacob, for <i>I had requested it of my Father</i> which was in heaven, for he had <i>heard my cry and answered my prayer</i> (v. 22).   |

A' this *wicked man* (v. 23).

The center of this parallel structure, lines C-D', is organized as a simple alternate. In lines C and D we are told that "the power of the Lord came upon" Sherem causing him to fall to the earth. Lines C' and D' explain that after Sherem's death the "power of God came down upon" the people, causing them to fall to the earth also. Lines A and A' inform us that Jacob considered Sherem to be "of the devil" and a "wicked man." In line B, which can be understood as a prayer, Jacob asks God to smite Sherem as a sign rather than granting him the sign that he had demanded. This request is bookended with the caveat that God's will rather than Jacob's was to be done. In line B' Jacob tells us that he was pleased that God had "heard my cry and answered my prayer," and adds that he had "requested it of my Father," a clear reference to his prayer in line B.

After Sherem fell to the earth he was "nourished for the space of many days." Sensing that he was going to die, Sherem requested to speak with the people. His words in this section can be organized into a chiasm:

A	<i>Gather together</i>
B	<i>on the morrow,</i>
C	<i>for I shall die</i> (v. 16);
C'	wherefore I desire to speak unto the people before
	<i>that I shall die.</i>
B'	And it came to pass that <i>on the morrow</i>
A'	that the multitude were <i>gathered together</i> (vv.16-17),

Jacob then summarized the key points of Sherem's words to the people in two separate sections. In the first section he organized Sherem's words into four expressions: a repudiation of incorrect teachings and three declarations of belief (B lines). In the second section Jacob provided four additional statements, each focusing on the negative outcomes of Sherem's apostasy (B' lines). Both of these sections begin with the phrase "and he spake plainly unto them," followed by an expression that includes the Hebrew verb כחש (*kachash*):

A	<i>and he spake plainly unto them</i>
B	and <i>denied</i> [כחש <i>kachash</i> ] the things which he had taught them,
B	and confessed the <i>Christ</i>
B	and the <i>power of the Holy Ghost</i>
B	and the <i>ministering of angels</i> (v. 17).
A'	<i>And he spake plainly unto them</i>

- B' that he had been *deceived* [כחש *kachash*] by the power  
of the devil.  
B' And he spake of *hell*  
B' and of *eternity*  
B' and of *eternal punishment* (v. 18).

Sherem's final words to the people can be organized into the following chiasm. As just shown, this chiasm repeats the Hebrew verb כחש (*kachash*) in lines B and B':<sup>42</sup>

- A And he saith: *I fear lest I have committed the unpardonable sin,*  
B for *I have lied* [כחש *kachash*] *unto God.*  
C For I *denied the Christ*  
D and said that I believed *the scriptures* —  
D' and *they*  
C' *truly testify of him.*  
B' And because that *I have thus lied* [כחש *kachash*] *unto God,*  
A' *I greatly fear lest my case shall be awful* but I confess unto  
God (v. 19).

Finally, Jacob records Sherem's death — giving up the ghost — as a simple alternate parallelism:

- A And it came to pass that when he *had said these words*, he  
could say *no more* (v. 20)  
B and he *gave up the ghost* (v. 20).  
A' And when the multitude had witnessed that he *spake*  
*these things* (v.21)  
B' as he was about to *give up the ghost* (v. 21),

These parallel structures demonstrate that Jacob carefully crafted his retelling of Sherem's story. Interestingly, once Jacob spoke the fateful line "*thy will, O Lord, be done and not mine*" (verse 14), Jacob seems to distance himself from the events that unfolded. However, once Sherem "*gave up the ghost*" (v. 20), and observing that the people "*were overcome, that they fell to the earth*" (v. 21), Jacob once again reinserted himself into the story (vv. 22 and 23). I propose that Jacob intentionally removed himself from the final dramatic events of the story to show that it was God who was in control of Sherem's fate; it was not Jacob who smote Sherem, but God. And it was God who ultimately determined that Sherem would die. In essence, when Jacob reentered the story it was merely to give credit to God for removing "this wicked man" from among the people.

## Conclusion

The story of Sherem is a compelling tale of the Book of Mormon's first documented anti-Christ. Although Sherem accused Jacob of two capital offenses — the sin of blasphemy and of being a ידעני (*yiddoni*), or soothsayer — in the end it was Jacob who prevailed over Sherem as he was made “a sign and a proverb,” and was eventually *eliminated* from among them (see Ezekiel 14:7–8). Various additional observations and insights can be garnered from an analysis of this story:

- Based on the language in Jacob 7:1 there is no reason to believe that Sherem came from outside the small Nephite community;
- Rather than Sherem seeking repeatedly, but unsuccessfully to talk with Jacob, their mutual use of the phrase *sought much opportunity* most likely informs us that Sherem successfully sought out Jacob on multiple occasions, and that the two had repeated discussions with each other;
- Sherem's *right way* — following the law of Moses and rejecting the doctrine of Christ — stands in direct opposition to Nephi's preaching of the *right way* which was to believe in Christ and deny him not;
- While Sherem relied on his “much power of speech according to the power of the devil,” Jacob was able to confound him through the *power of the Spirit of God*;
- Jacob possibly used repetitive wordplay in his retelling of Sherem's story, involving the Hebrew verbs כחש (*kachash*), ידע (*yada*), and ידה (*yadah*). כחש (*kachash*) can be translated as to *deceive, deny, lie, pretend obedience, or act falsely*. The root י-ד-ע (*y-d-‘a*) carries the meaning of *knowing, being learned, knowledge, or being a fortune teller* (ידעני *yiddoni*). ידה (*yadah*), a near homonym of ידע (*yada*), can be translated as to *confess*. Jacob likely used these Hebrew roots to tie his narrative together and to transition to different parts of the story;
- Just as Moses performed signs for the elders of Israel in Egypt, Sherem may have felt entitled to a *sign* from Jacob. However, Jesus' teaching that “an evil and adulterous generation seeketh after a sign” (Matthew 12:39 KJV) helps confirm Jacob's assessment that Sherem was a “wicked man.” God's ultimate judgment on Sherem was that he was *eliminated* or *cut off* from among the people;

- Jacob structured the last half of the Sherem story into a series of parallel structures.<sup>43</sup> These parallelisms help us observe that Jacob carefully constructed his retelling of the events surrounding the anti-Christ Sherem.

Rejecting a central tenet of the gospel, the doctrine of Christ, in favor of a law of carnal commandments, the law of Moses, Sherem found himself at cross purposes with Jacob, Nephi's spiritual successor and God's designated leader. Speaking to holders of the priesthood, but equally applicable to both male and female members of the church today, Joseph Smith wrote:

When we undertake to cover our sins, or to gratify our pride, our vain ambition, or to exercise control or dominion or compulsion upon the souls of the children of men, in any degree of unrighteousness, behold, the heavens withdraw themselves; the Spirit of the Lord is grieved; and when it is withdrawn, Amen to the priesthood or the authority of that man. Behold, ere he is aware, he is left unto himself, to kick against the pricks, to persecute the saints, and to fight against God (D&C 121:37–38).

These cautionary words could have been addressed directly to Sherem. Fighting against God and his prophet, Sherem was “left unto himself.” The prophet Ezekiel lamented: “Son of man, you live in the midst of the rebellious house, who have eyes to see but do not see, ears to hear but do not hear; for they are a rebellious house” (Ezekiel 12:2 NASB20). Sadly, Sherem's story ends with him being *cut off* (כרת *carat*) from God and from the people, becoming a *sign* and a *proverb* to all who have *eyes to see* and *ears to hear*.

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### Appendix:

#### Additional Examples of “Sought Opportunity”

1. His whole heart was in his work, and his only desire was to glorify God and advance his cause. He *continually sought opportunity* to do good that he might help fallen humanity. As a pastor he visited, knew, and loved his people. He knew and called the children by name.<sup>44</sup>
2. No sooner had Mary got possession of the throne, than she resolved to re-establish the old religion. Being of a revengeful disposition, she *sought every opportunity* of sacrificing those to her malice who had given the least encouragement to the reformation.<sup>45</sup>
3. During his illness he was daily watched by his friend, who did everything to promote his comfort, and particularly *sought opportunity* to call his attention to the Word of God.<sup>46</sup>
4. This was in 1861, and he had not found time to engage in business when Sumter was fired on. That “meant business,” indeed, and Mann was among the promptest to respond to the ominous summons. He enlisted as a private, “for three years or the war.” But, not content with enlisting himself, he *sought opportunity* to enlist others, and soon had a company raised for the Thirty-ninth Illinois Regiment, the historic “Yates Phalanx.”<sup>47</sup>
5. At Rome, as in other cities where his people were represented, the apostle *sought opportunity* to preach first to the Jews. In response to his invitation, their “chief” or leading men assembled at his residence, and gave courteous attention to his speech.<sup>48</sup>
6. But he did not content himself with being simply a student of God’s word, and an agent for its distribution. He *sought opportunity* to preach it also. Turning his attention to the English sailors at Cronstadt, he began to preach there regularly beneath the Bethel flag, going out on Saturday and returning on the Monday’s boat.<sup>49</sup>
7. It was Paul’s custom, wherever he found Jews, to first attend with them at their worship, and explain to them the Scriptures of the Old Testament, and preach the gospel, and afterwards he *sought opportunity* to instruct the Gentiles.<sup>50</sup>

8. Since the Greek drama had its origin in the celebration of the worship of Dionysus, the dramatists *often sought opportunity* to insert odes in their plays in honor of this god.<sup>51</sup>
9. I do not intend to enter minutely into the discussions of this subject, for the reason that we have no time to spare; but I will refer to a remark of my colleague, [Mr. Giddings,] in which, yesterday, he charged that I had proved recreant to the cause of freedom — that I was found acting with the foes of freedom. It is not the first time that my colleague has *sought opportunity* to assail me on this floor — not merely on this floor, but elsewhere.<sup>52</sup>
10. St. Paul constantly changing his place of living, moving among large bodies of people, never overlooked individuals. In his speech to the elders of Ephesus he could challenge them to bear witness that he had taught not only publicly, but from house to house, and had warned every one night and day with tears. Like his Master he was moved by the sight of a multitude, and gladly *sought opportunity* to tell the Gospel story to many.<sup>53</sup>

### Endnotes

- 1 All Book of Mormon citations are from *The Book of Mormon: The Earliest Text*, ed. Royal Skousen (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2009).
- 2 A. Keith Thompson, “Who Was Sherem?,” *Interpreter: A Journal of Mormon Scripture* 14 (2015): 2, <https://journal.interpreterfoundation.org/who-was-sherem/>.
- 3 John L. Sorenson uses the idea that Sherem came from outside the local population as potential evidence that there were others in the land when the Lehighites arrived. See John L. Sorenson, “I have heard that the sizes of the Nephite and Lamanite populations indicated in the Book of Mormon do not make sense. What do we know about their numbers?,” *I Have a Question*, *Ensign* 22, no. 9 (September 1992), <https://www.churchofjesuschrist.org/study/ensign/1992/09/i-have-a-question/what-do-we-know-about-the-numbers-of-nephites-and-lamanites>. John Tvedtnes takes a similar approach; see John A. Tvedtnes, review of “Brent Lee Metcalfe, ed.,

*New Approaches to the Book of Mormon: Explorations in Critical Methodology*,” *Review of Books on the Book of Mormon 1989–2011* 6, no. 1 (1994): 28–29, <https://scholarsarchive.byu.edu/msr/vol6/iss1/4/>.

- 4 Adam S. Miller and Joseph M. Spencer, eds., “Summary Report,” *Christ and Antichrist: Reading Jacob 7* (Provo, UT: Neal A. Maxwell Institute, 2017), xvii. A slightly different version of the book is available at <https://scholarsarchive.byu.edu/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=1022&context=mi>. The differences between the online version and the printed version lie mainly in superficial grammatical errors.
- 5 Val Larsen has convincingly argued that Sherem, likely from the local Nephite community, enjoyed the support of the current Nephite king: “That Sherem was permitted to actively proselytize the Nephites to believe his theology is strong evidence that he had the support of the king. Were the king’s views the same as those of the high priest, Jacob, there is little chance that Sherem would have been allowed to teach an alternative theology even as an insider, let alone as an outsider.” Val Larsen, “Josiah to Zoram to Sherem to Jarom and the Big Little Book of Omni,” *Interpreter: A Journal of Latter-day Saint Faith and Scholarship* 44 (2021), 243, <https://journal.interpreterfoundation.org/josiah-to-zoram-to-sherem-to-jarom-and-the-big-little-book-of-omni/>.
- 6 The following New Testament passage also conforms to this same tripartite classification schema: “Now when Jesus was born in Bethlehem of Judaea in the days of Herod the king, behold, there came wise men from the east to Jerusalem, Saying, Where is he that is born King of the Jews? for we have seen his star in the east, and are come to worship him.” (Matthew 2:1–2 KJV)
- 7 “The core of Hebrew prophecy is its social significance, as the prophets claimed to have been sent by God in order to announce his word ... Indeed, the messenger motif is the common feature of the Hebrew Prophet.” Benjamin Uffenheimer, “Prophecy, Ecstasy, and Sympathy,” *Congress Volume Jerusalem 1986* (Leiden, NDL: Brill, 1988), 259.
- 8 Utilizing a different set of arguments, Keith Thompson arrives at a similar conclusion, that Sherem was part of the local Nephite community. Thompson, “Who Was Sherem?”

- 9 In an interesting Sunstone article Roger Terry proposes that Amaleki, the final author of the small plates of Nephi, was the brother of Abinadi. He bases this theory principally on Amaleki's statement that he "had a brother which also went with" Zeniff's group to the land of Nephi. Terry also points out that the name of Amaleki's father was Abinadom which closely parallels the name Abinadi. Roger Terry, "Scripture Notes: Unearthing Abinadi's Genealogy," *Sunstone*, June 11, 2013, <https://sunstone.org/scripture-notes-unearthing-abinadis-genealogy/>.
- 10 One could make the argument that Korihor was not from the land of Zarahemla since Alma 30:6 states that he came "into the land of Zarahemla." However, there is no reason to suppose that he was not a Nephite by birth and that he may have resided in another part of the Nephite nation which was extensive at that time. On the other hand, during the time of Jacob and Sherem the Nephite nation would have been much smaller, both in terms of population and geography.
- 11 John L. Sorenson, "When Lehi's Party Arrived in the Land, Did They Find Others There?," *Journal of Book of Mormon Studies* 1, no. 1 (1992): 4, <https://scholarsarchive.byu.edu/jbms/vol1/iss1/2>.
- 12 Adam S. Miller, *Future Mormon: Essays in Mormon Theology* (Draper, UT: Greg Kofford, 2016), 27.
- 13 In addition to the story of Jacob and Sherem in the Book of Mormon, only the gospels of Matthew and Luke use this language, sought opportunity. The KJV informs us that Judas, one of the twelve apostles, sought opportunity to betray Christ unto the chief priests: "Then one of the twelve, called Judas Iscariot, went unto the chief priests, and said unto them, What will ye give me, and I will deliver him unto you? And they covenanted with him for thirty pieces of silver. And from that time he sought opportunity to betray him" (Matthew 26:14–16 KJV, see also Luke 22:6).
- 14 "Memoir of the Late Rev. Bishop George," *The Methodist Magazine and Quarterly Review* 12 (1830): 434, [https://www.google.com/books/edition/Methodist\\_Magazine\\_and\\_Quarterly\\_Review/wFM4AQAAMAAJ?hl=en&gbpv=1&pg=PA434](https://www.google.com/books/edition/Methodist_Magazine_and_Quarterly_Review/wFM4AQAAMAAJ?hl=en&gbpv=1&pg=PA434).
- 15 Theodore Frelinghuysen, "Introduction," *An Address Delivered July 20, 1830, Before the Peithessophian and Philoclean Societies of Rutgers*

College, by Hon. William Wirt (New Brunswick: A. Ackerman, Publisher, 1852), vii.

- 16 In a private conversation with the author, Stanford Carmack provided examples of Early Modern English usage showing the use of “sought much” with much being used as an adverb rather than as an adjective. The first example is from the 1570s and the second is from the 1670s: 1. “The King at this time was a widdower, & therefore he sought much the honor of the Princesse his daughter.” 2. “and to sustain much reproach, because he was so feeble a person, and of no great wit, nor sought much the Kingdom...”
- 17 A search of the phrase “sought opportunity” in *Early English Books Online* (<https://quod.lib.umich.edu/cgi/t/text/text-idx?page=simple;g=eebogroup>) revealed examples conforming to three categories of usage: 1) Efforts that resulted in a single, final outcome. Most of these relate to attempts to have someone killed, which by definition can only be a single, successful event, for example, the betrayal of Jesus by Judas; 2) Representations of multiple successful efforts; and 3) Failed attempts.
- 18 William Burt, “Biography: Memoir of the Rev. Stephen Bamford, of British North America,” *The Wesleyan-Methodist Magazine* 7 (1851): 450, [https://www.google.com/books/edition/The\\_Wesleyan\\_Methodist\\_Magazine/f\\_kDAAAQAAJ?hl=en&gbpv=1&pg=PA834](https://www.google.com/books/edition/The_Wesleyan_Methodist_Magazine/f_kDAAAQAAJ?hl=en&gbpv=1&pg=PA834).
- 19 Henry Caswall, *The Martyr of the Pongas: Being a Memoir of the Rev. Hamble James Leacock* (London: Rivingtons, 1857), 37.
- 20 G. Everard, “The Shield, the Sword, and the Battle,” in *The Quiver: An Illustrated Magazine for Sunday and General Reading* (London: Cassel, 1891), 363.
- 21 As one peer reviewer observed, present-day readers would probably not use the phrase sought opportunity to convey multiple events. Rather, “they would make it plural and say ‘sought opportunities.’ Not many today would consider ‘sought opportunity’ to be plural.”
- 22 For example: “Dinner was over: Adelaide had sat all the while silent and pensive; it was plain her feelings were deeply agitated. Vatillen and the chevalier both sought opportunity to speak with her alone but she purposely avoided this. At last as she stood in a group of several ladies, they went up to her together. “Lady!” said Vatillen, “my friend the chevalier and I, whom you have permitted to call ourselves you knights, set off hence to-morrow

- with the army. Permit us to wait on you and take leave of you to-day, and vouchsafe us a token of favour from our lady, which in battle and danger may strengthen [sic] and exalt our courage.” *The Ladies’ Cabinet of Fashion, Music, and Romance* vol. 6 (London: Geo. Henderson, 1842), 385.
- 23 Whether consciously aware of the word choice or not, the *Encyclopedia of Mormonism* observed that Mormon regularly sought opportunity to interject his own spiritual insights into his work of abridgment: “While making his abridgment, Mormon often noted that he could not include even a hundredth part of the source records (e.g., Helaman. 3:14). He regularly sought opportunity to draw spiritual lessons from the course of events experienced by his people.” Phyllis Ann Roundy, “Mormon” in *Encyclopedia of Mormonism*, ed. Daniel H. Ludlow (New York: Macmillan, 1992), 933, <https://eom.byu.edu/index.php/Mormon>.
  - 24 Jacob’s independent confirmation that Sherem “sought much opportunity that he might come unto me” (Jacob 7:3) eliminates any possibility that Sherem may have been lying when he made a nearly identical claim (see Jacob 7:6).
  - 25 Adam S. Miller, “Reading Signs or Repeating Symptoms,” in *Christ and Antichrist: Reading Jacob 7*, eds. Adam S. Miller and Joseph M. Spencer (Provo, UT: Neal A. Maxwell Institute, 2017), 22, <https://scholarsarchive.byu.edu/mi/23>.
  - 26 The citation for this can be found through a complex series of clicks at the Blue Letter Bible website. First, visit [https://www.blueletterbible.org/kjv/2sa/15/4/p0/t\\_conc\\_282004](https://www.blueletterbible.org/kjv/2sa/15/4/p0/t_conc_282004), then click the “HVql3ms” button to display the Hebrew Parsing information. Finally click the “Imperfect (yiqtol)” link to see the referenced definition.
  - 27 It should be noted that Jacob 7 is not a word-for-word transcript of Jacob’s encounter with Sherem. Jacob would have edited, rephrased, or rearranged Sherem’s words to fit his own purpose. When Jacob wrote “Brother Jacob, I have sought much opportunity that I might speak unto you,” his main purpose was likely to confirm his own prior statement, that Sherem “sought much opportunity that he might come unto me.” It is altogether possible that Jacob and Sherem exchanged greetings prior to Sherem’s initial recorded words. After all, Jacob’s intent was not to record history but to teach his people and future readers a valuable lesson.

- 28 Three Hebrew expressions are translated “the right way” in the KJV. These include: 1) דרך אמת (*dereck emet*), better rendered “true way” (see Genesis 24:48); 2) דרך הטובה (*dereck ha’tovah*), more properly “the good way” (see 1 Samuel 12:23); and 3) דרך ישרה (*dereck yesharah*), better translated as “straight way” (see Psalm 107:7). Nephi most likely used one of these Hebrew phrases to express the idea of “the right way.” In addition, Nephi’s “right way” could be understood as “the covenant path,” or דרך הברית (*dereck ha’brit*), see Russell M. Nelson, “The Power of Spiritual Momentum,” *Liahona*, May 2022, 98, <https://www.churchofjesuschrist.org/study/general-conference/2022/04/47nelson>.
- 29 Nephi’s final written words reinforce this idea: “And now behold, my beloved brethren, this is the way. And there is none other way nor name given under heaven whereby man can be saved in the kingdom of God. And now behold, this is the doctrine of Christ, and the only and true doctrine of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Ghost, which is one God without end. Amen” (2 Nephi 31:21).
- 30 As one reviewer noted, “Jacob’s knowledge comes because Christ ‘poured in his spirit into my soul.’ The use of ‘poured’ has all kinds of atonement and Eucharistic imagery. The real question here is such a modern one, or such a universal one. How do we know what we know? How do we know the things of God? Is knowing enough? What kind of knowing does Sherem achieve?”
- 31 Ludwig Koehler, Walter Baumgartner, *The Hebrew and Aramaic Lexicon of the Old Testament* (Leiden, ND: Brill, 2001), s.v. “כחש,” 4215. (Hereafter referred to as *HALOT*.)
- 32 This Hebrew interpretation of the text requires a “reverse translation,” the process of retranslating a word or passage from the English of the Book of Mormon back to its source language. Moroni tells us that he and his father wrote their record “in the characters which are called among us the reformed Egyptian” (Mormon 9:32). Likewise, Nephi informed us that he made his record “in the language of my father, which consists of the learning of the Jews and the language of the Egyptians” (1 Nephi 1:2), and it would be reasonable to assume that Jacob followed Nephi’s example. King Benjamin added that the brass plates were also written in an Egyptian script: “for he [Lehi] having been taught in the language of the Egyptians therefore he could read these



- engravings" (Mosiah 1:4). However, even though these records were transcribed in an Egyptian script, the original "source language" of the brass plates, and almost certainly the small plates of Nephi, would have been Hebrew. Lehi, Nephi, and Jacob were preexilic Israelites. As such, their first and dominant language would have been Hebrew.
- 33 HALOT, s.v. "ידעני," 3575.
  - 34 Jacob would have agreed with Sherem's observation that "no man knoweth of such things," unless it is revealed to him by God. Jacob wrote: "And no man knoweth of his ways save it be revealed unto him; wherefore, brethren, despise not the revelations of God" (Jacob 4:8).
  - 35 Duane Boyce observed: "He [Sherem] denies, for example, that Jacob can know of the coming of Christ because, he says, it is not possible to 'tell of things to come' (Jacob 7:7). But then Sherem contradicts this view and claims to know the future himself; he declares that he knows there is no Christ and that there neither has been a Christ 'nor ever will be' (Jacob 7:9). So now he knows what he earlier told Jacob it is impossible to know. Sherem denies and asserts the same proposition, according to the rhetorical needs of the moment." Duane Boyce, "Reclaiming Jacob," *Interpreter: A Journal of Mormon Scripture* 22 (2016), 110, <https://journal.interpreterfoundation.org/reclaiming-jacob/>.
  - 36 Val Larsen argues the opposite, that Sherem had a real conversion to the doctrine of Christ: "Like Alma<sub>2</sub> and others who follow in the Book of Mormon, Sherem is struck down and then spiritually nourished by the power of God. Like Alma<sub>2</sub>, after he regains consciousness some days later, Sherem addresses the people he had deceived and declares the faith in Christ he has gained through a first-hand experience of God's power. He now declares that the scriptures, rather than denying the possibility of Christ, in fact testify of him." Larsen, "Big Little Book of Omni," 245.
  - 37 Kevin Christensen, "The Deuteronomist De-Christianizing of the Old Testament," *FARMS Review* 16, no. 2 (2004): 87, <https://scholarsarchive.byu.edu/msr/vol16/iss2/5/>.
  - 38 Thompson, "Who Was Sherem?," 3.
  - 39 The term *Deuteronomist* can be used to refer to a school of writers that advanced religious and temple reforms that began in the



late seventh century BCE. Margaret Barker explains that these “reforming Deuteronomists with their emphasis on history and law have evoked a sympathetic response in many modern scholars who have found there a religion after their own heart. Thus we have inherited a double distortion; the reformers edited much of what we now read in the Hebrew Bible, and modern interpreters with a similar cast of mind have told us what the whole of that Hebrew Bible was saying.” Margaret Barker, *The Great Angel: A Study of Israel’s Second God* (Louisville, KY: Westminster/John Knox Press, 1992), 28. With his emphasis on Mosaic history and law, Sherem can also fit into this camp of the Deuteronomists. Barker added: “King Josiah changed the religion of Israel in 623 BC. . . . An old law book had been discovered in the temple, and this had prompted the king to bring the religion of his kingdom into line with the requirements of that book (2 Kings 22:8–13; 2 Chronicles 34:14–20). There could be only one temple, it stated, and so all other places of sacrificial worship had to be destroyed (Deuteronomy 12:1–5). The law book is easily recognizable as Deuteronomy, and so King Josiah’s purge is usually known as the Deuteronomic reform of the temple.” Margaret Barker, “What Did King Josiah Reform?” in *Glimpses of Lehi’s Jerusalem*, ed. John W. Welch, David Rolph Seely, and Jo Ann H. Seely (Provo, UT: FARMS, 2004), 523, <https://scholarsarchive.byu.edu/mi/39/>.

- 40 A significant difference exists between the signs that Moses showed to the elders of Israel and the sign that Sherem demanded. While God prepared and instructed Moses to perform signs for the elders, Sherem demanded his own sign from God, which Jacob deemed as an offense toward God. This difference may be because Moses was coming among the Israelites as a true outsider. On the other hand, Jacob had been among the Nephites from the beginning and was already their recognized spiritual leader.
- 41 The verb כרת (*carat*) principally means to cut off or cut down. However, in the Hiphil form, as in Ezekiel 14:8, the verb means to exterminate. *HALOT*, 4441.
- 42 Donald W. Parry includes this chiasm in his book *Poetic Parallelisms in the Book of Mormon: The Complete Text Reformatted* (Provo, UT: The Neal A. Maxwell Institute for Religious Scholarship, 2007), 147–48, <https://scholarsarchive.byu.edu/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=1060&context=mi>.

- 43 It is possible that additional parallel structures exist in Jacob 7.
- 44 *Minutes of the Annual Conferences of the Methodist Episcopal Church, South* (Nashville, TN: Publishing House of the Methodist Episcopal Church, South, 1891), 68.
- 45 John Riles, *An Historical View of the Principal Sects, which have appeared in the Christian Church, from its First Rise to the Present Day* (Burslem, UK: John Tregortha, 1809), 204.
- 46 Alexander Haldane, *Memoirs of the Lives of Robert Haldane of Airthrey, and of his Brother, James Alexander Haldane* (New York: Robert Carter & Brothers, 1854), 368.
- 47 *Biographical Sketches of the Leading Men of Chicago* (Chicago: Wilson & St. Clair, 1868), 375.
- 48 Frank G. Browne, “Paul’s Ministry in Rome,” *Western Christian Advocate* 64, no. 44 (November 3, 1897): 1389.
- 49 E. Henderson, *The Book of the Twelve Minor Prophets, Translated from the Original Hebrew. With a Commentary, Critical, Philological, and Exegetical* (Boston: W. H. Halliday and Company, 1868), 17–18.
- 50 F. N. Peloubet, M. A. Peloubet, *Select Notes on the International Sabbath School Lessons for 1877. Explanatory, Illustrative, and Practical* (Boston: Henry Hoyt, 1877), 153.
- 51 Martin L. D’Ooge, ed., *Sophocles’ Antigone Edited on the Basis of Wolff’s Edition* (Boston: Ginn & Company, 1890), 135.
- 52 *Congressional Globe*, 34<sup>th</sup> Congress, 1<sup>st</sup> Session 133 (1856), 2119.
- 53 Rufus W. Miller, “Special Work for Young Men,” *Official Report of the Eleventh International Christian Endeavor Convention* (Boston: United Society of Christian Endeavor, 1892), 63.

# **“BEING OF THAT LINEAGE”: GENERATIONAL CURSES AND INHERITANCE IN THE BOOK OF ABRAHAM**

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**John S. Thompson**

**Abstract:** *The seeming appearance of a lineal or generational curse in the Book of Abraham has been used erroneously to marginalize people and justify racist ideas in Latter-day Saint history. To avoid any further misinterpretation of scripture in ways that are hurtful to others, the following attempts to elucidate the meaning of lineal curses within the Book of Abraham’s claimed ancient provenance. “Cursed” often reflected a simple legalistic concept, applicable to any person regardless of race, that meant one was currently in a state of disinheritance. An individual might be in a state of disinheritance if they violated any requirement necessary to receive their inheritance, and any descendant who remained an heir of a person who no longer had an inheritance to give was also considered disinherited or “cursed,” even though they may have personally done nothing wrong. This ancient understanding of cursing as disinheritance provides better context and clarity to many of Joseph Smith’s revelations and translations, including the Book of Abraham. Arguably, the scriptures and revelations of the Latter-day Saint tradition, including the Bible, indicate that the eternal blessings of a kingdom (land) and priestly kingship/queenship (priesthood) originate from God but must be inherited through an unbroken ancestral chain forged via covenant. Indeed, the express purpose of sealing children to parents in modern Latter-day Saint temples is to make them “heirs.” Consequently, moving towards a better understanding of the roles inheritance and disinheritance play in receiving the divine blessings of the covenant might be beneficial generally and help readers avoid racist interpretations of the Book of Abraham and other scripture. This is especially the case when it is understood that being disinherited, in a gospel context, does not need to be a permanent status when one relies on the grace of the Holy Messiah and*

*submits to those divine laws and covenant rites whereby one can literally inherit the promised blessings.*

The Book of Abraham, which Joseph Smith started publishing in 1842 as a divinely revealed translation of a text “purporting to be the writings of Abraham ... upon papyri,” gives a first-person account of two major events from the patriarch’s life: 1) his initial calling by God at an altar where he nearly experienced capital punishment at the hands of a “priest of Elkenah,” who “was also the priest of Pharaoh” (see Abraham 1:1–31) and 2) his later covenant with God that included divine temple-like instruction concerning pre-mortal spirits (whose organization and relationships are compared to various heavenly bodies) as well as the creation of the earth and mankind (see Abraham 2:1–5:21).<sup>1</sup> Passages within the first event appear to suggest that some kind of generational curse prohibited the king of Egypt from having the right to priesthood. The reader is told that from the biblical Ham “sprang that race which preserved the curse in the land” and that Pharaoh, as a descendant of Ham, was “of that lineage by which he could not have the right of Priesthood,” though the pharaohs generally would “fain claim it from Noah, through Ham” (Abraham 1:21, 24, 27).<sup>2</sup>

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1. For the original publication of the Book of Abraham see “Book of Abraham and Facsimiles, 1 March–16 May 1842,” 704–706, 719–22, *The Joseph Smith Papers*, <https://www.josephsmithpapers.org/paper-summary/book-of-abraham-and-facsimiles-1-march-16-may-1842/1>. Citations of the Book of Abraham used throughout this study are from the current (2013) edition. Pertinent differences in the original publication and earliest manuscripts will be noted. In addition to the original published header quoted above, several contemporary sources demonstrate that Joseph Smith and his associates believed the Book of Abraham translation came from “writings” on the papyri. Other sources are noted in John Gee, *An Introduction to the Book of Abraham* (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 2017), 83–86. Consequently, efforts to promote a narrative that Joseph Smith only relied on the pictures and/or the mere possession of ancient papyri to imagine a Book of Abraham that had no corollary, either real or assumed, with a text on the papyri is glossing what Joseph Smith and his contemporaries claimed. An early published report of Joseph Smith’s acquisition of the papyri appears in Oliver Cowdery, “Egyptian Mummies — Ancient Records,” *Latter Day Saints’ Messenger and Advocate* 2 (Dec. 1835): 223–27.

2. The meaning of the term “race” in Joseph Smith’s day included: “The lineage of a family, or continued series of descendants from a parent who is called the stock. A *race* is the series of descendants indefinitely. Thus all mankind are called the *race* of Adam; the Israelites are of the *race* of Abraham and Jacob. Thus we speak of a *race* of kings, the *race* of Clovis or Charlemagne; a *race* of nobles, etc.” Noah

Given traditional assumptions in the Western world that all black Africans were descendants of Noah's son Ham and perhaps even Cain, both of whose stories contain curses, the Book of Abraham's denying priesthood to the Egyptian pharaohs on account of their descendancy from Ham prompted some to use this text as a justification for The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints' ban denying priesthood and temple rituals to black people of African descent prior to June 1978. Beginning in the late 1960s and early 1970s, however, Armand Mauss and Lester Bush argued that many of the explanations for the modern ban based in the Book of Abraham and other scripture were assertions that do not actually appear in or were over-reaching the texts.<sup>3</sup> Their work prompted a flurry of subsequent scholarship revisiting the historical sources in an attempt to determine the ban's modern origins and to scrutinize the many explanations for it.<sup>4</sup> In more recent years,

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Webster, *American Dictionary of the English Language* (New York: S. Converse, 1828), s.v. "race," emphasis in original.

3. See Armand L. Mauss, "Mormonism and the Negro: Faith, Folklore, and Civil Rights," in *Neither White nor Black: Mormon Scholars Confront the Race Issue in a Universal Church*, ed. Lester E. Bush, Jr. and Armand L. Mauss (Salt Lake City: Signature Books, 1984), 9–30; Lester E. Bush, Jr. "Mormonism's Negro Doctrine: An Historical Overview," in *Neither White nor Black: Mormon Scholars Confront the Race Issue in a Universal Church*, ed. Lester E. Bush, Jr. and Armand L. Mauss (Salt Lake City: Signature Books, 1984), 53–129.

4. See, for example, Ronald K. Esplin, "Brigham Young and Priesthood Denial to the Blacks: An Alternate View," *BYU Studies Quarterly* 19, no. 3 (1979): 394–402; Newell G. Bringhurst, *Saints, Slaves, and Blacks: The Changing Place of Black People Within Mormonism* (Westport, CT: Greenwood Press, 1981); Lester E. Bush, Jr., "Whence the Negro Doctrine? A Review of Ten Years of Answers," in *Neither White nor Black: Mormon Scholars Confront the Race Issue in a Universal Church* (Salt Lake City: Signature Books, 1984); Arnold H. Green, "Gathering and Election: Israelite Descent and Universalism in Mormon Discourse," *Journal of Mormon History* 25, no. 1 (Spring 1999): 195–228; Armand L. Mauss, *All Abraham's Children: Changing Mormon Conceptions of Race and Lineage* (Champaign, IL: University of Illinois Press, 2003); Newell G. Bringhurst and Darron T. Smith, *Black and Mormon* (Champaign, IL: University of Illinois Press, 2004), 13–18, 20, 23, 28–29; Claudia Bushman, *Contemporary Mormonism: Latter-day Saints in Modern America* (Westport, CT: Praeger Publishers, 2006); Russell W. Stevenson, *For the Cause of Righteousness: A Global History of Blacks and Mormonism, 1830–2013* (Salt Lake City: Greg Kofford Books, 2014); W. Paul Reeve, *Religion of a Different Color: Race and the Mormon Struggle for Whiteness* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2015), 133, 138, 147, 200–201, 205–206; Max Perry Mueller, "Black, White, and Red: Race and the Making of the Mormon People, 1830–1880" (doctoral dissertation, Harvard University, 2015); Matthew L. Harris and Newell G. Bringhurst, *The Mormon Church and Blacks: A Documentary History* (Champaign, IL: University of

Church leaders published an official statement disavowing the many reasons given thus far for the modern ban's existence, including those reasons based on the Book of Abraham. The statement acknowledges that many of these past explanations were influenced by racist ideologies of their day.<sup>5</sup>

Due to racist interpretations of the Book of Abraham, some have assumed that:

1. Generational curses denying priesthood in the Book of Abraham must be a relic of Joseph Smith's modern American-influenced racism.<sup>6</sup> This assumption, along with other controversies surrounding the Book of Abraham, is fueling a movement within the Latter-day Saint community to increasingly marginalize the Book of Abraham, calling into question its place in Latter-day Saint canon and claiming

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Illinois Press, 2015), 12–14, 31, 35, 44, 48–50, 58, 73–74, 90–91, 99, 104, 113, 116–17. John Gee indicates that racist interpretations of Book of Abraham passages do not appear in Church publications until 1895 (Gee, *Introduction to Book of Abraham*, 163–73). However, racist interpretations of the Book of Abraham did exist in other sources prior to that time. For example, Parley P. Pratt commented in April 1847 that the Black schismatic leader William McCary “had ‘got the blood of Ham in him which lineage was cursed as regards [to] the priesthood’” (“Historian’s Office General Church Minutes, 1839–1877;” 1846–1850; Meetings in Winter Quarters while Brigham Young was West, 1847 April–July; Sunday Meeting Minutes, Winter Quarters; Church History Library; The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints; <https://catalog.churchofjesuschrist.org/assets/32fcc85a-a3db-4751-8e4a-df46a5bd68a3/0/0>). While not explicitly mentioning where his idea came from, Pratt’s statement likely draws upon the unique Book of Abraham teaching that Ham’s descendants were cursed with respect to priesthood.

5. “Race and the Priesthood,” *Gospel Topics Essays*, The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints (2013), <https://www.churchofjesuschrist.org/study/manual/gospel-topics-essays/race-and-the-priesthood>. Matthew Harris and Newell Bringhurst state, “The church now teaches that the ban was rooted in racism, not divine revelation.” Harris and Bringhurst, *The Mormon Church and Blacks*, 119. To the contrary, the Church’s essay cited above only states that the many reasons or justifications given for the ban were rooted in racism, but it has not made a statement on the origin of the ban itself: “Over time, Church leaders and members advanced many theories to explain the priesthood and temple restrictions. None of these explanations is accepted today as the official doctrine of the Church.”

6. For such a view see Ryan Stuart Bingham, “Curses and Marks: Racial Dispensations and Dispensations of Race in Joseph Smith’s Bible Revision and the Book of Abraham,” *Journal of Mormon History* 41, no. 3 (July 2015): 22–57.

it is essentially a nineteenth-century pseudepigrapha of Joseph Smith and his scribes.<sup>7</sup>

2. Generational curses appearing in the Book of Abraham and other scripture, being unjust, are not actually generational curses. This approach requires allegorizing or glossing the curse-related material to explain away or deny its existence in the text. For example, in his otherwise astute critique of racially motivated interpretations of scripture, Armand Mauss claimed that there are no scriptural grounds for assuming that curses upon single individuals, such as Cain or Ham, can be applied to their descendants:

If we take either the Old Testament or the Pearl of Great Price account of Cain's punishment, we are told very little about the "curse" and nothing at all about the "mark" except the cryptic comment that it was to protect the bearer from being killed. Nor are we given any grounds to suppose that either the "curse" or the "mark" should apply to any of Cain's descendants. ... There is absolutely no scriptural basis for assuming

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7. For example, Terryl Givens and Brian Hauglid attempt to marginalize the Book of Abraham by suggesting that Joseph Smith never claimed the Book of Abraham was part of his divine calling and likely did not intend it to be canonized either (Terryl Givens and Brian M. Hauglid, *The Pearl of Greatest Price: Mormonism's Most Controversial Scripture* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2019), 201). A rebuttal of this point is in John S. Thompson, "'We May Not Understand Our Words': The Book of Abraham and the Concept of Translation in The Pearl of Greatest Price," *Interpreter: A Journal of Latter-day Saint Faith and Scholarship* 41 (2020): 41–42, <https://journal.interpreterfoundation.org/we-may-not-understand-our-words-the-book-of-abraham-and-the-concept-of-translation-in-the-pearl-of-greatest-price/>. Most recently see Dan Vogel, *Book of Abraham Apologetics: A Review and Critique* (Salt Lake City: Signature Books, 2021), 95–118. See response to Vogel by Jeff Lindsay, "Book of Abraham Polemics: Dan Vogel's Broad Critique of the Defense of the Book of Abraham," *Interpreter: A Journal of Latter-day Saint Faith and Scholarship* 47 (2021): 107–50, <https://journal.interpreterfoundation.org/book-of-abraham-polemics-dan-vogels-broad-critique-of-the-defense-of-the-book-of-abraham/>. See also response to Vogel by Stephen O. Smoot, "Framing the Book of Abraham: Presumptions and Paradigms," *Interpreter: A Journal of Latter-day Saint Faith and Scholarship* 47 (2021): 263–338 (especially, 302–304), <https://journal.interpreterfoundation.org/framing-the-book-of-abraham-presumptions-and-paradigms/>.



that anything Ham himself did was involved in the  
denial of the priesthood to his descendants. ...<sup>8</sup>

Both of these conclusions, though sometimes well-meaning, are erroneous, having interpreted the text through a modern lens. When the Book of Abraham is viewed within its claimed ancient provenance, the existence and mechanics of its generational curse is understood to be neither racist nor unjust, nor is it any reflection of the worthiness of a descendant affected by it. Rather, its “curse” can be understood simply as an expression of a disinheritance as well as the natural consequences of a disinheritance among one’s descendants.

A quick illustration to provide a framework: if a person had a family heirloom, such as a precious jewel, taken away due to an action that violated the terms by which one was to inherit such an heirloom, their loss could be referred to as a “curse” in scriptural language. Since this person no longer has the family heirloom to pass on to their own descendants, then any person who remains an heir of the one who lost the jewel are also considered “cursed” or disinherited, because they simply cannot receive what their forefather no longer has to give them.

As will be shown, ancient scriptures portray God using family inheritances, forged within covenant bonds, as the distribution mechanism of the divine blessings, particularly the blessings of a kingdom (land) and royal powers (priesthood). This arguably creates an environment wherein children and fathers/mothers must look to one another in order to obtain the heavenly blessings together, strengthening family relationships. However, it also appears to create an environment in which children can be naturally cut off, through no fault of their own, from any divine blessing that an ancestor lost and no longer has to pass down to their posterity.

To remedy this natural consequence, Joseph Smith’s and subsequent prophetic revelations clarified the means by which the progeny of one who was cut off can still inherit the divine blessings, if they so desire. A descendant can either aid their disinherited ancestors through repentance and restore them to the family chain, allowing the inheritance to flow once again, or, if an ancestor persists in their choice to abide not the covenant laws by which the blessings come, a descendant can use the law of adoption to forge inheritance links with those who do abide in the covenant. In this way, any believing child, regardless of race, can overcome being legally cut off or cursed (i.e., disinherited) from the

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8. Mauss, “Mormonism and the Negro,” 14–15.



divine blessings. Conversely, anyone who chooses to follow the tradition or remain the heir of someone who has rejected the true blessings are considered "cursed" or cutoff — i.e., in a state of disinheritance — from the divine blessings, with their fathers, until such a time as they are brought to know the incorrectness of their fathers' tradition and (re)turn to the covenant family wherein the blessings flow.

It is within these broader legal concepts that the Book of Abraham should be understood if one is to avoid racist misinterpretations or avoid wresting scripture in reaction to racism. Viewed in its proper historical context, the Book of Abraham's generational curse regarding priesthood, an inherited blessing, is consistent with biblical and other scriptural teachings and with the greater theological system that Joseph Smith restored. The implications of these legal concepts on any modern priesthood ban will be addressed in the conclusion.

### **What Does the Book of Abraham Actually Say?**

Details within the text that Joseph Smith published indicate that Abraham's kin had turned from the Lord and his commandments to other traditions, worshipping "heathen" gods (Abraham 1:5). Abraham's own father had converted to the religious authority of the pharaohs, believing they had legitimate claim to the "right of priesthood." Abraham, however, states that the pharaoh was "of that lineage by which he could not have the right of priesthood" and indicates that he has records to prove such (Abraham 1:27–28).

Presumably drawing upon these records, Abraham gives details concerning the pharaoh's lineage, explaining that "this king of Egypt was a descendant from the loins of Ham, and was a partaker of the blood of the Canaanites by birth. From this descent sprang all the Egyptians, and thus the blood of the Canaanites was preserved in the land" (Abraham 1:21–22). From a purely historical point of view, a claim of Canaanite descendancy for a pharaoh during the Abrahamic era is possible as some pharaohs in that period of Egyptian history appear to have originated from Canaanite territories and gained control in some of the northern Delta regions of Egypt, comprising the Fourteenth Dynasty.<sup>9</sup>

Abraham's claim that "from this descent sprang all the Egyptians" is problematic in light of biblical understanding that most of the Egyptians

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9. See Kim S. B. Ryholt, *The Political Situation in Egypt During the Second Intermediate Period, c. 1800–1550 B.C.* (Copenhagen: University of Copenhagen, Museum Tusculanum Press, 1997), 94–117, 251–55, 295–99.

were descendants of another son of Ham with the eponymous name Mitsraim/Mizraim (the Hebrew word for “Egypt”) and not from his son Canaan (see Genesis 10:6). Either 1) Abraham incorrectly assumed all Egyptians were Canaanite like the pharaoh of his day (for this view, see John Gee’s discussion),<sup>10</sup> however, Abraham claims he is appealing to written records, not just assumptions, as proof of lineage, making this view problematic; 2) Abraham’s statement is accurate and the Egyptian people generally were Canaanite in ways that history has not understood; or 3) the antecedent of “from this descent sprang all the Egyptians” is “the loins of Ham,” not the “blood of the Canaanites.” The original published text has an additional comma after Canaanites and reads “this King of Egypt was a descendant from the loins of Ham, and was a partaker of the blood of the Canaanites, by birth. From this descent sprang all the Egyptians, ....” If the phrase “and was a partaker of the blood of the Canaanites” was meant to be understood as a parenthetical set apart by the commas, then the rest can be read as saying “this king of Egypt was a descendant from the loins of Ham ... by birth. From this [Ham’s] descent sprang all the Egyptians. ...”<sup>11</sup> The phrases in question could also be viewed in parallel:

- [A] this king of Egypt was a descendant from the loins of Ham,
- [B] and was a partaker of the blood of the Canaanites by birth.
- [A'] From this [Ham’s] descent sprang all the Egyptians,
- [B'] and thus [through this king’s lineage] the blood of the Canaanites was preserved in the land.

The text goes on to support a reading that “all the Egyptians” sprang from Ham, not Canaan, as it reveals their origin through Ham’s daughter (with no mention of her husband), not through his son Canaan.

Abraham then goes further back and reveals that the very founders of Egypt were also descendants of Ham. The first governmental leader of Egypt was one of the sons of Egyptus, who was “the daughter of Ham, and the daughter of Egyptus” (Abraham 1:23). This daughter had discovered the land of Egypt and settled her family there.<sup>12</sup> Her son, having the eponymous name-title Pharaoh, is described as a “righteous

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10. See Gee, *Introduction to Book of Abraham*, 101–102.

11. “Book of Abraham and Facsimiles,” 705.

12. On the Egyptian tradition concerning the founding of ancient Egypt by a woman, see Hugh W. Nibley, “A Pioneer Woman,” in *Abraham in Egypt* (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 1981).

man" who sought "earnestly to imitate that order established by the fathers in the first generations [i.e., the patriarchs from Adam to Noah]" (Abraham 1:26). In spite of his righteousness, however, Noah "cursed him as pertaining to the Priesthood" (Abraham 1:26).

After connecting both the Canaanite pharaoh of his own day as well as the original Pharaoh of the founding family to Ham, Abraham states "and thus, from Ham, sprang that race which preserved the curse in the land" (Abraham 1:24) and concludes that Pharaoh was "of that lineage by which he could not have the right of Priesthood, notwithstanding the Pharaohs would fain claim it from Noah, through Ham, therefore my father was led away by their idolatry" (Abraham 1:27).<sup>13</sup>

In contrast to the lineage of the pharaohs not having the right of priesthood, Abraham declares at the beginning and end of this particular narrative-event, framing the whole, that he is the one, according to the records, that has the right of priesthood through his lineage:

I became a *rightful heir*, a High Priest, *holding the right belonging to the fathers*. It was conferred upon me from the fathers; *it came down from the fathers, ... through the fathers unto me*. I sought for mine appointment unto the Priesthood according to the appointment of God unto the fathers concerning the seed. ... 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, ... the *records of the fathers*, even the patriarchs, *concerning the right of Priesthood*, the Lord my God preserved in mine own hands ... (Abraham 1:2–4, 28, 31)

To summarize: Abraham appears to be claiming that he has a right to priesthood because of his lineage, "it came down from the fathers ... through the fathers unto me," but the pharaoh does not because of his lineage. What does it mean for a right of priesthood to come "through" the fathers? Why would someone not have the right of priesthood simply because of their lineage, especially if they are righteous?

There are several gaps in the details of this text as provided. It assumes the reader already knows what "the curse" is and how curses operate. It does not give particulars on why this curse exists or how it is being "preserved ... in the land." It also does not explain why Noah

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13. Since the Egyptian practices appear to have "imitated" those of the original patriarchs according to Abraham, then "idolatry" here may be more a function of lacking authority rather than a commentary on a specific practice.

cursed Pharaoh pertaining to the priesthood though he was a “righteous man.”

The Book of Abraham also assumes the reader knows who the Canaanites are. Readers may view them either as the descendants of Ham’s son Canaan who are discussed frequently in the Bible (see Genesis 9:22, 10:6–19, and 12:5–6) or, less plausibly, as the antediluvian “people of Canaan” mentioned in Joseph Smith’s restored Enoch-narrative within the Book of Moses (see Moses 7:6–12, noting that the term “Canaanites” is not used there).<sup>14</sup> Additionally, the Book of Abraham gives no indication from where Ham’s wife Egyptus comes or what relationship, if any, she has to the curse.

Due to these and other holes in the text, speculative interpretations emerged to fill in the gaps. For example, some concluded that the pharaohs could not have priesthood because they were descendants of Cain through Egyptus.<sup>15</sup> This linkage can only be made through a series of steps that include assumptions and racist interpretations:

1. Stated: The Book of Abraham mentions that the pharaoh of Abraham’s day was a “partaker of the blood of the Canaanites.”
2. Stated: The Book of Moses mentions an ante-diluvian group of people in Enoch’s day called “the people of Canaan.” This text also mentions that a “blackness came upon” all these “children of Canaan” in the context of their conquering a land that became cursed with much heat and barren (Moses 7:8). They were “despised among all people” (v. 8), became isolated as no one else would dwell in the “unfruitful and barren” land with them (v. 7), and for some undeclared reason Enoch did not preach among them (v. 12).

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14. A footnote in current editions of the Latter-day Saint scripture cross-reference readers to the Canaanites of the Enoch-narrative (see Abraham 1:21, fn. c) which is problematic as discussed below.

15. B. H. Roberts is one of the earliest on record to explicitly suggest that Egyptus may be one of Cain’s descendants. He proposed the idea in a series of questions: “Was the wife of Ham, as her name signifies, of a race which those who held the Priesthood were forbidden to intermarry? Was she a descendant of Cain, who was cursed for murdering his brother? And was it by Ham marrying her, and she being saved from the flood in the ark, that “the race which preserved the curse in the land” was perpetuated? If so, then ...” B. H. Roberts, “To the Youth of Israel,” *The Contributor* 6 (1885): 296–97. Subsequent publications repeated this idea. For some examples, see Lester E. Bush Jr., “Mormonism’s Negro Doctrine,” 80–81.

3. Stated: The Book of Moses mentions later that the seed of Cain were "black" and isolated from or "had not place among" all other people (see Moses 7:22).
4. Assumption: Due to similar descriptions ("blackness"/"black" and isolated from other people) the antediluvian Canaanites of the Book of Moses must be Cain's descendants.
5. Assumption: The antediluvian Canaanites of the Book of Moses are the Canaanites mentioned in the Book of Abraham.
6. Assumption: The pharaoh of Abraham's day in the Book of Abraham is a descendant of these antediluvian Canaanites.
7. Assumption: Since Noah and Ham are Seth's descendants, the pharaoh in the Book of Abraham must have been a descendant of the antediluvian Canaanites, and thus Cain, through Ham's wife Egyptus.
8. Assumption: The Book of Abraham mentions that Ham's wife Egyptus was of a "forbidden" race that Ham should not have married.

By spanning many gaps with assumptions, some arrive at the conclusion that the Egyptian pharaohs could not have the priesthood because they were descendants of Ham's wife Egyptus, a forbidden wife because she was a black descendant of the cursed Cain through the black, despised, and isolated antediluvian Canaanites of Enoch's day. Since both Cain's descendants and the antediluvian Canaanites are described as "black" or having "blackness," the combination of all the factors above were combined to become one justification for withholding priesthood from black Africans. However, no explicit or direct connections actually appear in the texts between the Canaanites in the Book of Abraham and the much earlier "people of Canaan" in the Book of Moses, between any Canaanites and Cain, between Egyptus and any ancestor, or between Egyptus and the word "forbidden." Further, whether the term "black" or "blackness" in these verses and elsewhere are always a reference to skin color in ancient texts is arguable.<sup>16</sup>

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16. For recent interpretations of "black" or "blackness" of the Enochic Canaanites see Adam Stokes, "The People of Canaan: A New Reading of Moses 7," *Interpreter: A Journal of Latter-day Saint Faith and Scholarship* 47 (2021): 159–80, <https://journal.interpreterfoundation.org/the-people-of-canaan-a-new-reading-of-moses-7/>. On the use of these terms in other contexts see Ethan Sproat, "Skins as Garments in the Book of Mormon: A Textual Exegesis," *Journal of Book of Mormon Studies* 24 (2015): 138–65; Gerrit M. Steenblik, "Demythologizing the Lamanites' 'Skin of Blackness,'"

Filling the gaps in the Book of Abraham with assumptions can certainly distort the text and lead to hurtful racist interpretations. However, when challenging these flawed assertions, it is important not to swing the pendulum too far the other way and assert or assume incorrectly that lineal curses are not scriptural or must be reflections of modern racism. There is biblical and broader ancient Near Eastern cultural precedent for concluding that one's personal actions could indeed cause a loss of priesthood and other divine blessings among one's descendants if nothing is done to overcome the state of things in the family. This is due to the concept of inheritance that appears to be central to the operations of the covenant that God makes with Abraham and others. Inheriting divine blessings from God through one's lineage, not *directly* from deity, is an ancient ideology and practice that Joseph Smith appears to have restored and which provides a better context for understanding the Book of Abraham.

### **Inheriting Blessings, Cursing as Disinheritance**

Notwithstanding the scriptural tradition of portraying all blessings outlined in covenants coming from God, a closer reading suggests that they were not actually given directly from God to individuals in an *ad hoc* manner, like some kind of royal grant. Rather, they are referenced consistently as an "inheritance" and appear to be transmitted through familial lines and governed by inheritance laws.

### **Inheriting Land in the Bible**

For example, the Hebrew Bible portrays the earth as a divine creation and possession, to be sure,<sup>17</sup> but it also portrays God giving the earth, or portions of it, to mortals as an inheritance that is passed from generation

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*Interpreter: A Journal of Latter-day Saint Faith and Scholarship* 49 (2021): 167–258, <https://journal.interpreterfoundation.org/demythicalizing-the-lamanites-skin-of-blackness/>; David M. Belnap, "The Inclusive, Anti-Discrimination Message of the Book of Mormon," *Interpreter: A Journal of Latter-day Saint Faith and Scholarship* 42 (2021): 195–370, <https://journal.interpreterfoundation.org/the-inclusive-anti-discrimination-message-of-the-book-of-mormon/>; Todd Uriona, "Life and Death, Blessing and Cursing: Reconceptualizing the Lamanite 'Skin of Blackness,'" *Interpreter: A Journal of Latter-day Saint Faith and Scholarship* (forthcoming); and Clifford Jones, "Understanding the Lamanite Mark and Curse," *Interpreter: A Journal of Latter-day Saint Faith and Scholarship* (forthcoming).

17. E.g., see Genesis 1:1, 2:4; Exodus 9:29, 19:5; Deuteronomy 10:14; Psalms 24:1, 50:10–11, 89:11; and Isaiah 14:2, where "the land of the Lord" is literally "Yahweh's land."

to generation. This suggests that not only must there be a relationship with God but some sort of familial connection must also exist in order to receive the divine blessings of a kingdom or land:

And [God] said unto [Abraham], I am the Lord that brought thee out of Ur of the Chaldees, to give thee this land to inherit it. And he said, Lord God, whereby shall I know that I shall inherit it? ... [In answer to this question, God instructs Abraham to participate in a ritual with him and shows him a vision followed by this summary:] In the same day the Lord made a covenant with Abram, saying, Unto thy seed have I given this land. (Genesis 15:7–18)

The above text indicates that entering a covenant with God was the means whereby Abraham would know that he personally would inherit land ("how shall I know that I shall inherit it?"). Interestingly, in the very moment he enters into this covenant, assuring his own personal position as an heir to the blessing, the Lord says: "unto thy seed have I given this land." The sudden and unexpected shift from Abraham obtaining land to his seed obtaining land makes sense in the cultural/legal context of "inheritance," the very topic governing this moment as indicated in Abraham's question. In other words, the reason that Abraham inheriting land is tantamount to his children receiving land is that Abraham's children can now inherit the land their father himself has inherited (from whom precisely Abraham inherits the land is not explicitly stated in this moment).

Though God as the creator of the earth is party to the covenants that allow the land to be obtained, the biblical record assumes the children would "inherit" the land from their fathers:

And God Almighty bless thee [Jacob] ... And give thee the blessing of Abraham, to thee, and to thy seed with thee; that thou mayest inherit the land wherein thou art a stranger, which God gave unto Abraham. (Genesis 28:3–4)

Remember Abraham, Isaac, and Israel, thy servants, to whom thou [God] swarest by thine own self, and saidst unto them, I will multiply your seed as the stars of heaven, and all this land that I have spoken of will I give unto your seed, and they shall inherit *it* for ever. (Exodus 32:13)

And Moses called unto Joshua, and said ... thou must go with this people unto the land which the Lord hath sworn



unto their fathers to give them; and thou shalt cause them to inherit it. (Deuteronomy 31:7)

These passages explicitly state that the children are receiving their blessing (in this case land) as an inheritance from their fathers, to whom the land was previously given or promised.

Because each subsequent generation in the Hebrew Bible appears to enter into their own covenant with God, scholars have debated whether the blessings are truly inherited or just given directly by God to each person, similar to ancient royal grants.<sup>18</sup> Bernard Jackson argues that given the explicit hereditary wording in the texts, it is difficult to understand God's relationships with successive generations as royal grant or even "covenant renewal," rather,

Modern English lawyers might understand this in terms of the doctrine of 'privity of contract', under which 'third party' beneficiaries cannot enforce a benefit promised to them in a contract to which they are not parties. ... Hence, the need to reaffirm the covenant to successive generations of beneficiaries. Such 'confirmation' is hardly 'renewal' in a theological sense.<sup>19</sup>

As each succeeding generation enters a covenant with God in the examples above, they appeal to the former covenants God made with their fathers wherein He promised that their seed could possess the blessings as heirs. This shows that the successors recognized their dependence upon the previous generations possessing the divine blessing in order to truly "inherit" them, but this dependence existed in tandem with maintaining the family's covenant relationship to God via subsequent affirmations or repetitions of covenants. Such a legal setup created an environment in which the hearts of the children turned to their fathers as well as to God at the same time.

Although the lands were literally inherited in mortality, the statements above indicate that they understood that these inheritances of land were "for ever" or as an "everlasting possession" signifying that they understood that the physical land literally given to them in time (mortality) would be their abode, if faithful, throughout eternity. Indeed,

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18. On covenants as royal grant see Moshe Weinfeld, "The Covenant of Grant in the Old Testament and in the Ancient Near East," *Journal of the American Oriental Society* 90, no. 2 (April–June 1970): 184–203.

19. Bernard S. Jackson, *Studies in the Semiotics of Biblical Law* (Sheffield, UK: Sheffield Academic Press, 2000), 238.



scholars are increasingly arguing that the Hebrew Bible indicates, and Jews and Christians of classical antiquity believed, that "heaven" was simply a continuation of life on earth, not some other-worldly place or dimension.<sup>20</sup> In other words, receiving divinely appointed land in mortality was effectively a place for individuals and their heirs to inhabit during the future "heaven" on earth.

A purpose of covenants in the biblical and Near Eastern traditions was to create kinship relationships where one may not exist, allowing such things as inheritances to pass between parties that were formed by marriage or adoption.<sup>21</sup> Although actual examples of adoption are scanty in the Hebrew Bible, it is generally understood to exist. For example,

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20. See, for example, Jon D. Levenson, *Resurrection and the Restoration of Israel: The Ultimate Victory of the God of Life* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2008); N. T. Wright, *The Resurrection of the Son of God* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2003). Biblical evidence for a Jewish belief in a bodily resurrection comes mainly from the book of Daniel, which indicates that both the righteous and wicked will rise again: "And many of them that sleep in the dust of the earth shall awake, some to everlasting life, and some to shame and everlasting contempt" (Daniel 12:2). 2 Maccabees also preserves the belief that family relations will continue and that vicarious work for the dead was practiced in this life because of a belief that it would have benefit in the resurrection: "Do not fear this butcher [mother and sons are being put to death], but prove worthy of your brothers. Accept death, so that in God's mercy I may get you back again with your brothers" (2 Maccabees 7:23, 29). "He [Judah, upon learning of the slaying of some fellow soldiers] also took up a collection, man by man, to the amount of two thousand drachmas of silver, and sent it to Jerusalem to provide for a sin offering. In doing this he acted very well and honorably, taking account of the resurrection. For if he were not expecting that those who had fallen would rise again, it would have been superfluous and foolish to pray for the dead. But if he was looking to the splendid reward that is laid up for those who fall asleep in godliness, it was a holy and pious thought. Therefore he made atonement for the dead, that they might be delivered from their sin" (2 Maccabees 12:43–45).

21. Frank Cross outlined the work of others and highlighted that the fundamental meaning of the term *bērit* "covenant" was the incorporation of individuals or groups by agreement into a *family* structure where one did not exist naturally. Frank Cross, "Kinship and Covenant in Ancient Israel" in *From Epic to Canon: History and Literature in Ancient Israel* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1998), 3–21. For a more exhaustive study of this idea, see Scott W. Hahn, *Kinship by Covenant: A Canonical Approach to the Fulfillment of God's Saving Promises* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2009). Precedence for the idea of divine adoption in the Old Testament occurs in Exodus 4:22–23, wherein God calls the people of Israel his "firstborn" son: "Israel is my son, even my firstborn. So I said to you 'Let my son go that he may serve me.'" God also "adopts" David's son Solomon in 2 Samuel 7:12–15. God states that He will be Solomon's father and Solomon will

prior to the births of Ishmael and Isaac, Abraham indicated that his heir would need to be someone else in his household, suggesting an adoption (see Genesis 15:2–3).

The relationship of adoption to God's covenant with Israel becomes more emphasized in the New Testament.<sup>22</sup> Although Paul seems to assert that anyone can become "heirs" of God via "adoption" (see Galatians 4:4–7; Romans 8:15–17, 23, 9:4; and Ephesians 1:4–6), he also argues that this does not mean the literal seed of Abraham's body is no longer necessary. Indeed, he asserts that the Gentiles must still be grafted or adopted into Abraham's literal family in order to inherit the blessings from God that are flowing *through them*:

Hath God cast away his people [the Israelites, because he can adopt]? God forbid. . . . For if the casting away of them be the reconciling of the world, what shall the receiving of them be, but life from the dead? For if the firstfruit be holy, the lump is also holy: and if the root be holy, so are the branches. And if some of the branches be broken off, and thou [Gentiles], being a wild olive tree, wert grafted in among them, and with them partakest of the root and fatness of the olive tree; Boast not against the branches. But if thou boast, thou bearest not the root, but the root thee. (Romans 11:1, 15–18)

The implication here is that the olive tree of Abraham's literal seed is the foundation into which the families of the earth can be grafted or adopted, becoming heirs thereby and fulfilling God's repeated statement in a literal/legal way that through Abraham's seed all the nations of the earth would be blessed.

The first explicit mention of a covenant in the Bible is when God says he will "establish" his covenant with Noah in Genesis 6:18 and 9:9. Jacob Milgrom pointed out that *hēqîm*, "establish," is a Hiphil form of the verb and thus means "maintain" or "uphold." Such a rendering suggests that God's covenant with Noah is not new but being maintained from an

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be his son and God will establish his throne forever. He will discipline Solomon if needed and even renames him Jedidiah "loved of God" (2 Samuel 12:25).

22. See, for example, Bradley Trick, *Abrahamic Descent, Testamentary Adoption, and the Law in Galatians: Differentiating Abraham's Sons, Seed, and Children of Promise* (Leiden, NDL: Brill, 2016); Francis Lyall, "Roman Law in the Writing of Paul—Adoption," *Journal of Biblical Literature* 88, no. 4. (1969): 460–64; David Bartlett, "Adoption in the Bible," in *The Child in the Bible*, ed. Marcia J. Bunge (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2008): 377–85.

earlier era.<sup>23</sup> Katherine Dell demonstrates that the covenant passages in the story of Noah draw heavily upon terms and phrases from the creation story and that biblical texts often combine creation themes with covenants, leading her to wonder if the creation itself was a covenant act.<sup>24</sup> Latter-day Saints would certainly agree. In this view, God creates and gives the earth (i.e., a kingdom) via covenant to Adam and Eve, over which they have dominion (i.e., priestly kingship/queenship) as in Genesis 1:26–28. The ongoing narrative continues to show God ensuring the land of this earth is passed down through the generations as an inheritance. Indeed, the story of the creation of the earth “is not presented as an independent ‘doctrine’ but belongs in the context of an extended story that moves from the beginning toward the fulfillment of God’s purpose for all creatures and the whole creation.”<sup>25</sup> The genealogy from Adam to Abraham provides a continuity through which the divine blessing of land is flowing as an inheritance.

In biblical texts there were two complementary systems of inheritance that are still prevalent in modern societies: 1) the legal order of succession — i.e., the rules governing natural born heirs: early biblical practice seemed to favor sons over daughters, children over the deceased’s siblings, older over younger, and the eldest son as executor of the inheritance for the family; and 2) a written declaration of intent allowing for adopted heirs or other exceptions to the established legal order. The second overrules the first.<sup>26</sup> These practices were not just

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23. Jacob Milgrom, “Covenants: The Sinaitic and Patriarchal Covenants in the Holiness Code (Leviticus 17–27),” in *Sefer Moshe: The Moshe Weinfeld Jubilee Volume: Studies in the Bible and the Ancient Near East, Qumran, and Post-Biblical Judaism*, ed. Chaim Cohen, Avi Hurvitz, Shalom M. Paul (Winona Lake, IN: Eisenbrauns, 2004), 91–101. On covenants in the Ancient Near East generally, see Kenneth A. and Paul J. N. Lawrence, *Treaty, Law and Covenant in the Ancient Near East*, 3 vols. (Wiesbaden, DEU: Harrassowitz Verlag, 2012).

24. Katherine J. Dell, “Covenant and Creation in Relationship,” in *Covenant as Contexts: Essays in Honour of E. W. Nicholson*, ed. A. D. H. Mayes and R. B. Salters (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2003), 111–34.

25. Bernhard W. Anderson, *Contours of Old Testament Theology* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1999), 92.

26. On the stipulations and legal practices of inheritance portrayed in the Bible see, for example, Yosef Rivlin, “Inheritance,” in *The Oxford Encyclopedia of the Bible and Law*, ed. Brent A. Strawn (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2015); Calum Carmichael, “Inheritance in Biblical Sources,” *Law & Literature* 20, no. 2 (Summer 2008): 229–42; Richard H. Hiers, “Transfer of Property by Inheritance and Bequest in Biblical Law and Tradition,” *Journal of Law & Religion* 121 (1993): 121–55; Arthur Mason Brown, “The Concept of Inheritance in the Old Testament”

part of the culture of the day but existed within the theological and eschatological framework of biblical covenants and divine blessings.<sup>27</sup>

In the Hebrew Bible, more was required of an heir than just being a descendant or adoptee. Obedience and fealty to God were integral to the covenant's stipulations and thus one's right to inherit:

Ye shall therefore keep all my statutes, and all my judgments, and do them: that the land, whither I bring you to dwell therein, spue you not out [i.e., wickedness can prevent one from being an heir or legal possessor of the land]. And ye shall not walk in the manners of the nation, which I cast out before you: for they committed all these things [the wicked acts outlined in the previous verses], and therefore I abhorred them. But I have said unto you, Ye shall inherit their land, and I will give it unto you to possess it, a land that floweth with milk and honey: I am the Lord your God, which have separated you from other people. (Leviticus 20:22–24)

And Moses sware on that day, saying, Surely the land whereon thy feet have trodden shall be thine inheritance, and thy children's for ever, because thou hast wholly followed the Lord my God. (Joshua 14:9)

For evildoers shall be cut off: but those that wait upon the Lord, they shall inherit the earth. ... the meek shall inherit the earth; ... For such as be blessed of him [the Lord] shall inherit the earth; and they that be cursed of him shall be cut

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(PhD dissertation, Columbia University, 1965). Again, the adoption of children was certainly a legitimate practice in biblical culture whereby heirships were created where one did not exist naturally. See, for example, the story of Mephibosheth, who was included in the royal inheritance even though not naturally a part of Davidic family (2 Samuel 9:7–13). On the firstborn as executor see Eryl W. Davies, "The Inheritance of the Firstborn in Israel and the Ancient Near East," *Journal of Semitic Studies* 38 (1993): 175–91; L. R. Helyer, "The Prōtotokos Title in Hebrews," *Studia Biblica et Theologica* 6 (1977): 3–28. Paul appears to be drawing on Jewish, not Roman, inheritance ideology when describing Christ as the first-born who obtains the inheritance and shares it with his "brothers" (Hebrews 1:6; 2:11).

27. On the theological framework concerning land inheritances see, for example, Jong Keun Lee, "The Theological Concept of Divine Ownership of the Land in the Hebrew Bible," (ThD dissertation, Boston University School of Theology, 1993); and Christopher J. H. Wright, *God's People in God's Land: Family, Land, and Property in the Old Testament* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1990).

off. . . . The righteous shall inherit the land, and dwell therein for ever. (Psalm 37:9, 11, 22, 29)

A good man leaveth an inheritance to his children's children: and the wealth of the sinner is laid up for the just [i.e., the sinner's inheritance will be given to the righteous]. (Proverbs 13:22)

A wise servant shall have rule over a son that causeth shame, and shall have part of the inheritance among the brethren [i.e., a good servant (not a naturally born heir) will be adopted, receive the inheritance, and rule in the household, whereas a wicked son will be cut off from the inheritance and become the ruled (servant)]. (Proverbs 17:2)

Note that in the Psalm passage above, unrighteousness brings the curse of being "cut off" from the inherited land, which they were to dwell in "for ever." Being cursed is often associated with the word *kāraṭ* "cut off" from one's family and inheritance. *Kāraṭ* is often used in biblical passages relative to covenant making, wherein a sacrifice is "cut" in two pieces, and the parties of the covenant walk between the pieces to symbolize a cutting penalty of death or separation for those who break their agreement.<sup>28</sup> The implication is that those who break their covenant through unrighteousness are exiled from the family — i.e., cut off from their inheritance.<sup>29</sup>

When Cain acts wickedly and kills his brother Abel, God's "curse" (Heb. *ʾārūr*) upon Cain is a term typically used as an execration against one's person or property: "And now art thou [Cain] cursed from the earth, which hath opened her mouth to receive thy brother's blood from thy hand" (Genesis 4:11). Cain's curse, plainly and simply stated, is "from the earth." God is severing him from the land that he was to inherit from Adam and Eve. Being landless (i.e., kingdom-less), he no longer gets to be a beneficiary of the land's yield. He is to be a fugitive and

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28. See Genesis 15:9–10, 18. "Made" in v. 18 is translated from *karath* "to cut." Cf. Jeremiah 34:18–19.

29. See also examples in Genesis 17:14; Exodus 12:19, 31:14; Leviticus 7:21, 25, 27, 17:4, 9, 10, 18:29, 19:8, 22:3; and Numbers 15:30. "In the majority of offenses, 'cutting off' means a 'cutting out' which leads to 'banishment' or 'excommunication' from the cultic community and the covenant people." *Theological Dictionary of the Old Testament*, ed. G. Johannes Botterweck, Helmer Ringgren, and Heinz-Josef Fabry, vol. 7 (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1974), 348. See also Donald John Wold, "The Meaning of the Biblical Penalty *Kareth*" (PhD dissertation, University of California—Berkeley, 1978).

wanderer — an exile from his kingdom (Genesis 4:12). If the earth or land from which Cain is now cut off in mortality was understood to be an everlasting or eternal possession or kingdom — i.e., his future heaven — then the weight of his curse becomes clear not only in the immediate, mortal, social context but in the theological and eschatological context. In other words, losing an inheritance in time is a curse that can affect one's eternity.

### **Inheriting Priesthood in the Bible**

Not only was land part of the divine blessings and inheritance in the biblical tradition but priesthood also appears to be a covenant blessing obtained through inheritance. In the Mosaic covenant, priesthood was inherited by the generations of Aaron:

And take thou unto thee Aaron thy brother, and his sons with him, from among the children of Israel, that he may minister unto me in the priest's office, even Aaron, Nadab and Abihu, Eleazar and Ithamar, Aaron's sons. (Exodus 28:1)

And the holy garments of Aaron shall be his sons' after him, to be anointed therein, and to be consecrated in them. (Exodus 29:29)

But the Levites have no part among you; for the priesthood of the Lord is their inheritance .... (Joshua 18:7)

One's genealogy was sought as proof to inherit priesthood during the second temple period:

And these were they which went up from Tel-melah, Tel-harsa, Cherub, Addan, and Immer: but they could not shew their father's house, and their seed, whether they were of Israel: ... These sought their register among those that were reckoned by genealogy, but they were not found: therefore were they, as polluted, put from the priesthood. And the Tirshatha said unto them, that they should not eat of the most holy things, till there stood up a priest with Urim and with Thummim. (Ezra 2:59, 62–63)

Similar to the requirements of land, righteousness was also a requirement to continue in one's right to inherit priesthood. For example, a holy man said to Eli that the priesthood has been in "the house of [Eli's] father":

Did I plainly appear unto the house of thy father, when they were in Egypt in Pharaoh's house? And did I choose him out of all the tribes of Israel to be my priest, to offer upon mine altar, to burn incense, to wear an ephod before me? and did I give unto the house of thy father all the offerings made by fire of the children of Israel? (1 Samuel 2:27–28)

However, due to the wickedness of Eli's sons, the Lord rescinded the blessing of priesthood from Eli's "house" and spoke of another "house" wherein the priesthood would be established:

Behold, the days come, that I will cut off thine arm, and the arm of thy father's house, that there shall not be an old man in thine house. . . . I will raise me up a faithful priest, that shall do according to that which is in mine heart and in my mind: and I will build him a sure house; and he shall walk before mine anointed for ever. (1 Samuel 2:31, 35)

The presence or absence of priesthood in one's "house" makes sense in terms of inheritance. Note also that the inheritance of priesthood, like land, was not only for mortality but understood to be a possession "for ever." Likewise, the Psalmist declared: "The Lord hath sworn, and will not repent, Thou art a priest for ever after the order of Melchizedek" (Psalm 110:4).

The Hebrew Bible does not explicitly mention an inheritance of priesthood in Abraham's covenant, but he is shown performing priestly actions such as sacrificing at altars and receives assurance that through him and his seed "shall all the nations of earth be blessed" (Genesis 22:18; cf. Genesis 12:3), a likely allusion to an inherited priesthood by which they would bless the nations. Later Jewish tradition claims that Abraham did indeed have a priesthood that his posterity inherited. Melchizedek, Abraham's contemporary, is the first in the Hebrew Bible to be called "priest," and the Babylonian Talmud maintains that the priesthood held by Melchizedek was given to Abraham who passed it on to his descendants.<sup>30</sup>

When Cain killed his brother, he not only lost his inheritance of land as noted above, but the text also suggests he was cut off from a priesthood inheritance. After the Lord tells him he is cursed from the earth, Cain's response suggests he understood the full implication of this curse: "Behold, thou hast driven me out this day from the face of

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30. See Nedarim 32b in the Koren Noé Talmud (Babylonian Talmud), William Davidson Edition, Sefaria, <https://www.sefaria.org/Nedarim.32b?lang=bi>.



the earth; and from thy face shall I be hid” (Genesis 4:14). Menahem Haran demonstrated years ago that being “before the Lord” (from the Hebrew *liphnê Yahweh* meaning literally “to the face of Yahweh”) often indicated the presence of a temple, which is not out of the question since Cain is making offerings (see Genesis 4:5).<sup>31</sup> In other words, Cain appears to understand that his curse not only disinherits him from his earth kingdom or land but it also disinherits him from the priesthood by which he would normally enter a temple and stand before the face of God.

### Inheriting Land in Ancient Egypt

Concepts of inheritance and possessing blessings in time and then eternity also appear in ancient Egypt, which Latter-day Saints would expect since they are told in the Book of Abraham that the first pharaoh sought earnestly to imitate the order of the original patriarchs (see Abraham 1: 26). Like the Judeo-Christian notion of living forever on earth noted earlier, Egyptologists have long noted that dwelling eternally on earth figures into ancient Egyptian conceptions of salvation.<sup>32</sup> For example, Egyptian tombs, from the earliest periods, were called a *pr dt* “house of eternity” in which the tomb owner could effectively dwell on earth forever among family and friends: “The timely construction of a tomb was a goal in life, one that afforded the certainty of not slipping, at death, out of the context of the life of the land as a social, geographical, and cultural space, but rather of having a place where one remained present after death, integrated into the community of the living.”<sup>33</sup> *Pr dt* can refer to the whole private estate of the person in mortality, suggesting a belief that everything present in time can continue into eternity. The dead *w3h tp t3* “enduring on earth” or being able to “go

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31. Menahem Haran, *Temples and Temple-Service in Ancient Israel: An Inquiry into the Character of Cult Phenomena and the Historical Setting of the Priestly School* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1978), 26. In the Book of Moses, Cain not only offers sacrifice but he then makes covenant oaths, counterfeiting the progressive temple rites of courtyard sacrifices and then covenanting in the temple proper (Moses 5:29–31).

32. See Jan Assmann, *Death and Salvation in Ancient Egypt* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2005), 175–81. James Allen, “Some Aspects of the Non-Royal Afterlife in the Old Kingdom,” in *The Old Kingdom Art and Archaeology: Proceedings of the Conference Held in Prague, May 31–June 4, 2004*, ed. Miroslav Barta (Prague: Academy of Sciences of the Czech Republic, 2006), 9–17.

33. Assmann, *Death and Salvation*, 13.



forth by day, going upon the earth among all the living" are some of the eternal blessings appearing in ancient Egyptian texts.<sup>34</sup>

The land, tomb, and tomb equipment were typically viewed as gifts from the king, who was the living Horus on earth and representative of the gods. These objects were typically labeled with a *ḥtp-dī-(n)swt* formula: "A gift which the king [and gods may also be mentioned] gives ...." The presence of this formula likely indicates that the king either literally gave the property so labeled to the deceased or at least is acknowledged as the ultimate source of these things.<sup>35</sup> Indeed, connection to the king was so important that hieroglyphic texts on tomb chapel walls often preserve interactions the deceased had with the king in life, and the tombs themselves were often organized in a grid, like homes along streets, around the kings' pyramid tombs. Many officials were even given the honorific kinship title of *s3 nswt* "son of the king" who himself had the title *s3 r'* "son of Re."<sup>36</sup> These and other concepts may suggest the

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34. Mahmoud El-Khadragy, "Some Significant Features in the Decoration of the Chapel of Iti-ibi-iker at Asyut," *Studien zur Altägyptischen Kultur* 36 (2007): 114; Harold M. Hays, *The Organization of the Pyramid Texts: Typology and Disposition* (Leiden, NDL: Brill, 2012), 46. Compare John Gee, "The Use of the Daily Temple Liturgy in the Book of the Dead," in *Totenbuch-Forschungen: Gesammelte Beiträge Des 2. Internationalen Totenbuch-Symposiums, Bonn, 25. Bis 29* (Wiesbaden, DEU: Harrassowitz Verlag, 2006), 75–77.

35. Günther Lapp, *Die Opferformel des Alten Reiches: Unter Berücksichtigung einiger späterer Formen* (Mainz am Rhein, DEU: Verlag Philipp von Zabern, 1986); Ronald J. Leprohon, *The Great Name: Ancient Egyptian Royal Titulary* (Atlanta: Society of Biblical Literature, 2013), 18–19. James Allen indicates that the *ḥtp-dī-(n)swt* "may have meant to acknowledge the king's gift of the tomb itself or, more loosely, royal permission for the tomb's construction; the latter is perhaps likelier, since the mass of evidence indicates that most tombs after the Fourth Dynasty were built from the owner's own resources." Allen, "Aspects of the Non-Royal Afterlife," 14. See also Violaine Chauvet, "The Conception of Private Tombs in the Late Old Kingdom (Egypt)" (master's thesis, Johns Hopkins University, 2004). H. Satzinger argues that the *ḥtp-dī-(n)swt* was understood as a past occurrence "an offering the king has given;" providing evidence that it refers to the king's past action or permission that gave rise to the tomb and the means for its services. H. Satzinger, "Beobachtungen zur Opferformel: Theorie und Praxis," *Lingua Aegyptia* 5 (1997): 177–88. The king may even attend the presentation of the tomb elements as discussed in David P. Silverman, "The Nature of Egyptian Kingship," in *Ancient Egyptian Kingship*, ed. David O'Connor and David P. Silverman (Leiden, NDL: Brill, 1995), 64–65.

36. Jochem Kahl, "Nsw und Bit," in *Zeichen aus dem Sand: Streiflichter aus Ägyptens Geschichte zu Ehren von Günter Dreyer*, ed. Eva-Maria Engel, Vera Müller, and Ulrich Hartung (Wiesbaden, DEU: Harrassowitz, 2008), 307–27.

Egyptians viewed their eternal blessings as an inheritance from the king, who was the son of god.

Like Israelite society, ancient Egyptian inheritances were conveyed either through the legal order of succession (favoring sons over daughters, children over siblings, and older over younger) or through written declarations.<sup>37</sup> Adoption was a legitimate means for securing an heir.<sup>38</sup> In earlier periods, the practice was to establish the eldest son as sole heir, but this was replaced by dividing the property among all children. The eldest son, however, continued to play an important role as administrator among his siblings and typically received a larger share. Already in the Old Kingdom, land was an object of inheritance.<sup>39</sup>

Curses in ancient Egypt included the idea that the property of the one cursed would no longer be part of an inheritance. In the Decree of Demedjibtawy (Eighth Dynasty, Koptos), the wrongdoer would not only lose his own possessions but also lose the possessions that belonged to his father — i.e., they are cut off from the family inheritance.<sup>40</sup> This in turn would impact any inheritance that could have passed down to his successors. In the Chapel of Meru/Bebi (Sixth Dynasty, Saqqara) a curse indicates that the recipient's heirs will not be able to receive any inheritance and establish their homes.<sup>41</sup> On the Stela of Iuwelot (Twenty Second Dynasty, Karnak), the inheritance of the one who is cursed is given to another.<sup>42</sup> Children no longer inheriting the land and possessions of their father is the natural consequence of a father who lost the land or possessions through wrongdoing. If a child wants the land, they would have to obtain it some other way.

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37. Schafik Allam, "Inheritance in ancient Egypt," *Bulletin de l'Institut d'Égypte* 77 (1999): 39–44. "Inheritance" in *The Oxford Encyclopedia of Ancient Egypt*, ed. Donald Redford (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001), 2:158–61. Sandra Lippert, "Inheritance," in *UCLA Encyclopedia of Egyptology*, ed. Elizabeth Froid and Willeke Wendrich (Los Angeles: UC Press, 2013), <http://digital2.library.ucla.edu/viewItem.do?ark=21198/zz002hg0w1>.

38. Eugene Cruz-Urbe, "A New Look at the Adoption Papyrus," *Journal of Egyptian Archaeology* 74 (1988): 220–23; Christopher Eyre, "The Adoption Papyrus in Social Context," *Journal of Egyptian Archaeology* 78 (1992): 207–21.

39. Nigel Strudwick, *Texts from the Pyramid Age* (Atlanta: Society of Biblical Literature, 2005), 192–93.

40. Strudwick, 123–24.

41. *Ibid.*, 225.

42. K. Jansen-Winkel, *Inschriften der Spätzeit II* (Wiesbaden, DEU: Harrassowitz Verlag, 2007), 79–80.

## Inheriting Priesthood in Ancient Egypt

In Egypt, priesthood was also an inheritance that could be passed from generation to generation. During the Old Kingdom, the inheritability of priestly offices in private funerary and royal funerary cults are attested.<sup>43</sup> From the Middle Kingdom onwards, state and temple offices appear as objects of inheritance.<sup>44</sup> Use of an *jmyt pr* document to convey state priesthood inheritances suggests that these inheritances were also subject to an approval by the vizier or king, similar to Israelite inheritances that depended not only on birth but also the ratification by God by adherence to his covenant.

Similar to cursing a person from an inheritance of land, cursing in ancient Egypt included the disinheritance of offices, including priesthood. A graffito for Djediah (23rd Dynasty, Khonsu Temple at Karnak) indicates that the son of one cursed would not receive the office of his father.<sup>45</sup> Similarly an Endowment Stela (19th Dynasty, Bilgai) contains a curse against a wrongdoer saying that his son will not ascend to his (the wrongdoer's) office.<sup>46</sup> While it may seem unjust to deny priesthood from the child of one who is cursed, a child simply cannot inherit their father's office if the father no longer has the office to give. It is the natural consequence upon one's children when cursed from one's office. If a child wants the priestly office, they will have to obtain it some other way.

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43. See Peter der Manuelian, "Nj-k-'nh and the Earliest hrjw rnpt," *Journal of Near Eastern Studies* 45, no. 1 (January 1986): 1–18, which includes statements of a father designating his children to inherit his duties as ka-priest in private tombs and also as priest in the temple of Hathor in the Old Kingdom period. See also Paule Posener-Kriéger, "Vour transmettez vos fonctions à vos enfants ...," in *Mélanges Jacques Jean Clère*, Cahiers de Recherches de l'Institut de Papyrologie et d'Égyptologie de Lille 13, ed. Juan Carlos Moreno García (Villeneuve d'Ascq, France: Université Charles de Gaulle — Lille 3, 1991), 107–12.

44. See, for example, the inheritance of a priestly title on the Stela of Ahmose-Nefetari in Michel Gitton, "La résiliation d'une fonction religieuse: Nouvelle interprétation de la stèle de donation d'Ahmès Néfertari," *Bulletin de l'Institut français d'archéologie orientale* 76 (1976): 65–89, plate 14.

45. Helen Jacquet-Gordon, *The Temple of Khonsu*, vol. 3, *The Graffiti on the Khonsu Temple Roof at Karnak: A Manifestation of Personal Piety* (Chicago: The Oriental Institute of the University of Chicago, 2003), 55, plate 55.

46. Alan H. Gardiner, "The Stela of Bilgai," *Zeitschrift für Ägyptische Sprache und Altertumskunde* 50 (1912): 49–57.

## Inheriting Land in Joseph Smith's Revelations

Like the ancient traditions noted above, Joseph Smith's revelations include the idea that the divine blessing of earth or land would be an inherited possession in mortality and continue into eternity. The Book of Mormon boldly declares that inheriting the covenant blessing of land is required in order to be saved: "how can ye be saved, except ye inherit the kingdom of heaven?" (Alma 11:37). Lehi, the founding father of the principal nations in this text, appears to understand this and declares to his sons:

Notwithstanding our afflictions, we have obtained a land of promise, a land which is choice above all other lands; a land which the Lord God hath covenanted with me should be a land for the inheritance of my seed. Yea, the Lord hath covenanted this land unto me, and to my children forever, and also all those who should be led out of other countries by the hand of the Lord. (2 Nephi 1:5)

Lehi clearly declares that he obtained land because of a covenant with God and that it would become an inheritance for his posterity to possess "forever." Like the biblical requirements outlined above, Lehi also indicates that righteousness was a requirement to maintain possession of the inheritance forever: "And if it so be that they shall keep his commandments they shall be blessed upon the face of this land, and there shall be none to molest them, nor to take away the land of their inheritance; and they shall dwell safely forever" (2 Nephi 1:9).

That Lehi's promised land was expected to be inherited by his own children for time and eternity ("forever") is further substantiated in his remark to his son Joseph: "And may the Lord consecrate also unto thee this land, which is a most precious land, for thine inheritance and the inheritance of thy seed with thy brethren, for thy security forever, if it so be that ye shall keep the commandments of the Holy One of Israel" (2 Nephi 3:2).

When Jesus appears to the Book of Mormon people after his resurrection, he affirms the laws and covenant ideas of inheriting land: "the Father hath commanded me that I should give unto you this land, for your inheritance" (3 Nephi 20:14). He then declares that even though the covenant people of the Book of Mormon as well as those in Jerusalem would be scattered by the Gentiles and be exiled from their inheritances for a time due to their own wickedness, the covenant and inheritances would one day be restored:

I will gather my people together as a man gathereth his sheaves into the floor. ... And behold, this people will I establish in this land, unto the fulfilling of the covenant which I made with your father Jacob; and it shall be a New Jerusalem. ... And I will remember the covenant which I have made with my people; and I have covenanted with them that I would gather them together in mine own due time, that I would give unto them again the land of their fathers for their inheritance, which is the land of Jerusalem, which is the promised land unto them forever, saith the Father. (3 Nephi 20:18, 22, 29)

The covenant blessing is explicitly stated to be the "land of their fathers" that will be an inheritance forever for the descendants.

Similar to Cain's curse of being cut off from the earth and its yield, becoming an exiled vagabond, Samuel the Lamanite indicates that the wickedness of the Nephites brought a curse upon their lands and goods that they became "slippery," suggesting a lack of ability of the Nephites to hold their lands and possessions, indicative of their inability to hold on to their heaven (see Helaman 13:31, 33, 36).

In addition to the Book of Mormon, Joseph Smith had other canonized revelations that speak of inheriting land "from generation to generation" — including the idea that righteousness, not just lineage, was a required stipulation — and that the land or earth would be an eternal possession or heaven:

But blessed are the poor, who are pure in heart, ... for the fatness of the earth shall be theirs. ... And their generations shall inherit the earth from generation to generation, forever and ever. (D&C 26:18, 20)

The poor and the meek of the earth shall inherit it. Therefore, it [the earth] must needs be sanctified from all unrighteousness, ... That bodies who are of the celestial kingdom may possess it forever and ever; for, for this intent was it made, and created .... (D&C 88:17–18, 20)

In contrast to the "pure in heart" and "meek" who will inherit the earth, those who are wicked will be "cut off" from or "not inherit" the land:

And the rebellious shall be cut off out of the land of Zion, and shall be sent away, and shall not inherit the land. (D&C 64:35)

## Inheriting Priesthood in Joseph Smith's Revelations

Some may question whether inheriting priesthood through one's lineage is part of the theology Joseph Smith restored based on the fact that, since the earliest days of the modern Church, priesthood has been distributed through ecclesiastical lines of authority irrespective of any familial inheritances. However, the revelations of Joseph Smith seem to suggest that the ecclesiastical lines of authority must eventually be reorganized and sealed up into familial lines of authority if priesthood is to be enduring through eternity.

For example, the crowning revelation that formalized the stipulations and blessings of the covenant in the Church includes this declaration:

All covenants, contracts, bonds, obligations, oaths, vows, performances, connections, associations, or expectations, that are not made and entered into and sealed by the Holy Spirit of promise, of him who is anointed, both as well for time and for all eternity, and that too most holy, by revelation and commandment through the medium of mine anointed, ... are of no efficacy, virtue, or force in and after the resurrection from the dead; for all contracts that are not made unto this end have an end when men are dead. (D&C 132:7)

A plain reading of this text suggests that any covenant or ordinance performed in the Church, including priesthood ordinations, that are not ultimately “sealed up,” will not have any efficacy or force both “in the resurrection” (i.e., in the millennial day) or “after the resurrection” (i.e., throughout eternity).

That temples are the place where this sealing up is to occur was declared earlier in an 1841 revelation of the Prophet concerning the building of the Nauvoo temple:

For, for this cause I commanded Moses that he should build a tabernacle, that they should bear it with them in the wilderness, and to build a house in the land of promise, that those ordinances might be revealed which had been hid from before the world was. Therefore, verily I say unto you, that your anointings, and your washings, and your baptisms for the dead, and your solemn assemblies, and your memorials for your sacrifices by the sons of Levi, and for your oracles in your most holy places wherein you receive conversations, and your statutes and judgments, for the beginning of the revelations and foundation of Zion, and for the glory, honor,

and endowment of all her municipals, are ordained by the ordinance of my holy house, which my people are always commanded to build unto my holy name. (D&C 124:38–39)

Again, a plain reading of this text suggests that all covenants and ordinances that the ecclesiastical Church performs are only “ordained” (a much earlier revelation uses the word “confirmed” — see Moses 5:59) “by *the* ordinance of my holy house.” In other words, these two revelations seem to be saying that anything the Church does must ultimately be ratified or sealed (authorized) through the temple in order for it to have any efficacy in and after the millennial day, the time when the kingdom of heaven is fully established on earth.

Since the ratifying ordinance or sealing in temples that Joseph Smith restored includes organizing the children of God into family units of a patriarchal order, wherein children are literally declared “heirs,” then it would appear that establishing lines of inheritance for the purpose of maintaining one’s priesthood in and after the resurrection are part of the theology that Joseph Smith restored.

More recently, President M. Russell Ballard said it this way: “Although the Church plays a pivotal role in proclaiming, announcing, and administering the necessary ordinances of salvation and exaltation, all of that, as important as it is, is really just the scaffolding being used in an infinite and eternal construction project to build, support, and strengthen the family. And just as scaffolding is eventually taken down and put away to reveal the final completed building, so too will the mortal, administrative functions of the church eventually fade as the eternal family comes fully into view.”<sup>47</sup>

In other words, the ecclesiastical lines of authority appear to have been established at the founding of the Church as a temporary measure due to the broken inheritance lines caused by apostasy and broken covenants. However, the ecclesiastical lines of authority are seeking to repair these broken familial lines and inheritances through the work of temples. If not, then the priesthood and all covenants will have no efficacy, virtue, or force in and after the resurrection.

Casual readers of Joseph Smith’s revelations can become confused if they do not recognize that revelations addressing the ecclesiastical lines of authority exist in tandem with those that address the familial

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47. M. Russell Ballard, “Women of Dedication, Faith, Determination, and Action,” address, BYU Women’s Conference, May 1, 2015, transcript, [https://womensconference.byu.edu/sites/womensconference.ce.byu.edu/files/elder\\_m\\_russell\\_ballard\\_0.pdf](https://womensconference.byu.edu/sites/womensconference.ce.byu.edu/files/elder_m_russell_ballard_0.pdf).



inheritances of priesthood that the Church is attempting to reconstruct through its temples. Priesthood in some of Joseph Smith's revelations is indeed portrayed as a family inherited blessing rather than just an ecclesiastically bestowed line of authority.

For example, a December 1832 revelation that Joseph Smith obtained while reviewing the manuscript of his Bible revisions includes this passage:

Therefore thus saith the Lord unto you, with whom the priesthood hath continued through the lineage of your fathers, for ye are lawful heirs according to the flesh, and have been hid from the world with Christ in God: therefore your life and the priesthood hath remained, and must needs remain, through you and your lineage, until the restoration of all things spoken by the mouths of all the holy prophets since the world began. (D&C 86:8–11)

“The priesthood hath continued through the lineage of your fathers” and being “heirs, according to the flesh” certainly emphasizes the perspective that priesthood, or at least the right to receive it, was understood to be an inheritance obtained from previous generations within one's lineage. It also indicates that subsequent generations would also have a right to priesthood via their lineage.

Priesthood is an inherited right by lineage according to an answer Joseph Smith gave to some questions from Elias Higbee:

Questions by Elias Higbee: What is meant by the command in Isaiah, 52d chapter, 1st verse, which saith: Put on thy strength, O Zion — and what people had Isaiah reference to? He had reference to those whom God should call in the last days, who should hold the power of priesthood to bring again Zion, and the redemption of Israel; and to put on her strength is to put on the authority of the priesthood, which she, Zion, has a right to by lineage; also to return to that power which she had lost. (D&C 113:7–10)

Similarly, Joseph Smith's revelation concerning “evangelical ministers” or the patriarchal order indicated that it was a priesthood inherited from father to son:

The order of this priesthood was confirmed to be handed down from father to son, and rightly belongs to the literal descendants of the chosen seed, to whom the promises were



made. This order was instituted in the days of Adam, and came down by lineage .... (D&C 107:40–41)

While this priestly order was formalized as an ecclesiastical office within the Church that was literally passed down as an inheritance within the Smith family for decades, it was meant to reflect the truism that such an order is to exist among all families, as "instituted in the days of Adam." Consequently, entering the patriarchal order in temples can be viewed as the fulfillment or the ordaining within families of this ecclesiastical office.

Joseph Smith's revelation restoring details concerning the Abrahamic covenant includes the following text:

Thou [Abraham] shalt be a blessing unto thy seed after thee, that in their hands they shall bear this ministry and Priesthood unto all nations; ... and in thee (that is, in thy Priesthood) and in thy seed (that is, thy Priesthood), for I give unto thee a promise that this right shall continue in thee, and in thy seed after thee (that is to say, the literal seed, or the seed of the body) shall all the families of the earth be blessed .... (Abraham 2:9, 11)

The covenant includes God's "promise" that the right of priesthood would continue in Abraham and in his literal seed, even to the point that his seed is equated with priesthood itself. The emphasis on the priesthood continuing through the literal seed of the body again suggests a familial inheritance of priesthood is at play in the theology Joseph Smith restored.

Similar to the ancient societies, Joseph Smith's revelations also included curses for wickedness that would sever priesthood from an individual and thus, as a natural consequence, from the inheritance of their posterity. During the height of religious persecution in Missouri, the prophet Joseph Smith penned a letter to his followers, later canonized as scripture, that included a generational curse by God against any persecutor: "Cursed are all those that shall lift up the heel against mine anointed, ... they shall be severed from the ordinances of mine house. ... they shall not have right to the priesthood, nor their posterity after them from generation to generation" (D&C 121:16, 19, 21).

Declaring subsequent generations cursed from priesthood and temple ordinances due to the actions of a forefather seems unjust and appears to contradict Smith's later truth claim, also canonized, that "men will be punished for their own sins, and not for Adam's transgression" (Articles of Faith 2). However, these objections are overcome when they

are understood in the context of inheritance laws. If a parent is cut off from possessing a blessing due to their own wickedness, the natural consequence is that a child and all subsequent generations who remain the heir of that parent simply cannot inherit what the parent no longer possesses.<sup>48</sup>

The curse against the Lamanites in the Book of Mormon appears to be a denial of priesthood due to their iniquity and refusal to obey the Lord's chosen servant. The text states explicitly:

Inasmuch as they will not hearken unto thy words they shall be cut off from the presence of the Lord. And behold, they were cut off from his presence. And he had caused the cursing to come upon them, yea, even a sore cursing, because of their iniquity. (2 Nephi 5:20–21)

The wording of the curse here is the same as Cain's noted earlier, namely being cut off from "the presence of the Lord" or, in other words, being disinherited from the priesthood that gave one access to the temple wherein God's presence is found. Implicit in a curse denying priesthood dominion is that the Lamanites were also disinherited from the domain or land they would have also inherited from Lehi and over which they would have ruled.

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48. Spencer W. Kimball suggests that subsequent generations are cursed because their fathers do not teach them the truth: "Among Church members rebellion frequently takes the form of criticism of authorities and leaders. They 'speak evil of dignities' and 'of the things that they understand not,' says Peter. (2 Peter 2:10, 12.) They complain of the programs, belittle the constituted authorities, and generally set themselves up as judges. After a while they absent themselves from Church meetings for imagined offenses, and fail to pay their tithes and meet their other Church obligations. In a word, they have the spirit of apostasy, which is almost always the harvest of the seeds of criticism. ... Such people fail to bear testimony to their descendants, destroy faith within their own homes, and actually deny the 'right to the priesthood' [D&C 121:21] to succeeding generations who might otherwise have been faithful in all things." Spencer W. Kimball, *The Miracle of Forgiveness* (Salt Lake City: Bookcraft, 1969), 42–43. While such is certainly a truism and worth contemplation, this D&C text does not appear to address any additional conditions, such as one's failure to teach the next generation or the next generation's wickedness, as a reason the curse continues from generation to generation (indeed, the pharaoh of the Book of Abraham was still cursed from the right of priesthood even though he was "a righteous man"). The text simply asserts that all subsequent generations are cursed because their ancestor persecuted God's "anointed." Not having a blessing to give as an inheritance to one's posterity provides the best explanation, consistent with biblical and ancient cultural understanding, for why the curse would be generational regardless of any other conditions.

Without the contextual understanding that inheritance laws bring to the reader, the Book of Mormon's generational curses can appear prejudiced:

And cursed shall be the seed of him that mixeth with their [the Lamanite's] seed: for they shall be cursed even with the same cursing. (2 Nephi 5:23)

And it came to pass that whosoever did mingle his seed with that of the Lamanites, did bring the same curse upon his seed. (Alma 3:9)

The contextual material surrounding Alma 3:9 clarifies that the act of intermarriage alone is not the issue here, rather "that they might not mix *and believe in incorrect traditions*, which would prove their destruction" (v. 8) and "therefore whosoever *suffered himself to be led away* by the Lamanites, were called under that head" (v. 10). Note, a person who intermarried with *and* followed the incorrect traditions of the Lamanites was "called under that head" — i.e., they became followers or "children/seed" of the Lamanites, following the rules of adoption.

According to the natural consequences of inheritance, if the Lamanite "head" is cursed, then anyone who placed themselves "under that head" would bring the "same curse" of being cut off — i.e., you cannot inherit what your adopted father does not have to give. Joining a lineage that has been disinherited not only prevents the individual who placed themselves in that lineage to receive the inheritance of land or power but their posterity would also be cut off with them: "the same curse upon his seed."

## Overcoming Curses in Joseph Smith's Revelations

Such curses abound in scripture and in the ancient world as has been shown. Joseph Smith's revelations, however, provide means whereby those who find themselves cursed or cut off due to their own actions or the actions of a forefather can still obtain an inheritance of a kingdom (land) and power (priesthood) that are promised in the covenant. First and foremost, the Book of Mormon indicates that through the Atonement of Jesus Christ that any breaches of the covenant or severance from one's inheritance can be repaired among those who put their faith in Christ and repent (see, for example, Alma 5:51, 7:14, and 3 Nephi 11:33, 38).

The Book of Abraham outlines how anyone can still be a lawful heir of the blessings even if they were cut off from them due to the actions of a progenitor. If they cannot inherit the blessings through their own

lineage, then they can become Abraham's seed through adoption: "And I will bless them [the nations] through thy name; for as many as receive this Gospel shall be called after thy name [adopted], and shall be accounted thy seed, and shall rise up and bless thee, as their father" (Abraham 2:10).

Abraham himself seemingly could not inherit the priesthood from his own father who had turned away from God, so Jewish tradition, noted above, and a revelation of Joseph Smith indicate that "Abraham received the priesthood from Melchizedek" (D&C 84:14, cf. Genesis 14:18–20; Hebrews 7). In the context of inheritance laws, this would imply that Abraham became Melchizedek's adopted son whereby he could inherit the blessings of the covenant such as priesthood.

Ultimately, Joseph Smith revealed that the full covenant rituals of the temple are the formal means by which one is adopted or "sealed" into the family of Abraham.<sup>49</sup> His 1843 revelation on the covenant indicates explicitly that a marriage between a man and woman that is "sealed unto them by the Holy Spirit of promise" in which they were promised to "*inherit* thrones, kingdoms, principalities, and powers, dominions, all heights and depths"—and they do not shed innocent blood—then they shall have the promised blessings "in time, and through all eternity," and this glory "shall be a fullness and a continuation of the seeds forever and ever" (D&C 132:19). The promise of continuing seed suggests that the inherited blessings would also continue through the heirs of the man and woman so married.

Indeed, Joseph Smith also taught that there must be a "welding link" between the generations and that temple ordinances for the dead would make that possible:

Behold, I will send you Elijah the prophet before the coming of the great and dreadful day of the Lord: And he shall turn the heart of the fathers to the children, and the heart of the

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49. The foundational study of this concept is Gordon Irving, "The Law of Adoption: One Phase in the Development of the Mormon Concept of Salvation, 1830 1900," *BYU Studies* 14 (Spring 1974): 291–314. See also Jonathan A. Stapley, "Adoptive Sealing Ritual in Mormonism," *Journal of Mormon History* 37, no. 3 (Summer 2011): 53–118; Samuel Brown, "Early Mormon Adoption Theology and the Mechanics of Salvation," *Journal of Mormon History* 37, no. 3 (Summer 2011), 3–52; and Samuel Brown, "The Early Mormon Chain of Belonging," *Dialogue: A Journal of Mormon Thought* 44, no. 1 (Spring 2011), 1–52. Most modern studies such as Stapley's and Brown's, however, overlook the concept of literal inheritance along actual family lines as central to the sealing's purpose.

children to their fathers, lest I come and smite the earth with a curse' [Malachi 4:5–6]. ... It is sufficient to know, in this case, that the earth will be smitten with a curse unless there is a welding link of some kind or other between the fathers and the children, upon some subject or other — and behold what is that subject? It is the baptism for the dead. For we without them cannot be made perfect; neither can they without us be made perfect. Neither can they nor we be made perfect without those who have died in the gospel also; for it is necessary in the ushering in of the dispensation of the fulness of times, which dispensation is now beginning to usher in, that a whole and complete and perfect union, and welding together of dispensations, and keys, and powers, and glories should take place, and be revealed from the days of Adam even to the present time. (D&C 128:17–18)

The idea that one cannot “be made perfect” without their ancestors and must, therefore, create a welding link that binds together all the dispensations from the present back to Adam makes the most sense when viewed through the concept of inheritance.

According to Joseph Smith’s revelations, after the ministries of Christ in Jerusalem, in the Book of Mormon lands, and among the house of Israel in other parts of the earth, there was a universal apostasy wherein all the families of the earth severed themselves from the covenant blessings in one way or the other. The Book of Mormon plainly states that “they had all become corrupt” (Jacob 5:39). Thus all modern families have been effectively disinherited from God or cursed, and everything would be wasted, in every meaning of the word, if not for the Restoration.

Nothing in scriptural law suggests that a curse or disinheritance imposed on all the families of the earth due to the great apostasy is any different than the curse or disinheritance imposed upon Cain and his descendants, upon Ham and his descendants, upon Laman and Lemuel and their descendants, or any others who have abandoned the covenant of the Lord. Everyone has ancestors that rejected the covenant requirements at one point or another and so all families have been severed from the divine inheritance; all are cut off. Joseph Smith’s revelations and the practices that grew out of them appear to demonstrate that these broken lines of inheritance can be repaired through faith in Christ, repentance, and temple covenants. Additionally, he claimed that a modern priesthood chain of authority was given directly from heaven so that those in the latter-days would have the needed authority to reconstruct the family

kingdom and inheritance chains back through the generations to Adam and, ultimately, to God, allowing the family kingdom of kings and queens to be fully established. Joseph Smith revealed a God who is a God of law, expecting all commandments and legal requirements to be fulfilled as well as a God of mercy who makes a way possible through Christ for such to be fulfilled in any persons' life: "Now, the decrees of God are unalterable; therefore, the way is prepared that whosoever will may walk therein and be saved" (Alma 41:–8).

In nothing mentioned above is one's racial profile a qualifying test to receive an inheritance. The only legal requirements are righteousness (including repentance) and covenants that bind the generations so that the blessings can be received by inheritance. While an entire family or lineage can be cut off from an inheritance due to the actions of a forefather, the inheritance laws of the scriptural traditions discussed do not discriminate based on race, in the modern sense of that word. Every individual and their family can be heirs, whether by natural birth or by adoption, and every individual and their family can be cursed or disinherited when the covenant is breached. The Book of Mormon makes this position very clear:

And now behold, my beloved brethren, I would speak unto you; for I, Nephi, would not suffer that ye should suppose that ye are more righteous than the Gentiles shall be. For behold, except ye shall keep the commandments of God ye shall all likewise perish; and because of the words which have been spoken ye need not suppose that the Gentiles are utterly destroyed. For behold, I say unto you that as many of the Gentiles as will repent are the covenant people of the Lord [i.e., although all Gentiles' lineages are disinherited and will reap the destruction of their false kingdoms and priesthoods, individual Gentiles may still be heirs by being adopted through repentance and numbered among the "covenant people," thus they are not "utterly" or entirely destroyed]; and as many of the Jews as will not repent shall be cast off [disinherited]; for the Lord covenanteth with none save it be with them that repent and believe in his Son, who is the Holy One of Israel. (2 Nephi 30:1–2)

## The Book of Abraham and Inheritance

Within the context of inheritance laws relative to covenant blessings, we return to the Book of Abraham to determine more precisely why the pharaoh and Egyptians of Abraham's day did not have the right to priesthood. The only explicitly mentioned and active cursing respecting priesthood in this story comes from Noah: "Noah ... blessed him [Pharaoh] with the blessings of the earth, and with the blessings of wisdom, but cursed him as pertaining to the Priesthood" (Abraham 1:26). As noted earlier, this earliest Pharaoh was the eldest son of Egyptus, a daughter (or descendant) of Ham. The later Pharaoh of Abraham's day was also a descendant of Ham and a "partaker of the blood of the Canaanites," as noted earlier.

Since Noah is the explicitly stated source of the curse in the Book of Abraham, and this curse is related to the lineage of Ham, not some antediluvian curse upon Cain, then it makes more sense to interpret the "blood of the Canaanites" in the Book of Abraham as descendants of Ham's son Canaan (see Genesis 10:6, 15–19), and not the Canaanites from the Book of Moses that lived in Enoch's day. In fact, the book of Genesis actually preserves a story in which Noah curses some of Ham's descendants due to something Ham did, and this moment seems to be the best framework for interpreting the text of the Book of Abraham. The biblical account of this curse is as follows:

And Noah began to be an husbandman, and he planted a vineyard: And he drank of the wine, and was drunken; and he was uncovered within his tent. And Ham, the father of Canaan, saw the nakedness of his father, and told his two brethren without. And Shem and Japheth took a garment, and laid it upon both their shoulders, and went backward, and covered the nakedness of their father; and their faces were backward, and they saw not their father's nakedness. And Noah awoke from his wine, and knew what his younger son had done unto him. And he said, Cursed be Canaan; a servant of servants shall he be unto his brethren. (Genesis 9:20–25)

The text is certainly a difficult one to fully understand. Since Canaan is the one cursed, it is easy to assume that he, not Ham, did something wrong, and the text needs to be amended or read in different ways. However, viewed through the lens of inheritance, one can make sense of it as it stands.



The exact reason for Noah's cursing is not clear.<sup>50</sup> However, it leaves no ambiguity concerning the consequence of Ham's action: a curse upon Canaan. That an action of Ham would bring a curse upon Canaan makes legal sense in the context of inheritance laws. Like a child not being able to have the priestly office of a cursed father in ancient Egypt noted above, if Ham was disinherited from his covenant blessings for any reason, such would naturally prevent his son Canaan, and the Canaanites who descend from him, from inheriting those blessings from Ham. Ham would no longer have them to give to his posterity.

Why the Hebrew Bible singles out Canaan being cursed is likely a function of the larger contextual struggle for land between the

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50. Speculations include ideas such as: 1) pointing out the close correlation of Ham's action of seeing "the nakedness of his father" to similar biblical prohibitions elsewhere, suggesting that Ham may have had sexual relations with his father's wife (a mother, step-mother, or concubine): "The nakedness of thy father's wife shalt thou not uncover: it is thy father's nakedness" (Leviticus 18:8); "And the man that lieth with his father's wife hath uncovered his father's nakedness" (Leviticus 20:11); "Cursed be he that lieth with his father's wife; because he uncovereth his father's skirt" (Deuteronomy 27:20). In addition to incestual concerns, such an act could also be viewed as Ham usurping Noah's power or authority, similar to Absalom's act of treason enacted by sleeping with his father David's harem: "And Ahithophel said unto Absalom, Go in unto thy father's concubines, which he hath left to keep the house; and all Israel shall hear that thou art abhorred of thy father: then shall the hands of all that are with thee be strong. So they spread Absalom a tent upon the top of the house; and Absalom went in unto his father's concubines in the sight of all Israel" (2 Samuel 16:21; cf. 1 Kings 2:22). "To lie with a monarch's concubine was tantamount to usurpation of the throne (2 Samuel 3:7 and 16:21–22). For this reason Abner took Rizpah (2 Samuel 3:7). The same concept stands behind Ahithophel's advice to Absalom, to "go into his father's concubines" (16:21), and Adonijah's request for Abishag the Shunamite was clearly associated with this custom (1 Kings 2:21–24)." Anson Rainey, "Concubine: In the Bible," in *Encyclopaedia Judaica*, 2nd ed. (New York: Macmillan, 2006); 5:133–34. 2). Pointing out traditions that indicate Ham's wrongdoing may be that he stole a priesthood-related garment from his father, which legend claims was the same garment given to Adam in the garden of Eden and represented priestly or kingly authority. See, e.g., Stephen D. Ricks, "The Garment of Adam in Jewish, Muslim, and Christian Tradition," in *Temples of the Ancient World*, ed. Donald W. Parry (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 1994), 705–39. 3). Speculating that the text was amended to provide a basis for aggression against the Canaanites — i.e., Ham did not do anything wrong and any idea of a curse is a false narrative added to the text — chiefly as a reaction to the misuse of this story to justify racism and slavery throughout history. Certainly we should condemn the misuse of this text as justification for racism and slavery throughout history, but wisdom dictates that we should try to fully understand the text as it stands before amending scripture to suit our own purposes.



Israelites and Canaanites in the biblical text. Such a narrow focus in Genesis does not necessarily mean that the other children of Ham are not also disinherited or cursed. Legally speaking, they most assuredly would be. The Book of Abraham's claim that descendants of Ham's daughter Egyptus, not just those of Ham's son Canaan, were also cursed/disinherited is important evidence to verify this point. Indeed, the Bible's claim that Canaan would be a servant "of servants" could be read as indicating that Ham's entire household were no longer heirs but servants. In the context of inheritance laws, "servant" is not meant to indicate some kind of slavery, but rather one's status in a kingdom as a non-heir. Jesus's discussion of the difference between being a servant vs. son/heir in John 8:31–47 is instructive on this point.

Similar to the biblical narrative regarding Canaan, the Book of Abraham portrays Noah directly cursing Pharaoh, Ham's descendant, even though Pharaoh had not done anything wrong and was even declared a righteous man. Such cursing makes more sense when understood as a simple statement of the disinherited status of the pharaoh who was maintaining his inheritance through Ham. Indeed, the Book of Abraham explicitly states that Pharaoh's *lineage* was the reason for his inability to obtain priesthood, rather than any personal misdeed he did that Noah disliked.

In other words, any curse of Noah severing Ham from the covenant blessings, including land and priesthood, affects his son Canaan and his descendants (including the Canaanite pharaoh of Abraham's day), his son Mitzraim and his descendants, the Egyptians, and upon all other descendants of Ham who maintain their connection to divine blessings through him. The Book of Abraham states that the pharaohs of Egypt would "fain claim the priesthood from Noah, through Ham" (Abraham 1:27), but that simply was not possible, according to Abraham, because Ham did not currently have the priesthood to give to his descendants. They would need to get it some other way.

Abraham claiming authority from his fathers versus the pharaohs' claiming authority from their fathers (through Ham) is a theme that has parallels in other books of scripture. For example, in the Book of Moses, Noah and his sons prior to the flood are called the "sons of God," but the wicked claim that they, not Noah and his sons, are the true "sons of God," having the authority and blessings (see Moses 8). In a related and poignant moment, the very first words attributed to Satan in mortality is "I am also a son of God" immediately after Adam and Eve were told to "repent and call upon God in the name of the Son forevermore"

(Moses 5:8, 13). These are stories, among many, that address who has the true inheritance as “sons of God” — which lineage has the real authority that came down through covenant abiding fathers, whether natural or adopted, from the divine and which has a counterfeit inheritance of priesthood or land based on the false traditions of the fathers.

Historically, the pharaohs of Egypt, as did most rulers in antiquity, claimed that they were the ones with the divine right to rule the earth and to be the great high priest of the people. They claimed the title “Son of Re” in their standard titulary to affirm this. Consequently, they viewed all other nations as subservient to them and symbolically depicted them below windows over which the pharaoh appeared or on footstools under the pharaoh’s foot.<sup>51</sup> To emphasize their right to rule, the Egyptians even made lists of surrounding city-states or nations on clay figurines that became the subject of cursing rituals.<sup>52</sup> Longer versions of these lists appear on temple pylons next to images of the pharaoh about to smite the heads of bound foreigners.<sup>53</sup> In the hierarchy of the cosmic order of Egyptian ideology, the gods and king had authority and reigned supreme while common Egyptians, foreigners, and nature were subservient, in that order.<sup>54</sup>

In spite of the disinherited status of Pharaoh, son of Egyptus, in the Book of Abraham, it still portrays Noah blessing him for his righteousness with “wisdom,” for such does not depend on an inheritance to acquire. Noah also blessed Pharaoh with the “blessings of the earth,” which can appear problematic since land is typically an inherited right. The phrase “blessings of the earth,” however, does not appear anywhere else in scripture, so it is not clear if receiving the blessings of the earth means the same thing as inheriting the earth itself and having dominion over it. The New Testament’s “prodigal son” declares: “How many hired servants of my father’s have bread enough and to spare, and I perish with hunger!

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51. For a good discussion on this, see David O’Connor, “Egypt’s Views of ‘Others,’” in *Never Had the Like Occurred: Egypt’s View of Its Past*, ed. John Tait (Abingdon, UK: Routledge, 2016), 155–86.

52. Robert K. Ritner, *The Mechanics of Ancient Egyptian Magical Practice* (Studies in Ancient Oriental Civilization 54) (Chicago: The Oriental Institute, 1993), 136–42.

53. For a discussion of these lists and their physical counterparts in geography see Donald B. Redford, *Egypt, Canaan, and Israel in Ancient Times* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1992).

54. On this order see David O’Connor and Stephen Quirke, “Introduction: Mapping the Unknown in Ancient Egypt,” in *Mysterious Lands*, ed. David O’Connor and Stephen Quirke (Abingdon, UK: Routledge, 2007), 10–15.

I will arise and go to my father, and will say unto him, Father, I have sinned against heaven, and before thee, And am no more worthy to be called thy son: make me as one of thy hired servants" in order that he may at least benefit from the blessings of his father's estate (Luke 15:17–19). It may be that Pharaoh, likewise, was blessed by Noah to enjoy the blessings of the earth even though he did not have legitimacy to rule the earth as a king-priest through the lineage by which he was claiming it.

### **Egyptus and the Curse of Cain**

Again, the Book of Abraham explicitly mentions Noah's curse and Ham's seed, so any interpretation of the text should privilege that framework. There is nothing that indicates God's curse upon Cain or Cain's descendants is operative in this story. Some late antiquity, medieval, and even early American sources promoted the idea that a member of Noah's family may have married someone from the seed of Cain, the memory of which still persists into popular culture of recent years.<sup>55</sup> Neither the Hebrew Bible nor the New Testament, however, make such a claim.

As noted earlier, some within the Church speculated that Ham's wife Egyptus in the published Book of Abraham was Cain's descendant.<sup>56</sup> The Book of Abraham, however, makes no such claim. It does not speak of the parents or ancestors of Ham's wife at all. In spite of this, the idea that Egyptus is a descendant of Cain has become so ingrained in the modern Church's thought and dialogue that aging but currently utilized official Church sources still make this point.<sup>57</sup> Even Armand Mauss, who was

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55. For example, a classical Jewish tradition maintains that Naamah, the sister of Tubal-cain and a descendant of Cain (Genesis 4:22), was a wife of Noah and the mother of Ham himself (Genesis Rabba XXIII:3). See also Benjamin Braude, "The Sons of Noah and the Construction of Ethnic and Geographical Identities in the Medieval and Early Modern Periods," *William and Mary Quarterly* LIV (January 1997): 103–42. See also William McKee Evans, "From the Land of Canaan to the Land of Guinea: The Strange Odyssey of the Sons of Ham," *American Historical Review* 85 (February 1980): 15–43. The 1991 London West End musical *Children of Eden* adapts this popular notion by having the character Yonah, who believes she will perish in the flood before becoming the wife of Noah's son Japheth, sing the lyrics, "This won't be the first time I've stayed behind to face the bitter consequences of an ancient fall from grace. I'm a daughter of the race of Cain. I am not a stranger to the rain." Stephen Schwartz, "Stranger to the Rain," *Children of Eden*, music and lyrics by Stephen Schwartz, book by John Caird (New York: Music Theatre International, 1991).

56. See also Harris and Bringham, *The Mormon Church and Blacks*, 158.

57. For example, the Guide to the Scriptures accessible at the Church's official website simply states, "Ham's wife, Egyptus, was a descendant of Cain." "Ham," in

trying to question similar baseless conclusions in his paper, incorrectly assumed that the Pearl of Great Price actually states that Ham's wife descended from Cain: "Mormons usually corroborate this interpretation of the biblical account with reference to our own Pearl of Great Price, where we are told that Ham's wife was a descendant of Cain ...."<sup>58</sup>

Interestingly, the name-title given to Ham's wife in the earliest manuscript copies of the Book of Abraham is not Egyptus at all, but rather "Zep-tah, which in the Chaldea signifies Egypt, which sign[i]fies that which is forbidden."<sup>59</sup> The reader is not told why Zeptah in the Chaldea "signifies Egypt," though Zeptah is, arguably, a good Egyptian name: Za(t)-Ptah, meaning "daughter of Ptah."<sup>60</sup> The reader is also not told why Egypt "signifies that which is forbidden."<sup>61</sup> Further, neither Zeptah nor her daughter are called "forbidden" in the text, only the land Egypt explicitly "signifies" such. No other details concerning Ham's wife are given other than that stated above, so any claims of Zeptah/Egyptus being a descendant of Cain and the means by which his curse is passed along to the Egyptians is not supported by a careful reading of the text.<sup>62</sup>

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"Guide to the Scriptures," The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, <https://www.churchofjesuschrist.org/study/scriptures/gs/ham>. See also the *Old Testament Student Manual Genesis-2 Samuel*, which mentions that Ham's sons were denied priesthood because he had married Egyptus, a descendant of Cain. *Old Testament Student Manual Genesis-2 Samuel* (Salt Lake City: The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, 1980), 50–59.

58. Mauss, "Mormonism and the Negro," 14.

59. "Book of Abraham Manuscript, circa July–circa November 1835–A [Abraham 1:4–2:6]," 3, *The Joseph Smith Papers*, <https://www.josephsmithpapers.org/paper-summary/book-of-abraham-manuscript-circa-july-circa-november-1835-a-abraham-14-26/3>.

60. On Zeptah as a viable ancient Egyptian personal name see "Zeptah and Egyptes," Book of Abraham Insights, Pearl of Great Price Central, August 28, 2019, [https://www.pearlofgreatpricecentral.org/zeptah-and-egyptes/#\\_ftn4](https://www.pearlofgreatpricecentral.org/zeptah-and-egyptes/#_ftn4).

61. For one speculative idea, see Brent Metcalfe, "The Curious Textual History of 'Egyptus' the Wife of Ham," *The John Whitmer Historical Association Journal* 34, no. 2 (Fall/Winter 2014): 1–11.

62. During the review process for this article, I was made aware of a self-published work dealing with this topic: Matthieu Crouet, *Brigham Young and the Priesthood Ban: The Lineage Criterion* (Amazon Kindle, 2017). Crouet provides some similar arguments that the issue is lineage and not race per se; however, he perpetuates the assumption that the reason for the loss of priesthood among the pharaohs in the Book of Abraham was that Ham had married Cain's descendant, Egyptus, and that "marriage in and of itself can result in the loss of the priesthood to the posterity, even when the wife and the children would have embraced the beliefs of the husband or father" (p. 43). Again, attempting to tie Egyptus to Cain

Inheritances in the biblical and Egyptian cultures typically follow patriarchal lines, not matriarchal. In the Book of Abraham, the pharaohs claimed their right to priesthood from Ham, not Egyptus.<sup>63</sup> So no matter her ancestry, Ham's posterity would not be cut off from their inheritance of land or priesthood if Zeptah/Egyptus was in the covenant, just as Ishmael, the son of the Egyptian Hagar, was qualified as and understood to be Abraham's heir, until Isaac was born (see Genesis 15:4, 16:1–4, and 21:9–10). Since the biblical record indicates that Noah, his sons, and their wives were all part of the covenant promises of land and priesthood which the Lord established with them when they entered and left the ark (see Genesis 6:18 and 9:8–9), then there is nothing to indicate that marriage was the cause for any loss of priesthood in Ham's family. Consequently, any speculation that Egyptus carried a curse that affected her posterity has no real foundation and needs to be put to rest.

### The Right of the Firstborn

Abraham initially mentions in his record that the blessing he was seeking was the "right of the firstborn." Based on this, some have attempted to explain Pharaoh's priesthood curse as a more narrowly focused ban only against the right to *preside*, rather than a ban against actually possessing priesthood. For example, Alma Allred states:

In the Book of Abraham, Abraham explains that he sought the blessings of the fathers and the right to be ordained to administer those blessings. He says that he became an heir holding the right belonging to the fathers. According to LDS theology, the right to administer the ordinances is held by the presiding priesthood authority on the earth. In the days of Abraham, that right was held by the presiding patriarch. It started with Adam and came in due course to Abraham. Abraham 1:3–4 stipulates that the appointment came by lineage. The right to preside was the birthright which went to Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, Joseph, and finally to Ephraim.

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is too speculative, nor does any scriptural text suggest that Ham's marriage to his wife was a cause for any loss of priesthood. To the contrary, Genesis suggests that the sons of Noah and their wives were all recipients of the covenant blessings (see below). Crouet's work does not focus on the mechanics of inheritance as the reason lineage is the criterion and not race.

63. Nibley's contention that the pharaohs were disqualified from priesthood due to their descent through Ham's daughter, thus a matriarchal line, is not foolproof without knowing who her husband was (see Nibley, *Abraham in Egypt*, 133–34).

According to these LDS scriptures, even though the priesthood did not remain exclusively with Ephraim, the right to preside did. Moses presided over Israel even though he was of the tribe of Levi. Joseph Smith, however, claimed to be a “lawful heir” because he was of the house of Ephraim (D&C 86:8–11). Since this authority was passed from father to only one son, when Noah gave it to Shem, Ham could not be the heir. Ham and Japheth, together with their descendants, did not have the right to administer the priesthood because it was given to Shem. Esau lost the right to Jacob. Reuben lost the right to Joseph. Manasseh lost that right when Jacob conferred it upon Ephraim. Each man who lost the birthright did not lose the right to be ordained to the priesthood; rather, he lost the right to preside as *the* presiding high priest in a patriarchal order. The scripture does not say that Pharaoh could not hold the priesthood; it says that he could not have the “right of priesthood” (Abraham 1:27). This right had been given to Shem, who in turn gave it to his successor in the patriarchal office.

Years after the right of priesthood had been passed to Abraham, the Pharaohs were feigning a claim to it from Noah. They did not merely claim priesthood; they claimed the right to preside over the priesthood. Pharaoh, the son of Egyptus, established a patriarchal government in Egypt; but he was of that lineage by which he could not have the “right of priesthood” or “the right of the firstborn,” which belonged to Shem and his posterity. In response to the Pharaoh’s claims, Abraham states: “But the records of the fathers, even the patriarchs, concerning *the right of priesthood*, the Lord my God preserved in mine own hands” (Abraham 1:31). In other words, Abraham retained the right to preside over the priesthood.<sup>64</sup>

Allred asserts that priesthood was available generally to all sons but that the right to preside “was passed from father to only one son” — the birthright son. Unfortunately, Allred often conflates the mechanics and structure of priesthood in the ecclesiastical church with the priesthood

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64. Alma Allred, “The Traditions of Their Fathers: Myth versus Reality in LDS Scriptural Writings,” in *Black and Mormon*, ed. Newell G. Bringhurst and Darron T. Smith (Urbana, IL: University of Illinois Press, 2004), 45–46.

of a patriarchal order. In other words, in patriarchal or other ancient orders, receiving high priesthood (i.e., becoming a high priest) is the same as receiving the right to preside, especially in one's own family kingdom.<sup>65</sup> In other words, in ancient societies one did not separate high priesthood and presidency as Allred does based on modern ecclesiastical practices.

That receiving high priesthood itself is the right to preside is a concept that Joseph Smith appears to have restored: "The [high or] Melchisedek priesthood holds the right of presidency, and has power and authority over all the offices in the church, in all ages of the world, to administer in spiritual things" (D&C 107:3). Indeed, among "all ages of the world" the high priests of ancient religions wielded the supreme authority or presidency within their respective religions. Further, it was common to have multiple high priests, each presiding over their own family, district, or temple. In most ancient societies, the king himself was considered a high priest with the right to rule both politically and ecclesiastically. Smaller kingdoms (i.e., principalities) could each have a ruling king/high priest within a larger kingdom — for example, Melchizedek was both a king and high priest but did "reign under his father" (see Alma 13:18). Also, Lamoni and Antionmo each ruled as kings in their own lands but reigned under their father who was the king over all (see Mosiah 24:2; Alma 18:9 and 20:8).

While the current redaction of the Hebrew Bible seems to promote the idea that only one high priest and one temple could exist at a time in ancient Israel, other evidence calls this into question. Scholars are divided on whether the Jewish temples discovered at Elephantine and Leontopolis in Egypt had high priests for their establishment and function.<sup>66</sup> Latter-day Saints would certainly lean towards the idea that they did, in light of the Book of Mormon's claim. For example, Nephi

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65. The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints' recent (2018) priesthood reorganization where only those actually serving in presiding roles are considered members of the high priest quorums appears to be an effort to better align with this principle.

66. Deborah W. Rooke, *Zadok's Heirs: The Role and Development of the High Priesthood in Ancient Israel* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 2000); Bezalel Porten, et al., eds., *The Elephantine Papyri in English: Three Millennia of Cross-Cultural Continuity and Change* (Leiden, NDL: Brill, 1996); Joseph Mélèze-Modrzejewski, *The Jews of Egypt* (Philadelphia: Jewish Publication Society, 1995); Arthur Cowley, *The Aramaic Papyri of the Fifth Century* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1923); Eduard Sachau, *Aramäische Papyrus und Ostraka aus einer jüdischen Militär-Kolonie zu Elephantine* (Leipzig: Hinrichs, 1911).



and many others in the Book of Mormon implicitly or explicitly claim high priestly authority, establish temples, and preside over churches even though such already existed in Jerusalem (see 2 Nephi 5:16; Mosiah 11:11; Mosiah 23:16; Alma 13:10, 29:42, 46:6, 38; Helaman 3:25; and 3 Nephi 6:21, 27).

Like these ancient orders, Joseph Smith's restoration of priesthood, in its fullest eternal form relative to families and temples, indicates that anyone can obtain the fullness of the high or Melchizedek priesthood and possess all the powers, titles, keys of their kingdom, and rights to preside as king and high priest related to it:

[The order of Melchizedek] was not the power of a Prophet nor apostle nor Patriarc[h] only but of King or Priest to God to open the windows of Heaven and pour out the peace & Law of endless Life to man & No man can attain to the Joint heirship with Jesus Christ with out bein[g] administered to by one having the same power & Authority of Melchisede[c].<sup>67</sup>

Indeed, the rights and titles of the high priesthood that anyone can obtain appear to include the right of the firstborn:

They [those who inherit the Celestial Kingdom] are they who are the church of the Firstborn: they are they into whose hands the Father has given all things — they are they who are priests and kings, who have received of his fulness, and of his glory; and are priests of the Most High after the order of Melchizedek, which was after the order of Enoch, which was after the order of the only begotten Son. ... They who dwell in his presence are the church of the Firstborn; and they see as they are seen, and know as they are known, having received of his fulness and of his grace; and he makes them equal in power, and in might, and in dominion. (D&C 76:54–57, 94–95)

Note that Joseph Smith believed this is what Paul had in mind when he declared that all could be “joint-heirs” with Christ (Romans 8:17). In other words, all can become a firstborn, a son of God, in similitude of Christ, thus becoming the “church of the Firstborn” and becoming part of the “order of the Only Begotten Son.” In this light, the Book of

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67. “Discourse, 27 August 1843, as Reported by Franklin D. Richards,” 26, *The Joseph Smith Papers*, <https://www.josephsmithpapers.org/paper-summary/discourse-27-august-1843-as-reported-by-franklin-d-richards/2>.



Abraham's ban against having the right of the firstborn, which is the right to preside as a high priest and king in one's own kingdom, is a ban against the high priesthood.

Allred cites D&C 86:8–11 to suggest that Joseph Smith claimed he was the sole "lawful heir [sic]" of the priesthood because he was of the house of Ephraim who had the sole right of firstborn anciently, but the text Allred cites does not actually say this. It actually states "ye [plural] are lawful heirs [plural]" of the priesthood, suggesting that the inheritance or right of priesthood was of a greater scope than just one singular president within it as Allred proposes.

The generational curse referenced earlier in D&C 121:16–21 also suggests that more than one can have the "right of priesthood" for it severs anyone who persecutes the Lord's anointed from this right: "They [plural] shall not have right to the priesthood, nor their [plural] posterity after them [plural] from generation to generation." Such a curse would not make sense if Joseph Smith alone had the "right."

There is one passage of scripture that can suggest that only one person has the right of the firstborn or presidency: "and I have appointed unto my servant Joseph to hold this power in the last days, and there is never but one on the earth at a time on whom this power and the keys of this priesthood are conferred" (D&C 132:7). This passage, in its context, is typically understood to reference the ecclesiastical church president's sole authority, though delegable, to authorize all ordinances and to ultimately confirm them, making one's calling and election sure (cf. D&C 124:39 and Moses 5:59). However, the keys of the kingdom of the Church are understood to operate differently than, though in harmony with, the keys of the family kingdom the Church is creating.

While the Church is indeed governed by the keys of one man, it seeks at the same time, as noted previously, to make every man and woman a king/high priest and queen/high priestess holding the keys of their own kingdom in a family system, both in time and eternity. The ecclesiastical church and patriarchal order are both true forms of government, but each function in different environments. Indeed, contrary to fundamentalist movements, no one today can actually have an independent family kingdom in a fully established patriarchal order, because all are currently subject to gentile governments worldwide and because, as this paper argues, they are all currently still cut off from their eternal inheritances due to the lack of complete welding links back to Adam and Eve. Consequently, a special dispensing of priesthood and chains of authority direct from heaven had to occur in modern

days to allow the Church the authority to create family kingdoms and construct the necessary welding links of inheritance back to Adam and Eve whereby men and women can legally and lawfully preside as kings/queens/priest/priestesses forever as heirs of Adam and Eve, who are heirs of Christ and, ultimately, the Father. All must operate within the structure of the Church and the presidencies/keys it holds until such a time as that scaffolding falls away and the family order and unbroken lines of inheritance are fully established.

Therefore, any assertions that the “right of priesthood” was only given to one person at a time and was separate from the priesthood generally is conflating the rules of an ecclesiastical kingdom of the Church operating in a gentile dominion with the rules of family kingdom that Abraham and the pharaohs understood and which Joseph Smith also began to restore. In other words, in antiquity and in Joseph Smith’s restoration of the patriarchal order there is not much distinction between having the right of priesthood, the right of the firstborn, and possessing the high priesthood. All who possess the high priesthood are ultimately defined as kings and queens possessing the right to preside, bless, and administer in the ordinances thereof, just as Abraham sought and as the pharaohs feigned.

## Conclusions

For too many generations, people have used distinguishing “marks,” such as bodily features (the shape of the nose or skin color) and other common phenotypes as well as being known for certain skills or products or even symbols, flags, clothing, makeup, etc. to determine lineal or tribal affiliation. However, the use of quick “profiles” such as these can easily create errors of judgment. Outward appearances or other markers, even biological ones, are no legal basis or guarantee of lineal descent and one’s right to inherit or one’s disinherited status. Indeed, the only certitude given in the Book of Abraham for Abraham’s inherited right to priesthood does not come from any appeal to racial markers or the like but rather, simply, to the “records of the fathers.”<sup>68</sup> In other words, genealogies are an acceptable form of legal proof to obtain the divine blessings.

If Ham and those who maintained their inheritance through him are truly disinherited from the divine priesthood due to some crime Ham committed, then, based on the legal mechanics of inheritance laws, any

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68. “Book of Abraham and Facsimiles,” 705.

claim that a modern person is a descendant of Ham and cannot inherit the priesthood through Ham would require: 1) proof that the modern was actually a descendant of Ham according to record, not simple profiling, 2) proof that Ham never (even beyond mortality) repented, rejoined the covenant, and became an heir once again, *and* 3) the modern descendant openly rejects inheriting their priesthood through Shem, Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob but insists their authority comes from Ham as the pharaohs apparently did. However, 1) we are not yet able to prove any modern descendancy from Ham according to record, 2) no one knows Ham's current status in the eternal scheme of things, and 3) it is not apparent that anyone joining the Church in modern times rejects the priesthood of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob and instead claims their right through Ham.

Additionally, trying to determine if any modern is part of a cursed lineage, or not, overlooks one major issue: Joseph Smith's commentary on Malachi 4:5–6, noted above, indicates that without generational links providing an uninterrupted flow of the inheritance back to Adam, the "whole earth" would be smitten with a curse. In other words, all of us are cursed or disinherited from the divine blessings of land and priestly kingship/queenship given to Adam and Eve because all of us are descendants of ancestors, like Ham, who severed themselves from the covenant.

Understanding better the mechanics of inheritance law does not answer the question why a modern priesthood and temple ban existed. If anything, it complicates the matter. One of the earliest reasons Brigham Young gave for the modern ban was one of timing — i.e., which lineage should be restored to their inheritance first: "the Lord told Cain that he should not receive the blessings of the preisthood nor his see[d], until the last of the posterity of Able had received the preisthood [sic], until the redemption [sic] of the earth."<sup>69</sup> This explanation, however, does not overcome the problems of assuming a modern person's lineage based largely on appearance or even a supposed general geographic ancestry. Such bases are typically not enough to legally establish an inheritance as Abraham's report suggests. This also does not overcome the problem that all families have broken links and so no modern can fully claim their royal priesthood by lineal inheritance, not at least until the broken chains are reformed.

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69. Brigham Young, "Address to Utah Legislature," February 5, 1852, George D. Watt Papers, Church History Library, transcript, <https://archive.org/details/CR100317B0001F0017/page/n3/mode/2up>.

If modern priesthood authority were established directly from heaven to Joseph Smith as a grace of God to circumvent the broken inheritances of priesthood that all families currently experience, then why would lineage be a basis for withholding priesthood to anyone? If lineage is the basis, then everyone should be denied priesthood since all lineages are currently cursed or disinherited. I suppose one could argue that giving priesthood through ecclesiastical channels, by the laying on of hands, to a modern provides that person the ability to work in temples to repair their own family inheritance lines, and if Brigham Young's claim that God determined some lineages would be delayed in this reconstruction project until other lineages were repaired first is doctrine, then an internal logic for a ban could be argued. But there is still the problem of profiling and assuming one's lineage without complete legal records to prove such and also the difficulty of why one, theologically, would need to be kept to their specific lineage when adoption exists as a legal means to receive an inheritance in some other way. In other words, why couldn't an actual descendant of Cain, if such exists, choose to be adopted and inherit the blessings as Abraham's, thus Abel's, seed? These and other questions still linger concerning the modern ban, even in light of inheritance laws.

It is hoped that this study at least provides a little more context and clarity to increase the accuracy of those addressing such difficult historical issues. While there is still no clear reason for the modern priesthood and temple ban and there is certainly still much work to do to overcome all the racist attitudes, feelings, and remarks that grew out of the practice, we do rejoice in the fact that today all can bind themselves to their ancestors and can begin or continue to create the welding link that will allow each to fully inherit the blessings of eternal life through their families — a work that will depend on our children to finish, thus turning our hearts to them, for even we will have to depend on them to provide us with the full legal claims to our inheritance and exaltation in Christ.

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# THE WORDS OF GAD THE SEER: AN APPARENTLY ANCIENT TEXT WITH INTRIGUING ORIGINS AND CONTENT

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Jeff Lindsay

Review of Meir Bar-Ilan, *Words of Gad the Seer* (Scotts Valley, CA: CreateSpace Publishing, 2016); Christian Israel, *The Words of Gad the Seer: Bible Cross-Reference Edition* (self-published, 2020); and Ken Johnson, *Ancient Book of Gad the Seer: Referenced in 1 Chronicles 29:29 and Alluded to in 1 Corinthians 12:12 and Galatians 4:26* (self-published, 2016).

**Abstract:** *A long-overlooked Hebrew document from an ancient Jewish colony in Cochin, India, purports to contain the words of Gad the Seer. Professor Meir Bar-Ilan has translated the text into English and has stirred interest in the fascinating document. At least two other English translations are also now available. Here we examine the story of the coming forth of the text and some issues of possible interest to Latter-day Saints, including some of Bar-Ilan's insights in evaluating the antiquity of disputed texts. Bar-Ilan's translation of this intriguing document and his related publications may be valuable for anyone with an interest in the Hebrew scriptures and ancient Judaism.*

Meir Bar-Ilan, a prominent Jewish scholar at Israel's Meir Bar-Ilan University, named after his grandfather,<sup>1</sup> has published a translation of an ancient Hebrew manuscript found in India purporting to contain the words of Gad the Seer. Bar-Ilan's *Words of Gad the Seer*,

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1. His grandfather is described in Wikipedia, s.v. "Meir Bar-Ilan," last modified February 9, 2022, 09:11, [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Meir\\_Bar-Ilan](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Meir_Bar-Ilan).

his translation of the document called “The Words of Gad the Seer,”<sup>2</sup> is a work that might be of interest to many members of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints.

Bar-Ilan believes the Hebrew document contains an authentic ancient text, but not one dating to the days of Gad the Seer as mentioned in the Old Testament. Rather, he believes it was composed around 2,000 years ago.

Gad was a prophet living at the time of David who seemed to have special status, based on 2 Samuel 24:11, which speaks of “Gad, David’s seer.” But like many prophets, Gad was not afraid to speak unpleasant things to his king (e.g., see 2 Samuel 12:1–13). One of the very few mentions of Gad occurs in 1 Chronicles 29:29, where we read that the acts of David the king were written “in the book of Gad the seer.” I have occasionally cited that verse in discussing the scriptures with others who accept the Bible to illustrate that the Bible we have might not contain all the scripture that has been written in the past. A common rejoinder is, “There may have been such a book, but if God didn’t preserve it for us in the Bible, it’s not scripture.” It would seem that there can be no such thing as lost scripture with that definition, and if it can’t be lost, it presumably can’t be found. In reply, I have asked others what they would do if a book that ancient Jews or Christians regarded and preserved as Biblical scripture became lost and then was found again?

My theoretical question perhaps became a little less theoretical with the fairly recent discovery, translation, and publication in 2016 of a long-lost manuscript that might have connections to the ancient lost book of Gad the Seer. The Hebrew document that Bar-Ilan translated has been through many human hands and may have some of the corruption common to non-canonical works such as the Apocrypha and pseudepigrapha, but Bar-Ilan, the scholar who has explored this text in the most detail and provided an important translation into English, believes it has ancient roots and is worthy of our attention.

The story of this unusual text may be relevant to our own and much more miraculous story of the finding, translation, and publication of the ancient books of scripture from ancient Hebrews and Christians that we have in the Book of Mormon. In addition to its fascinating content, an issue of particular interest is found in one of the reasons for Bar-Ilan’s

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2. I will refer to the Hebrew document as “The Words of Gad the Seer” while the nearly identical title for the published translation will be in italics: *Words of Gad the Seer*.

acceptance of the Hebrew text as an ancient document, namely, its blatant “plagiarism” of the Bible.

Bar-Ilan in a peer-reviewed article for the *Journal of Biblical Literature* considers the arguments made for a medieval origin of “The Words of Gad the Seer” and refutes them in detail, and then argues the case for a more ancient origin in late antiquity. His first argument will be of interest to Book of Mormon students:

The Words of Gad the Seer incorporate three chapters from the Bible as if they were part of the whole work. Chapter 10 here is Psalm 145, chapter 11 is no other than Psalm 144, and chapter 7 is a kind of compilation of 2 Sam 24:1–21 with 1 Chr 21:1–30, a chapter that deals with the deeds of Gad the Seer. As will be demonstrated later, the Biblical text in Gad’s book is slightly different from the masoretic text, with some ‘minor’ changes that might be regarded as scribal errata, though others are extremely important. In any case, **this phenomenon of inserting whole chapters from the Bible into one’s treatise is known only from the Bible itself**. For example, David’s song in 2 Sam 22:2–51 appears as well in Psalm 18:2–50, not to speak, of course, of other parallels in Biblical literature. It does not matter where the ‘original’ position of this chapter was. Only one who lived in the ‘days of the Bible’, or thought so of himself, could have made such a plagiarism including a Biblical text in his own work. [*emphasis mine*]<sup>3</sup>

Now that’s fascinating. This is not some unschooled Latter-day Saint apologist desperately trying to argue that heavy biblical plagiarism is not a reason to reject the antiquity of an allegedly ancient document like the Book of Mormon. It is a prominent scholar of Hebrew literature writing in a respected peer-reviewed journal on biblical literature, explaining that the extensive “plagiarism” of biblical material in a disputed work is a characteristic of ancient literature that helps rule out a relatively modern origin for the text. In light of Bar-Ilan’s argument, the things Nephi and other Book of Mormon writers do with other biblical texts, such as quoting entire chapters of Isaiah or combining extensive passages of

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3. Meir Bar-Ilan, “The Date of The Words of Gad the Seer,” *Journal of Biblical Literature* 109, no. 3 (1990): 477–93, available at <https://faculty.biu.ac.il/~barilm/articles/publications/publications0025.html>.

scripture from different books, widely condemned as blatant plagiarism by our critics, might actually be indicators of antiquity, not modernity.<sup>4</sup>

### The Story Behind “The Words of Gad the Seer”

The coming forth of the document “The Words of Gad the Seer” is a story that involves the the scattering of Israel and a Jewish colony in India and may raise interesting issues about ancient Jews not only in India but also in Yemen with possible relevance to Lehi’s Trail. This story also touches upon themes of lost and restored ancient scripture, apocalyptic literature like the Book of Enoch and our own Book of Moses, writing on metal plates, and other Latter-day Saint themes such as free agency, three main categories of outcomes in final judgment, seeing God, and even Alma’s discourse on the word as a seed in Alma 32.

There may be much food for thought as we contemplate the story behind the text and the translation published in Bar-Ilan’s very short book, *Words of Gad the Seer*. Professor Bar-Ilan has been a professor for decades at Bar-Ilan University, often abbreviated as BIU, where he teaches in both the Talmud and Jewish History departments and has an interesting list of publications,<sup>5</sup> a number of which are related to “The Words of Gad the Seer.”

Unfortunately, Bar-Ilan’s English volume is a bare-bones paperback just 23 pages in length that provides the 5000+ words of the pseudepigraphal text without any explanation, background, or footnotes. With both the printed book and the Kindle edition, one can’t even determine who published it. There is a 390-page scholarly edition in Hebrew from Bar-Ilan with extensive commentary and analysis of the Hebrew text on the source document.<sup>6</sup> While that tome has not been

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4. On the compiling and reworking of different passages of the Old Testament, see Matthew L. Bowen, “Onomastic Wordplay on Joseph and Benjamin and Gezera Shawa in the Book of Mormon,” *Interpreter: A Journal of Latter-day Saint Faith and Scholarship* 18 (2016): 255–73, <https://journal.interpreterfoundation.org/onomastic-wordplay-on-joseph-and-benjamin-and-gezera-shawa-in-the-book-of-mormon/>.

5. “Prof. Meir Bar-Ilan: Publications,” Faculty, Bar-Ilan University, <https://faculty.biu.ac.il/~barilm/english/publications.html>.

6. Meir Bar-Ilan, דברי גד החזוה (The Words of Gad the Seer) (Rehovot, Israel: Meir Bar-Ilan, 2015), 390 pages. A review of the Hebrew volume is provided by Rabbi Dr. Simcha Rosenberg, “Book Review: The Words of Gad the Seer,” *Jewish Bible Quarterly* 45, no. 1 (2017): 59–60, <https://jbqnew.jewishbible.org/uncategorized/book-review-words-gad-seer/> and [https://jbqnew.jewishbible.org/assets/Uploads/451/jbq\\_451\\_rosenbergbookreviewGAD.pdf](https://jbqnew.jewishbible.org/assets/Uploads/451/jbq_451_rosenbergbookreviewGAD.pdf).



translated into English, related information can be found in a series of articles on Bar-Ilan's website. I look forward to Latter-day Saint Hebrew speakers providing future reviews of the more extensive Hebrew edition.

A little more information and a slightly different translation is available in Christian Israel's independently published 2020 version, *The Words of Gad the Seer: Bible Cross-Reference Edition*, available in paperback only.<sup>7</sup> The translation is slightly different than Bar-Ilan's.

The largest English volume available, as far as I know, with both Kindle and paperback editions, is Ken Johnson's *The Ancient Book of Gad the Seer: Referenced in 1 Chronicles 29:29 and alluded to in 1 Corinthians 12:12 and Galatians 4:26*.<sup>8</sup> This has extensive but often questionable commentary from the author, who appears to be an evangelical seeking to strongly guide the reader toward his preferred readings, stressing favorite topics such as Messianic themes, some of which may be valid. For example, he sees the condemnation of Edom as a condemnation of Rome, even inserting "[Rome]" after Edom in the text and stating in brackets that the fall of Edom by a "terrible nation" refers to the destruction of the Byzantine Empire by the Ottoman Empire. The insertion of altered text in brackets to push his pet themes is distracting. Fortunately, Johnson has provided his translation without all the commentary and with fewer bracketed insertions in a free online file.<sup>9</sup>

The translations from Christian Israel and Ken Johnson may have been influenced by Bar-Ilan's earlier work but differ in many verses, so there was certainly some independent effort in these works. Johnson's translation, though, often seems remarkably close to Bar-Ilan's. For example, the wording of the last four verses of Chapter 2, beginning with Bar-Ilan's "At the end of days Michael the great prince shall stand up in war like a whirlwind against Samel the prince of the world to put him under his feet," are identical in Johnson except for changing "the world" to "this world" and spelling Samel with the more common transliteration of Samael. While Christian Israel's work offers some helpful cross-references to various verses in the Bible, the translation has some obvious problems such as typographical errors. For example, in the

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7. Christian Israel, *The Words of Gad the Seer: Bible Cross-Reference Edition* (self-published, 2022).

8. Ken Johnson, *The Ancient Book of Gad the Seer: Referenced in 1 Chronicles 29:29 and alluded to in 1 Corinthians 12:12 and Galatians 4:26* (self-published, 2016).

9. The PDF for Johnson's commentary-free version of *Ancient Book of Gad* is at <https://pdf4pro.com/amp/view/ancient-book-of-gad-the-seer-biblefacts-org-1b16d1.html>.

verse about Michael mentioned above, Israel's text tells us that Michael "shall up in war," missing the verb "stand." The same verse speaks of the "breathe of the Lord" when "breath" is meant.

The translation I trust the most, of course, is that of Professor Bar-Ilan. All subsequent quotes from "The Words of Gad the Seer" will be from Bar-Ilan's translation.

### **First Mention: The Chronicles of the Jews of Cochin**

Many discoveries are behind the story of translation of "The Words of Gad the Seer." An overview is provided on the Barnes and Noble website, which I believe is just a translation from the Hebrew description of Bar-Ilan's 2015 scholarly edition of *Words of Gad the Seer*:

Gad is a prophet most associated with King David in the Holy Bible. This book is the outcome of a prolonged study of a manuscript that was found serendipitously 34 years ago. Actually, this was a re-discovery of a text that for some reason had escaped the eyes of many. It is a story of the survival of Jews remote in place and time, and of their books, visions, angels and divine voices, combined with their belief in God and his covenant with King David and Israel. There is no other book that resembles this one.

A book by the name Words of Gad the Seer is mentioned at the end of I Chronicles, presumably one of the sources of the history of King David. Ever since the book was considered lost and it is mentioned nowhere. In the 18th century Jews from Cochin said that their ancestors have had several apocryphal books, including Words of Gad the Seer, and this statement was published first by Johann Gottfried Eichhorn (1789) and translated [into modern Hebrew] by Naphtali H. Wesseley who publicized these fantastic claims (1790). Since none saw the book, it was probably considered to be an oriental legend.<sup>10</sup>

The first mention of the existence of "The Words of Gad the Seer" came from a chronicle of the Jews of Cochin, India (Kerala State on the Malabar Coast of southwest India), that was published in several languages. Bar-Ilan, in a paper for the *Journal for the Study of Pseudepigrapha*, gives details on the various people who discussed the *Chronicle of the Jews in Cochin* and then notes that:

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10. "Words of Gad the Seer," Barnes and Noble, <https://www.barnesandnoble.com/w/words-of-gad-the-seer-meir-bar-ilan-phd/1125415137>.

The chronicle says:

These exiled people brought with them (to Yemen) a book of Moses' Torah, book of Joshua, book of Ruth, book of Judges, first and second books of Samuel, books of: 1 Kings, Song of Songs of Solomon, Songs of Hallel — David, Assaf, Heiman and the sons of Korah, Proverbs, Ecclesiastes of Solomon, as well as his Riddles, prophecies of Gad, Nathan, Shemaiah and Ahijah, age-old Job, Jonah, and a book of Isaiah, etc.

These books were preserved under the authority of the patriarch of the Jews, 'Shimon Rabban from the tribe of Ephraim, who was the first (patriarch) in the period of Yemen captivity who attempted to preserve the books'. The Chronicle of the Jews of Cochin continues with a description of the history of those books which, according to it, were confiscated by the king, and only after a fast and prayers were the books returned to the Jews — 10 years later. For our purposes it should be added that some 500 years later the Jews in Yemen were exiled by King Prozom.

Since the exiled people had known of the Jews in Poona and Gujarat in India, they preferred to go there, and they and their descendants lived there for some 600 or 700 years. Almost all of those Jews were forced to convert, and less than 72 families moved from Poona and Gujarat to Malabar. Those who moved were welcomed by the governor, Cherman Perumal, who gave them privileges to encourage them to stay there, as is written on copper plates, and there in Cochin, the copper plates have remained until this day. ... We can determine that this "Chronicle of the Jews of Cochin" is from the first half of the 18th century.<sup>11</sup>

In the 1890s, a Hebrew manuscript containing "The Words of Gad the Seer" was noticed by Solomon Schechter in the Cambridge Library among a collection of Hebrew documents that were obtained by Claudius Buchanan.<sup>12</sup> Buchanan purchased the document from the "Black Jews"

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11. Meir Bar-Ilan, "The Discovery of The Words of Gad The Seer," *Journal for the Study of Pseudepigrapha* 11 (1993): 95–107, available at <https://faculty.biu.ac.il/%7Ebarilm/articles/publications/publications0048.html>.

12. Solomon Schechter, "Notes on Hebrew MSS. in the University Library at Cambridge. VI," *The Jewish Quarterly Review* 6, no. 1 (October 1893): 136–45, here

at Cochin in the state of Kerala on the Malabar Coast of India. There are two groups of Jews there, an ancient colony that has married with local peoples enough that they have the darker appearance of the local Indian population and a more recent group, the “White Jews,” that emigrated from Europe and generally avoided intermarriage.<sup>13</sup> Buchanan described the Jews there and their records in his 1811 book, *Christian Researches in Asia*.<sup>14</sup> As noted below, Schechter’s brief mention did little to motivate further investigation into the overlooked book. Over a century later, it was the work of Meir Bar-Ilan that began making this ancient work accessible to the world.

Bar-Ilan describes the short Hebrew book he translated and mentions the additional commentary:

The [Words of Gad the Seer] is 5227 words in length written in a pseudo-Biblical Hebrew intended to be a book written by the Seer of King David in the 10th century B.C.E. The text is an anthology and varies in style and character: 3 chapters are apocalyptic in nature, 2 chapters are a “mere” copy of Ps 145 and 144 (with different superscriptions and all sorts of different readings, some of them highly important); one chapter is a harmonization of 1 Sam 24 with 1 Chr 21 (that resembles ancient harmonizations of texts as found in the Samaritan Pentateuch and Qumran alike). One chapter is a kind of addendum to 2 Sam 13 (a “feminine story”), one chapter is a sermon, one chapter is a folk story, and there are more blessings, liturgies and other issues. Literary genre, scribalism and scribes’ technique are described and analyzed. The book comes with an index and a vast bibliography. The appearance of the text will add a great deal to our understanding of Jewish History and religion.

Date: The text assumed to be written either in the Land of Israel at the end of the first century or in the Middle Ages Europe.<sup>15</sup>

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at 140, <https://www.jstor.org/stable/1450113>.

13. Samyuktha Nair, “Did You Know About The Black Jews & White Jews in India’s Kerala?,” *ED Youth Blog*, *ED Times*, April 11, 2022, <https://edtimes.in/did-you-know-about-the-black-jews-white-jews-in-indias-kerala/>.

14. Claudius Buchanan, *Christian Researches in Asia* (Boston: Samuel T. Armstrong, 1811), 164–201, see particularly 176–85, <https://archive.org/details/christianresear01horngoog/page/n176/mode/2up>.

15. “Words of Gad the Seer,” Barnes and Noble.

Similar information on the discovery of the Hebrew manuscript is also provided in the introduction in Johnson's book.<sup>16</sup>

### Connections to Explore

There is much more to the story as Bar-Ilan explores the various efforts to publish information about "The Words of Gad the Seer." While the story would seem to be of interest to many people, it's puzzling how poorly known this text is. Bar-Ilan offers a reason why this has occurred:

This intriguing story of the lost books at Cochin is near its end. It is hardly credible that books that were mentioned in three languages, and especially in so many Hebrew editions were later overlooked. The only possible reason for that, I assume, is that the fascinating stories emerging from Cochin were considered to be legendary in character, such as any modern scholar should ignore. When one of [these] 'legends' became true [discovery of the Hebrew manuscript with "The Words of Gad the Seer"], its source was already forgotten and the whole issue was misunderstood and misjudged. However, in future studies I hope to demonstrate the significance of The Words of Gad the Seer, its date, its geographical source, and much more.<sup>17</sup>

As we see in the accounts of the background story, "The Words of Gad the Seer" may have roots in scriptures brought by ancient Jews who fled to Yemen. Perhaps this happened near the time when the Ten Tribes were scattered, with some from the Ten Tribes seeking new homelands. Ancient Jewish colonies in Yemen are an important aspect of the diaspora.<sup>18</sup> Warren Aston has suggested that a Jewish colony in the area of Nahom/Nehem in Yemen may have assisted in providing a proper Hebrew burial for Ishmael.<sup>19</sup> Jewish burials in Yemen are attested no later than 300 BC, and since we know of later Jewish presence

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16. Johnson, *Ancient Book of Gad*, 8–9.

17. Bar-Ilan, "Discovery."

18. See "Jews of Yemen — History — When Did the Jews Arrive in Yemen?," "Docuwebs," WysInfo, <https://wysinfo.com/the-jews-of-yemen-history-when-did-jews-settle-in-yemen/>; and Wikipedia, s.v. "Yemenite Jews," [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Yemenite\\_Jews#Early\\_history](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Yemenite_Jews#Early_history).

19. See discussion in Jeff Lindsay, "Joseph and the Amazing Technicolor Dream Map: Part 1 of 2," *Interpreter: A Journal of Mormon Scripture* 19 (2016): 153–239, <https://journal.interpreterfoundation.org/joseph-and-the-amazing-technicolor-dream-map-part-1-of-2/>.

in the Nihm tribal area, it is possible that Jews could have been there earlier and could have been able to assist in proper burials.<sup>20</sup> Aston also mentions Yemeni Jewish traditions of seven ancient Jewish migrations into Yemen. Further, there is evidence that Jewish traders and merchants were interacting with Yemen before Lehi's era.<sup>21</sup> It would be fascinating to know what versions of a book from Gad the Seer might have been brought to Yemen anciently, perhaps by Jews who established colonies in Yemen and perhaps even by Lehi on his brass plates.

One aspect of the story of ancient texts among the Jews at Cochin, India, is the issue of writing on metal plates. The Jews at Cochin were said to have kept their ancient history on copper or brass plates, consistent with traditions of using copper plates in India for important legal documents going back at least to the third century BC.<sup>22</sup> A hint about scriptures written on metal comes from one source who visited the Cochin colony several times early in the 1700s, Captain Alexander

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20. See Warren P. Aston, *Lehi and Sariah in Arabia: The Old World Setting of the Book of Mormon* (self-published, 2015). See particularly the sections "Ishmael's Death," "Nahom Today," and "Were the Jews Once Part of the Tribe?" in Part 3.

21. Ibid. See the section "Religion in Arabia" in Part 1.

22. See Krishnendu Ray, "Material Melieu of a Western Indian Vaisnava Temple-Cluster: Gleanings From Sanjeli Copper Plates (AD 499–515 AD)," *Proceedings of the Indian History Congress* 64 (2003): 254–60, <http://www.jstor.com/stable/44145467>; Richard Salomon, "New Inscriptional Evidence for the History of the Aulikaras of Mandasor," *Indo-Iranian Journal* 32, no. 1 (January 1989): 1–36, <https://www.jstor.org/stable/24654606>; Sanjukta Datta, "Issuance, Engravers, and Omissions," *Proceedings of the Indian History Congress* 78 (2017): 97–103, <https://www.jstor.org/stable/10.2307/26906073>; Dev Kumar Jhanjh, "Professor V.K. Thakur Memorial Prize Paper: Akṣaśālika, Akṣaśālin and Suvarṇakāra as the Engravers of Copper Plate Charters of Odisha (C. 7th–11th Centuries CE)," *Proceedings of the Indian History Congress* 78 (2017): 117–26, <https://www.jstor.org/stable/10.2307/26906076>; Dániel Balogh, "Rāṇasimha Revisited: A New Copper-plate Inscription of the Candrāvati Paramāra Dynasty," *Journal of the Royal Asiatic Society* 22, no. 1, series 3, Medieval India and the Paramara Dynasty (January 2012): 93–106, <https://www.jstor.org/stable/41490376>; and H.S. Thosar, "The Abhiras in Indian History," *Proceedings of the Indian History Congress* 51 (1990): 56–65, <https://www.jstor.org/stable/44148188>. For a general overview, see Wikipedia, s.v. "Indian Copper Plate Inscriptions," last modified July 28, 2022, 4:06, [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Indian\\_copper\\_plate\\_inscriptions](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Indian_copper_plate_inscriptions). Images of the Velvikudi copper plates, a set of 10 copper plates joined in a booklet with a metal ring, can be viewed at Wikipedia, s.v. "Velvikudi Inscription," last modified November 15, 2022, 17:17, [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Velvikudi\\_inscription](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Velvikudi_inscription).

Hamilton<sup>23</sup> (a British sailor, not the US statesman). In his *A New Account of the East Indies*, he stated that they had kept their history recorded on copper plates stored in a synagogue.<sup>24</sup> He reports:

They [the Jews in Cochin, India] have a Synagogue at Couchin, not far from the King's Palace, about two Miles from the City, in which are carefully kept their Records, engraven in Copper-plates in Hebrew characters; and when any of the Characters decay, they are new cut, so that they can shew their own History from the Reign of Nebuchadnezzar to this present Time ...

They declare themselves to be of the Tribe of Manasseh.<sup>25</sup>

I have previously discussed Hamilton's statement and its relationship to several Book of Mormon issues on the *Mormanity* blog (now *Arise from the Dust*), also noting the improbability of Joseph Smith being aware of the metal plates of the Jews at Cochin.<sup>26</sup>

Many decades after Hamilton's various visits to Cochin, Claudius Buchanan visited the Jews there and discussed them and their records in his 1811 book, *Christian Researches in Asia*.<sup>27</sup> He describes the Jews there but he makes no mention of Jewish records on plates stored in a synagogue. Buchanan does describe ancient "tablets of brass" created by a Syrian Christian group in Malabar, India, which were deposited in the Fort of Cochin and "on which were engraved rights of nobility, and other privileges granted by a Prince of a former age."<sup>28</sup> While these were long thought to be lost, they were found and put in possession of

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23. See Wikipedia, s.v. "Alexander Hamilton (sailor)," last modified June 28, 2022, 17:01, [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Alexander\\_Hamilton\\_\(sailor\)](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Alexander_Hamilton_(sailor)).

24. Alexander Hamilton, *A New Account of the East Indies, Giving an exact and copious Description of the Situation, Product, Manufactures, Laws, Customs, Religion, Trade, &c. of all the Countries and Islands, which lie between the Cape of Good Hope, and the Island of Japon* [ . . . ] (London: 1744), 1:323–24, available at [https://www.google.com/books/edition/A\\_New\\_Account\\_of\\_the\\_East\\_Indies/-jNagGDT-PsC??hl=en&gbpv=1&pg=PA323&printsec=frontcover](https://www.google.com/books/edition/A_New_Account_of_the_East_Indies/-jNagGDT-PsC??hl=en&gbpv=1&pg=PA323&printsec=frontcover).

25. Hamilton, *A New Account*, 1:324.

26. Jeff Lindsay, "The Jewish Copper Plates of Cochin, India and a Hint of an Ancient Jewish Tradition of Writing on Metal Plates," *Arise from the Dust* (blog), December 20, 2020, <https://www.arisefromthedust.com/the-jewish-copper-plates-of-cochin/>.

27. Buchanan, *Researches in Asia*, 176–85.

28. *Ibid.*, 113.



a British officer, Lieutenant Colonel Macaulay, who gave the following description:

The Christian Tablets are six in number. They are composed of a mixed metal. The engraving on the largest plate is thirteen inches long, by about four broad. They are closely written, four of them on both sides of the plate, making in all eleven pages.<sup>29</sup>

He also quotes from the journal of Lord William Bentinek, who was governor of Madras and visited Cochin from 1806 to 1808:

On my inquiry into the antiquity of the White Jews, they first delivered to me a narrative, in the Hebrew Language, of their arrival in India, which has been handed down to them from their fathers; and then exhibited their ancient brass Plate, containing their charter and freedom of residence, given by a king of Malabar.<sup>30</sup>

Bentinek does not describe the medium used for the Hebrew record, but it presumably was not on metal plates, or he would have mentioned that. The ancient brass plate mentioned is the royal charter granted to the Jews of Cochin by a king of Kerala, India, a record engraved on copper plates.<sup>31</sup> The set of three plates associated with the charter have a traditional date of AD 379 but are more likely to date to around AD 1000.

But Claudius Buchanan did more than merely mention the brass plate of the Cochin Jews. He had a replica made and transported to Cambridge, but there is controversy about whether he actually kept the original and gave the replica back to the Jews at Cochin. In fact, the original owners of the royal charter may have been left with nothing. It's a messy story that may require scientific testing of the plates to resolve.<sup>32</sup> It's a reminder of how important it is to keep precious writing on metal plates out of sight and out of the hands of others.

A reader of my blog posted a comment pointing to what may be the earliest published mention of the copper plates of the Cochin Jews:

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29. Ibid., 113.

30. Ibid., 171–72.

31. See Wikipedia, s.v. "Jewish copper plates of Cochin," last modified September 19, 2022, 05:15, [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Jewish\\_copper\\_plates\\_of\\_Cochin](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Jewish_copper_plates_of_Cochin).

32. See Thoufeek Zakriya, "The Copper Plate and the Big Sahib," *Jews of Malabar* (blog), August 19, 2013, <http://jewsofmalabar.blogspot.com/2013/08/the-copper-plate-and-big-sahib.html>.



As far as I can tell, the first western account of metal plates among the Jewish and Christian communities of Cochin comes from Damião de Góis in his “Three Letters of Mar Jacob.” Mar Jacob, the Bishop of the Thomas Christians between 1543 and 1545, mentioned two copper plates with inscriptions in Pahlavi, Cushic (sic) and Hebrew script. These plates are unrelated to the chronicles of the Cochin Jews that were said to have been destroyed when the Portuguese burned down the synagogue in 1662 AD. This history was inexplicably called the *sefer ha yashar* or the Book of the Upright One or the Book of Jasher.<sup>33</sup>

The “Three Letters of Mar Jacob” can be found in Georg Schurhammer’s *The Malabar Church and Rome during the Early Portuguese Period and Before*.<sup>34</sup> The letters are reproduced in Portuguese with an English translation. One passage says, “[W]e have a *Copperplate* sealed with his seal,”<sup>35</sup> and there is a later mention of several plates, some said to now be lost.<sup>36</sup>

Returning to Alexander Hamilton’s account, did the Jews at Cochin really have more ancient records of their history on copper or brass plates, or did the story of their one small document become inflated when it was told to Hamilton, or did their copper plates become conflated with their separate historical records? Hamilton gives enough detail that it seems unlikely that he was simply confused, but was he given correct information? Did the Jews at Cochin have much more that they did not risk discussing with Buchanan? Are there records on plates still in hiding somewhere? I would be thrilled if such a thing did exist and could be brought to light. For now, we just have Hamilton’s report

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33. RM Zosimus, comment on Jeff Lindsay, “The Words of Gad the Seer: Thoughts on a ‘Lost Book’ Preserved by the Jews at Cochin, India,” *Arise from the Dust* (blog), April 2, 2022, emphasis added, <https://www.arisefromthedust.com/the-words-of-gad-seer-thoughts-on-lost/#comments>.

34. Georg Schurhammer, *The Malabar Church and Rome during the Early Portuguese Period and Before* (Trichinopoly, India: F.M. Ponnuswamy, 1934), 14 and 22–23 (esp. footnote 69), [https://archive.org/details/malabarchurchrom00schu\\_0/page/22/mode/2up](https://archive.org/details/malabarchurchrom00schu_0/page/22/mode/2up). The “Three Letters of Mar Jacob” are reproduced in Portuguese early in the volume with an English translation at the side, and the mention of a copper plate in the second Portuguese letter has “do que temos hua [dua?] lamyna [lamina] de cobre asselada de sseu sselo,” with the given translation “of which we have a Copperplate sealed with his seal” (p. 14).

35. Ibid., 14.

36. Ibid., 22–23.

and the tradition of writing on copper plates in India that might add to the plausibility of the story. The document from the Cochin Jews bearing “The Words of Gad the Seer” was not written on metal plates.

A few more connections to explore will arise when we examine some passages from the text below.

### Assessing “The Words of Gad the Seer”

So what of this strange document from Cochin, India, “The Words of Gad the Seer”? Is it just pious fiction made up by some Jews in India? The first scholarly work analyzing the Hebrew manuscript of “The Words of Gad the Seer,” an 1893 article by Solomon Schechter, declared its origins to be from the Middle Ages. Then a 1927 article by I. Abrahams accepted Schechter’s brief report and said that that “The Words of Gad the Seer” was likely written in the 13th century AD.<sup>37</sup> On the other hand, Professor Bar-Ilan, in his peer-reviewed “The Date of The Words of Gad the Seer,” has examined the text in detail and disputes the arguments of Schechter and Abrahams, arguing that it has more ancient roots.<sup>38</sup> He estimates its origins to be in the first centuries of the Christian era, in spite of some words showing medieval era influence, possibly arising in much later copying or editing of the text.

Could it be earlier? Bar-Ilan says no, for the book is written as an apocalypse, and biblical scholars generally maintain that such literature, including First Enoch, the book of Daniel, and the book of Revelation, is a literary genre generally limited to roughly 250 BC to AD 250, characterized by similarity to the book of Revelation, with divine revelation about the end of the world and the nature of heaven.<sup>39</sup> Being apocalyptic, the argument is that “The Words of Gad the Seer” cannot represent biblical literature from the time of David or otherwise much before 250 BC. Some Latter-day Saints, however, may be open to more ancient origins for some apocalyptic literature like the material on Enoch in the Book

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37. See I. Abrahams, “The Words of Gad the Seer,” in *Livre d’hommage a la mémoire du Dr Samuel Poznanski (1864–1921)* (Vienna: Adolphe Holzhauzen, 1927), 8–12, <https://polona.pl/item/livre-d-hommage-a-la-memoire-du-dr-samuel-poznanski-1864-1921,MTA0NTI2OA/31/>.

38. Bar-Ilan, “Date.”

39. See John J. Collins, “Introduction: Towards the Morphology of a Genre,” *Semeia* 14 (1979): 1–21. There may be exceptions to the date range for apocalyptic literature, for Collins notes a later example of Jewish apocalyptic literature, the *Sefer Hekalot* (3 Enoch), which some have dated to the fifth century AD.

of Moses or Nephi's writings in the Book of Mormon.<sup>40</sup> Even Isaiah has what many view as apocalyptic elements in Isaiah 24–27.

Schechter examined the Hebrew manuscript in the library at the University of Cambridge and concluded rather peremptorily that it must have come from the medieval era based on a couple of examples of phrasing and apparent familiarity with the Kabbalah.<sup>41</sup> Unfortunately, Schechter spent only one page in his article discussing the manuscript and said nothing that would attract attention from other scholars about this long-overlooked record, which, in spite of having been discussed by several scholars and even published in Hebrew, German, and Dutch (and now English), has been largely overlooked by modern scholars. Such a situation seems hard to believe, as Bar-Ilan expresses in dismay, speculating that the cause of this dire lack of attention may be because “the fascinating stories emerging from Cochin were considered to be legendary in character, such as any modern scholar should ignore.”<sup>42</sup> This is not the first case of scholarly neglect of a fascinating ancient record from scattered Hebrews that might seem somewhat “legendary.”

Bar-Ilan points out that the meat of Schechter's arguments for a middle-ages origin relies upon the presence of several Hebrew words that are said to have arisen as a result of astronomical and philosophical discussions related to Greek philosophy. Bar-Ilan points out that while the words in question themselves aren't known or used as they are in “The Words of Gad the Seer” before the Middle Ages, the concepts are much older and had been discussed using other words in Hebrew. Here Bar-Ilan notes that the Talmud shows evidence of ancient astronomers and philosophers influencing Jewish sages, such that discussions of the rotation of “heavenly spheres” (simply “spheres” in vs. 204 of his translation) and other astronomical-philosophical concepts do not necessarily point to a late date (i.e., the Middle Ages).<sup>43</sup> He also notes there was no distinction anciently between the fields of astronomy and philosophy,<sup>44</sup> an observation that is helpful to keep in mind in analyzing Abraham's use of astronomical concepts to indirectly teach Pharaoh

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40. “Why Can Nephi's Vision Be Called an Apocalypse?,” KnoWhys, Book of Mormon Central, September 27, 2018, <https://knowhy.bookofmormoncentral.org/knowhy/why-can-nephis-vision-be-called-an-apocalypse>.

41. Schechter, “Notes on Hebrew MSS.,” 140.

42. Bar-Ilan, “Discovery.”

43. Bar-Ilan, “Date.”

44. Ibid.

about religion as we see in the Book of Abraham (Abraham 3 and Facsimile 2).<sup>45</sup>

After considering and refuting the arguments made for a medieval origin, Bar-Ilan then argues the case for late antiquity. His first argument, already cited above, is that “this phenomenon of inserting whole chapters from the Bible into one’s treatise is known only from the Bible itself.... Only one who lived in the ‘days of the Bible’, or thought so of himself, could have made such a plagiarism including a Biblical text in his own work.”<sup>46</sup>

His second argument is also of interest, pointing out that the way Bible content is merged and reworked in the document is also uncharacteristic of modern writings but is an indicator of antiquity.<sup>47</sup> That is also a characteristic of Nephi’s writings in the Book of Mormon as he combined various passages and reworks them in elegant ways, something Matthew Bowen and others have discussed.<sup>48</sup>

His third argument involves differences in the way the Psalms are quoted, particularly the changes in superscriptions that seem authentic.

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45. On the religious import of the astronomical issues raised by Abraham in Abraham 3, see John Gee, William J. Hamblin, and Daniel C. Peterson, “And I Saw the Stars’: The Book of Abraham and Ancient Geocentric Astronomy,” in *Astronomy, Papyrus, and Covenant*, ed. John Gee and Brian M. Hauglid (Provo, UT: FARMS, 2005), 1–16, <https://archive.bookofmormoncentral.org/content/and-i-saw-stars-book-abraham-and-ancient-geocentric-astronomy>. Also see the chapter “Abrahamic Astronomy” in John Gee, *An Introduction to the Book of Abraham* (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 2017), 115–20, <https://rsc.byu.edu/introduction-book-abraham/abrahamic-astronomy>. Also see Jeff Lindsay, “Book of Abraham Polemics: Dan Vogel’s Broad Critique of the Defense of the Book of Abraham,” *Interpreter: A Journal of Latter-day Saint Faith and Scholarship* 47 (2021): 138–44, <https://journal.interpreterfoundation.org/book-of-abraham-polemics-dan-vogels-broad-critique-of-the-defense-of-the-book-of-abraham/>. Note that the reference to (heavenly) “spheres” in *Words of Gad the Seer* need not draw upon Ptolemaic astronomy and its multiple rotating spheres dating to around AD 150 (when Ptolemy published *The Almagest*), for the concepts of the celestial sphere and multiple concentric spheres were being discussed centuries earlier by Aristotle and Eudoxus. See Wikipedia, s.v. “Celestial Sphere,” last modified November 14, 2022, 04:50, [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Celestial\\_sphere#Greek\\_history\\_on\\_celestial\\_spheres](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Celestial_sphere#Greek_history_on_celestial_spheres); and Wikipedia, s.v. “Eudoxus of Cnidus,” last modified October 5, 2022, 04:20, [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Eudoxus\\_of\\_Cnidus](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Eudoxus_of_Cnidus). More primitive related geocentric concepts such as celestial objects rotating around the earth or the sky as a sphere or dome were more ancient still.

46. Bar-Ilan, “Date.”

47. Ibid.

48. See, for example, Bowen, “Onomastic Wordplay.”

But another interesting and possibly authentic twist is the addition of the missing “Nun” verse in Psalm 145, a Psalm where each verse begins with a letter from the Hebrew alphabet forming an acrostic, with an apparent defect due to the absence of the letter “Nun” that should be between verses 13 and 14.<sup>49</sup> Bar-Ilan notes that no other known version of this Psalm provides the missing verse. The added verse reads, “All your enemies fell down, O Lord, and all of their might was swallowed up.” Bar-Ilan feels that “the style and content of the verse give good reason to believe that it is authentic.” But even if it were made up by a creative editor, he says “it still would be interesting, since the sages of the Talmud did not know it, and the invention of fictitious Biblical verses is not known in the Middle Ages either.”<sup>50</sup> The Hebrew word translated as “swallowed up” is from the root בָּלַע, *bāla*,<sup>51</sup> which can mean to “destroy” as well as to “swallow” or “engulf.”<sup>52</sup> The added verse combines the falling of enemies and a destructive “swallowing up,” a combination also seen in the Book of Mormon in 2 Nephi 26:5, where Nephi speaks of the coming destruction of those that kill the prophets, warning that the depths of the earth “shall swallow them up” and “buildings shall fall upon them.” This is likely a random but possibly interesting parallel coming from one of the Book of Mormon writers most attuned to the Psalms.<sup>53</sup>

Bar-Ilan’s fourth argument also sounds somewhat like a common defense of the Book of Mormon as he summarizes the diverse literary styles and tools in the text and mentions the highly creative visions and stories that seem unlikely to have been fabricated.

There are nine arguments in total for antiquity, followed by reviewing two recent cases where a text was deemed by experts to be relatively recent, only to have later discoveries such as a related document from Qumran proving that the document was ancient after all. There is much

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49. See Wikipedia, s.v. “Psalm 145,” heading “The ‘missing verse,’” last modified September 7, 2022, 14:03, [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Psalm\\_145#The\\_%22missing\\_verse%22](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Psalm_145#The_%22missing_verse%22).

50. Bar-Ilan, “Date.”

51. Meir Bar-Ilan, personal communication to the author, September 12, 2022.

52. Ludwig Koehler and Walter Baumgartner, *The Hebrew and Aramaic Lexicon of the Old Testament* (Leiden: E.J. Brill, 1994–2000), 134.

53. See Jeff Lindsay, “Too Little or Too Much Like the Bible? A Novel Critique of the Book of Mormon Involving David and the Psalms,” *Interpreter: A Journal of Latter-day Saint Faith and Scholarship* 29 (2018): 31–64, <https://journal.interpreterfoundation.org/too-little-or-too-much-like-the-bible-a-novel-critique-of-the-book-of-mormon-involving-david-and-the-psalms/>.

for Latter-day Saints to contemplate in reading Bar-Ilan's defense of the antiquity of the text of "The Words of Gad the Seer."

Perhaps there will be more to learn as we explore relationships between "The Words of Gad the Seer" with other overlooked or denigrated texts from the Restoration, namely, the Book of Mormon, the Book of Moses, and the Book of Abraham. For now, let's consider an overview of the text of "The Words of Gad the Seer" and look at just a few interesting passages.

### Overview of the Content and Some Passages of Interest

We turn again to Professor Bar-Ilan for a summary of the chapters of *Words of Gad the Seer*:

The Words of Gad the Seer contains 14 chapters dealing with King David and his prophet Gad. The nature of each of the chapters is different than the others, so one who has already read the first chapter, for example, cannot predict any other chapter in the book. The style is Biblical, in accordance with its heroes (some of whom are not mentioned in the Bible or elsewhere). Even when the author writes his own ideas, almost every word or phrase reflects biblical verse. Now, let us consider each of the chapters, one by one.<sup>54</sup>

Bar-Ilan's verse numbering progresses continually across all fourteen chapters. A brief summary follows, drawing in part upon Bar-Ilan's characterization of the chapters and giving his verse numbers for each.<sup>55</sup>

Chapter 1 (vv. 1–63) describes a revelation to Gad the Seer including visions of animals, the sun, and the moon, interpreted by the Lord. The Sun descends from heaven in the form of a man wearing a crown and carrying a lamb. The lamb, "rejected and despised" in vs. 13 (cf. the Isaiah 53:3, where the Suffering Servant is "despised and rejected"), laments. A man dressed in linen puts a crown on the lamb and the lamb makes "a peace-offerings sacrifice on the altar before El Shaddai Jealous Lord of hosts" (vs. 30), though in Bar-Ilan's summary, he states that "the lamb is sacrificed on the heavenly altar,"<sup>56</sup> something that is not clear to me in the translation. The lamb sings a song praising the Lord and the Lord replies, "You are My son, you are My Firstborn" (vs. 47), all of which resonates well with the Book of Mormon's teachings about ancient

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54. Bar-Ilan, "Date."

55. Ibid.

56. Ibid.

Hebrews understanding that the Lamb of God would be the Messiah, the Son of God. An allusion to Isaiah 53:5 (“wounded for our transgressions” ... “with his stripes we are healed”) may also occur in the description of the lamb in vs. 50: “And who is like unto Thee, among all creatures on earth? For in your shadow lived all these and by thy wounds they were healed!” Gad is commanded by a heavenly messenger to write the words of the vision (vs. 54).

The title “El Shaddai Jealous Lord of hosts” (vs. 30) seems to reflect a very ancient Jewish concept of God and the divine council that might point to origins much earlier than the era in late antiquity that is normally assumed for apocalyptic literature. David Biale sees “El Shaddai” as a very early Hebrew title dating to the time of King David or earlier, which then faded away (it does not occur in Deuteronomy and many other books) but regained some popularity in later books such as Ruth.<sup>57</sup> For a Latter-day Saint perspective on the significance of El Shaddai as an ancient title associated with important aspects of the Godhead, see Val Larsen, “First Visions and Last Sermons: Affirming Divine Sociality, Rejecting the Greater Apostasy.”<sup>58</sup> On the divine council and the “Lord of hosts,” see Stephen O. Smoot, “The Divine Council in the Hebrew Bible and the Book of Mormon.”<sup>59</sup> “Shaddai” also occurs in *Words of Gad the Seer* in vv. 39 (Chapter 1), 268 (Chapter 12), and 309 (Chapter 13). “Lords of hosts” also occurs in vv. 97 and 100 (Chapter 3), 315 (Chapter 13), and 369 (Chapter 14). Other biblical titles possibly related to the divine council include “God above all Gods” (2 Chronicles 2:5) in vs. 218 (Chapter 9) and “God of gods” (Deuteronomy 10:17, Joshua 22:22, Psalm 136:2, and Daniel 2:47, 11:36) in vv. 80 and 83 (Chapter 2). While further study is needed, Chapter 1 has much that might be of interest to students of the Book of Mormon.

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57. David Biale, “The God with Breasts: El Shaddai in the Bible,” *History of Religions* 21, no. 3, (February 1982): 240–56, <https://www.jstor.org/stable/1062160>.

58. Val Larsen, “First Visions and Last Sermons: Affirming Divine Sociality, Rejecting the Greater Apostasy,” *Interpreter: A Journal of Latter-day Saint Faith and Scholarship* 36 (2020): 37–84, <https://journal.interpreterfoundation.org/first-visions-and-last-sermons-affirming-divine-sociality-rejecting-the-greater-apostasy/>.

59. Stephen O. Smoot, “The Divine Council in the Hebrew Bible and the Book of Mormon,” *Interpreter: A Journal of Mormon Scripture* 27 (2017): 155–80, <https://journal.interpreterfoundation.org/the-divine-council-in-the-hebrew-bible-and-the-book-of-mormon/>.



Chapter 2 (vv. 64–92) comprises a second revelation to Gad about the “end of days.” A battle will occur between Michael and Samael (discussed below).

Chapter 3 (vv. 93–104) tells the story of a Moabite shepherd who asks King David for permission to convert to Judaism and live among the Jews as a circumcised male, able to join in religious rites. David denies the request and cites Deuteronomy 23:3, “An Ammonite or Moabite shall not enter the assembly of the Lord ... forever” (KJV), but the Moabite shepherd argues that the Lord’s acceptance of Ruth could justify an exception for him as well. David recognizes that a fair argument has been made and seeks counsel from the Lord. Nathan the prophet answers, explaining that only Moabite males, not females, are forbidden to “enter the assembly of the Lord.” Thus, there was no opportunity for him to participate with the Jews in temple rituals. The frustrated Moabite was appointed by David to be one of his shepherds, and the man’s daughter Sephirah later became a concubine to Solomon.

Chapter 4 (vv. 105–120) tells a story about David settling a dispute over some lost money (two talents of silver in a “pocket” or wallet) that highlights the wisdom of David. The owner writes a declaration on a city wall promising to give one talent of silver to whoever finds the pocket with the two talents. A Danite man finds the pocket and brings it to the owner, who then declares that his message on the wall had a mistake, for there were actually three talents of silver in the lost pocket and so the Danite man must have stolen a talent and demands that the Danite return the stolen talent. The dispute comes to David, who has both parties swear before the Lord to confirm their claims, and then tells the owner that since his pocket had three talents, and the Danite found a pocket with only two, it was obviously someone else’s pocket that was found, so he must give the Danite both talents. The story sounds much like the accounts of Solomon’s wisdom.

Chapter 5 (vv. 121–30) describes revelation from God to comfort David before a battle with the Philistines. That night a “fire rider” (vs. 125) with a sword descends from heaven and smites the Philistines.

Chapter 6 (vv. 131–41) reports that God sent Gad to tell David not to boast of his strength. David acknowledges that his strength comes from God, and God then decides to help the House of David forever. (Here I have to wonder if the optimism about the House of David and the lack of awareness of the fall of Judah might point to a pre-exilic origin for at least some parts of the text.)



Chapter 7 (vv. 142–77) tells the story of David’s sinful numbering of the children of Israel, apparently combining 2 Samuel 24:1–25 and 1 Chronicles 21:1–30, with some additions.

Chapter 8 (vv. 178–98) has David receiving a commandment from God that instructs him to give a majestic speech to a great assembly of his people. David builds a wooden pulpit for the occasion and urges his people to follow God’s law and love one another (discussed further below).

Chapter 9 (vv. 199–226), perhaps my favorite chapter, tells of Hiram, King of Tyre, asking David to send messengers to teach him the law of God. David answers that Hiram ought to fear the Lord and to fulfill the commandments of God to the children of Noah, while on the other hand the Jews, “sealed by the seal of Shaddai,” must keep all the law of Moses. Hiram accepts this and teaches his princes and servants to believe in the God of Israel. The Lord declares He will bless Hiram and his princes and servants, and that Hiram will be able to assist Israel in building the temple. David rejoices to see God’s mercy, for He gives reward to all who fear Him. David’s remarks to Hiram cite an interesting list of contrasting concepts, including “the substantial and the spiritual” (vs. 204), which may have some relationship to the contrast of “things which are temporal and things which are spiritual” in Moses 6:63 and the related phrase “things both temporal and spiritual” 1 Nephi 15:32 and 22:3.<sup>60</sup>

Chapter 10 (vv. 227–49) is Psalm 145 but with a different introduction (superscription) than in the Masoretic text and, unlike any other known version, includes the missing Nun verse.

Chapter 11 (vv. 250–65) is Psalm 144 having a different superscription than in the Masoretic text.

Chapter 12 (vv. 266–85) is a speech by David to his people that he spoke before his death. This chapter strikes me as having indications of a more ancient origin than late antiquity, such as use of the name Shaddai (vs. 268) and a promise that if the people are obedient, in the future, they will see God in Jerusalem: “And there shall you see Him face to face, in the presence of a living God that is seen face to face. And you are one

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60. For the possible significance of this shared phrasing in the two texts, see 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/>.

people, if you grow in belief you will be filled in gates of intelligence” (vs. 282). This seems more consistent with the vibrant religious world of pre-exilic prophets such as Isaiah and Lehi, as discussed by Margaret Barker and Latter-day Saint scholars, than with mainstream Judaism after the reforms of the Deuteronomists.<sup>61</sup> The same can be said for the vision in Chapter 1 with its vision of the Lamb, the Son of God, by whose wounds we are healed.

Chapter 13 (vv. 286–353) gives a lengthy story about the heroic Tamar, King David’s daughter, related to 2 Samuel 13. When Pirshaz, one of King David’s servants seeks to rape her, Tamar seeks help from God and is able to kill Pirshaz. She flees, but later returns to Jerusalem and is praised by Solomon.

Chapter 14 (vv. 354–75) has a revelation given to Gad, who sees the day of judgment with the Lord on His throne (vs. 355). There are three books with records of human deeds. Numerous details are provided with uncertain meaning.<sup>62</sup> After the judgments are rendered and Satan has departed to a waste land with his subjects, a divine messenger declares, “Happy is the people that know the joyful shout; that walk, O Lord, in the light of thy countenance” (vs. 368). Then Gad “heard the voice of the host of heaven dancing and saying, ‘master of justice, the Lord of hosts, the whole heaven and earth is full of His glory’” (vs. 369). This statement is similar to Isaiah 6:2, declared by seraphim in Isaiah’s great vision in which he also sees the Lord on a throne (Isaiah 6:1). Parallels to Isaiah 6 continue as one of the cherubim in Gad’s vision flies to Gad and puts in his mouth an olive leaf (vs. 371, instead of a hot coal that one of the seraphim uses to touch Isaiah’s lips in Isaiah 6:5). The cherub declares, “Lo, this hath touched thy mouth, and thine iniquity is taken away, and thy sin expiated” (vs. 371), essentially quoting Isaiah 6:7. As with Nephi in the Book of Mormon, Gad here seems to “shamelessly

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61. Kevin Christensen, “Paradigms Regained: A Survey of Margaret Barker’s Scholarship and Its Significance for Mormon Studies,” *FARMS Occasional Papers* 2 (2001): 1–94, <https://archive.bookofmormoncentral.org/content/paradigms-regained-survey-margaret-barkers-scholarship-and-its-significance-mormon-studies>; Margaret Barker, “What Did King Josiah Reform?” in *Glimpses of Lehi’s Jerusalem*, ed. John W. Welch, David Rolph Seely, and Jo Ann H. Seely (Provo, UT: FARMS, 2004), 526, <https://archive.bookofmormoncentral.org/content/what-did-king-josiah-reform>; and Kevin Christensen, “Prophets and Kings in Lehi’s Jerusalem and Margaret Barker’s Temple Theology,” *Interpreter: A Journal of Mormon Scripture* 4 (2013), <https://journal.interpreterfoundation.org/prophets-and-kings-in-lehis-jerusalem-and-margaret-barkers-temple-theology/#fn2-2695>.

62. Bar-Ilan, “Date.”

plagiarize” Isaiah (or could it be the other way around?) in a way, as Bar-Ilan explains, that is characteristic of writers in the era of the Bible, but not the modern era.

There is remarkable diversity in the contents of this brief document, with historical accounts, psalms, visions of God, and apocalyptic scenes. It is a document rich in visions and the ministry of angels, similar to themes in the Book of Mormon. Angels or messengers of God are often said to be dressed in linen, the material of sacred priestly robes. A number of elements resonate with the world of Lehi and Nephi and may be evidence of roots even more ancient than Bar-Ilan has determined for this text.

Here are a few more passages that seem interesting from a Latter-day Saint perspective. The titles are mine, suggesting themes that occur to me. The passages are quoted with their verse numbers.

### **On Michael the Great Prince and Archangel**

While the name Michael is given to several mortals mentioned in genealogies or lists of people in Numbers, 1 and 2 Chronicles, and Ezra, subsequent mentions of Michael in the Bible refer to a mysterious defender, a prince and/or angel who, in both Jewish and Christian lore, has long been associated with an angelic defender of God’s people, fighting battles in heaven and on earth for the good of Israel.<sup>63</sup> He is a great prince who helps defend Israel in the book of Daniel (Daniel 10:13, 21 and 12:1), an archangel who disputed with Satan over the body of Moses (Jude 1:9), and the angel described in Revelation 12:7 who, during war in heaven, joined with his angels to fight “the dragon” and his angels. While the passages in Daniel are often applied to the persecutions of the Jews by Antiochus IV Epiphanes, Christians often interpret them in terms of the end days when Christ comes again and reigns supreme. A related passage in chapter 2 of *The Words of Gad the Seer* explicitly refers to the work of Michael the great prince in putting down the evil prince of the world:

89 At the end of days Michael the great prince shall stand up  
in war like a whirlwind against Samel the prince of the world  
to put him under his feet, in the wind of the Lord and it shall

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63. See Norman Cohn, *Cosmos, Chaos, and the World to Come: The Ancient Roots of Apocalyptic Faith* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1993), 171. Also see John J. Collins, “The Son of Man and the Saints of the Most High in the Book of Daniel,” *Journal of Biblical Literature* 93, no. 1 (March 1974): 55–57, <https://www.jstor.org/stable/3263865>.

be eaten up; for the Lord hath spoken it. 90 At the end of days the robbed will overcome the robber, and the weak the strong, truly and in righteousness.

Samel or Samael is a complex figure that does not always equate with the Christian notions of Satan, but nevertheless can be called the “prince of demons” or “chief of Satans” and can be “regarded simply as the principle of evil that brought upon Israel and Judah every misfortune that befell them.”<sup>64</sup> This end-days role of Michael and his armies in totally vanquishing Satan and his armies can be compared with a passage from the D&C 88 about the great battle at the end of the Millennium:

110 And so on, until the seventh angel shall sound his trump; and he shall stand forth upon the land and upon the sea, and swear in the name of him who sitteth upon the throne, that there shall be time no longer; and Satan shall be bound, that old serpent, who is called the devil, and shall not be loosed for the space of a thousand years.

111 And then he shall be loosed for a little season, that he may gather together his armies.

112 And Michael, the seventh angel, even the archangel, shall gather together his armies, even the hosts of heaven.

113 And the devil shall gather together his armies; even the hosts of hell, and shall come up to battle against Michael and his armies.

114 And then cometh the battle of the great God; and the devil and his armies shall be cast away into their own place, that they shall not have power over the saints any more at all.

115 For Michael shall fight their battles, and shall overcome him who seeketh the throne of him who sitteth upon the throne, even the Lamb.

## On Purity

16 And it came to pass when the voice of the lamb was over, and, lo, a man dressed in linen came with three branches of vine and twelve palms in his hand. 17 And he took the lamb

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64. Ludwig Blau, “Samael,” in *The Jewish Encyclopedia*, ed. Isidore Singer and Cyrus Adler (New York and London: Funk and Wagnalls, 1907), 10:665–66, <https://jewishencyclopedia.com/articles/13082-samuel>.

from the hand of the Sun and put the crown on its head, and the vine-branches and palms on his heart. 18 And the man, dressed in linen, cried like a ram's horn, saying: 'What hast thou here, impurity, and who hast thou here, impurity, that thou hast hewed thee a place in purity, and in my covenant 19 that I have set with the vine-branches and palms'. 20 And I have heard the lamb's shepherd saying: 'There is a place for the pure, not for the impure, with me, for I am a holy God, and I do not want the impure, only the pure. 21 Though both are creations of my hands, and my eyes are equally open on both. 22 But there is an advantage to the abundance of purity over the abundance of impurity just like the advantage of a man over a shadow.

### **The Seal of Truth**

54 And the one dressed in linen came down to me and touched me, saying: 'Write these words and seal with the seal of truth for "I am that I am" is My name, and with My name thou shalt bless all the house of Israel for they are a true seed. 55 Thou shalt go, for yet a little while, before thou art gathered quietly to thy fathers, and at the end of days thou shalt see with thy own eyes all these, not as a vision but in fact. 56 For in those days they shall not be called Jacob but Israel for in their remnant no iniquity is found for they belong entirely to the Lord.

### **David Standing on a Pulpit to Speak to His Assembled People**

182 Then David assembled all Israel in Jerusalem, and he made to himself a pulpit of wood and he stood upon it before all the people. And he opened his mouth and said: 183 'Hear, O Israel, your God and my God is one, the only One and unique, there is no one like His individuality, hidden from all, He was and is and will be, He fills His place but His place doesn't fill Him, He sees but is not seen, He tells and knows futures, for He is God without end and there is no end to His end, Omnipotence, God of truth, whole worlds are full of His glory.

Near the end of David's life, "in the time of his old age" (vs. 178), the Lord appeared to him and gave him words regarding God's covenant to speak to his people (vv. 178–81). David then built a wooden pulpit and used that to stand before his people and teach them. He would speak of free agency (see below), choosing to hear the word (vv. 189–91), the need to "talk peacefully each one with another" (vs. 192) and to love one another (vv. 192–94). David then prayed to "God of the spirits of all flesh" (vs. 195) that the Lord might save and bless his people (vv. 195–96), after which the people called out, "Amen, Amen!" (vs. 197).

This scene, not found in the Bible, has several parallels to King Benjamin's speech, also given in his old age while speaking from a tower that he had built for the occasion. Whether King Benjamin's tower was made of stone or wood, the concept of a great assembly led by a king for a covenant-making event and/or coronation and using a platform of some kind for the event has been viewed as a significant ancient Near East element by some scholars such as Hugh Nibley.<sup>65</sup>

## David Teaches the Concept of Free Agency

184 And He gave each one free choice: if one wants to do good — he will be helped, and if one wants to do evil — a path will be opened for him. 185 For that we will worship our God our king our Lord our saviour with love and awe, for your wisdom is the fear of the Lord and your cleverness is to depart from evil. 186 Remember and obey the law of Moses, man of God, that it may be well with thee all the days.

## Comparing the Law to a Seed and Faith to a Tree

187 Ask thy fathers and they will declare unto thee; thine elders, and they will tell thee. 188 Be strong and valiant to obey the law and not to hear it only. 189 For a deed is like a root, hearing it is like a seed, a belief is like a tree and the fruit

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65. Hugh Nibley, "Assembly and Atonement," in *King Benjamin's Speech Made Simple*, ed. John W. Welch and Stephen D. Ricks (Provo, UT: FARMS, 1999), 99–125, <https://web.archive.org/web/20120927050840/http://maxwellinstitute.byu.edu/publications/books/?bookid=133&chapid=1570>. Also see John W. Welch and Terry L. Szink, "Benjamin's Tower and Old Testament Pillars," 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), 100–102, <https://archive.bookofmormoncentral.org/node/258>.

is like righteousness. 190 And what shall we do to a smelly and stinky seed if a root will not come out of it? 191 For that, hurry up! be quick and act, hear and act, for you are true seed, for you have belief and righteousness then the Lord will bless you all in peace.

This has some similarity to Alma's teaching that compares the word of God to a seed in Alma 32:28–43. That passage also uses the phrase "true seed" (vs. 28), not used elsewhere in the scriptures, but in a different sense than in *Words of Gad the Seer*, where "true seed" (here in vs. 191; see also vs. 54 above, under "The Seal of Truth") refers to the people who hear and obey the word.

### **On Love for Others**

192 Talk peacefully each with one another, and love the deed and those created in the image of the Lord like your own souls. 193 For if you love [man] the created, it is a sign that you love the Creator. 194 And also, thou shouldest take hold of the one; yea, also from the other withdraw not thy hand; love the Lord and also man that it shall be well with thee all the days'.

### **Three Outcomes on the Day of Judgement**

360 And, lo, a man dressed in linen brought before the glory of the Lord three books that were written about every man. 361 And he read in the first one and it was found to have the just deeds of His people, and the Lord said: 'These will live forever'. 362 And Satan said: 'Who are these guilty people?' And the man dressed in linen cried to Satan like a ram's horn, saying: 'Keep silent, for this day is holy to our master'. 363 And he read in the second book, and it was found to have inadvertent sins of His people, and the Lord said: 'Put aside this book but save it, until one third of the month elapses, to see what they will do'. 364 And he read in the third book, and it was found to have malicious deeds of His people. 365 And the Lord said to Satan: 'These are your share, take them to do with them as seemeth good to thee'. 366 And Satan took those which acted maliciously and he went with them to a waste land to destroy them there. 367 And the man dressed in linen cried like a ram's horn, saying: 368 'Happy is the people that

know the joyful shout; that walk, O Lord, in the light of Thy countenance’.

This relates to the Jewish tradition of three books being opened on the day of judgment, as described in the Tractate Rosh Hashana from the Babylonian Talmud:

The Gemara goes back to discuss the Day of Judgment. Rabbi Kruspedai said that Rabbi Yoḥanan said: Three books are opened on Rosh HaShana before the Holy One, Blessed be He: One of wholly wicked people, and one of wholly righteous people, and one of middling people whose good and bad deeds are equally balanced. Wholly righteous people are immediately written and sealed for life; wholly wicked people are immediately written and sealed for death; and middling people are left with their judgment suspended from Rosh HaShana until Yom Kippur, their fate remaining undecided. If they merit, through the good deeds and mitzvot that they perform during this period, they are written for life; if they do not so merit, they are written for death.<sup>66</sup>

According to the Talmud, it would seem that while there are three books and three classes of people being judged, there are really only two ultimate outcomes, life or death. But the concept of three books for three classes of mortals also seems akin to the three degrees of glory described in D&C 76 and reflected in 1 Corinthians 15:40–42.

## Conclusions

Bar-Ilan’s translation, *Words of Gad the Seer*, may merit more attention in the Latter-day Saint community. While the text may not be the actual lost record of Gad mentioned in the Old Testament, it still may have genuine connections to ancient texts and traditions, even if portions were composed or edited in late antiquity or even the medieval era. The origins and content of the text are worthy of study to better appreciate ancient Jewish thought and the complex issues around the origins and evolution of ancient documents and the ideas they contain.

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66. Tractate Rosh Hashanah 16b:12, Koren Noé Talmud, William Davidson Edition, Sefaria, [https://www.sefaria.org/Rosh\\_Hashanah.16b.12?lang=bi](https://www.sefaria.org/Rosh_Hashanah.16b.12?lang=bi). See also Tractate Rosh Hashana, Chapter 1, Jewish Virtual Library, The American-Israeli Cooperative Enterprise, <https://www.jewishvirtuallibrary.org/tractate-rosh-hashana-chapter-1>.



There may even be implications for the Book of Mormon, which, like “The Words of Gad the Seer,” reflects an ancient Jewish religion rich in prophetic revelation, the ministry of angels, visions of God, a heavenly council led by the Lord of Hosts, and even the expectation that the righteous will one day see the face of the living God.

The peripheral issues of writing on metal, of ancient records in Yemen, and the ways in which sacred writings can be corrupted or neglected are fascinating in their own right, but there may be many gems to extract directly from the text. More treasures from Cochin may yet remain to be discovered, and certainly further work and investigation is warranted.

**Jeffrey Dean Lindsay** recently returned to the United States after almost 9 years in Shanghai, China. Jeff has been providing online materials defending the Latter-day Saint faith for over twenty years, primarily at *JeffLindsay.com*. His blog, originally *Mormanity* but now *Arise From the Dust* (*arisefromthedust.com*), has been in operation since 2004. He is currently Vice President for The Interpreter Foundation and co-editor of *Interpreter: A Journal of Latter-day Saint Faith and Scholarship*. Jeff has a PhD in chemical engineering from BYU and is a US patent agent. Through his Planet Lindsay, LLC, he helps clients in the US and Asia in creating intellectual property and innovation. From 2011 to 2019 he was the Head of Intellectual Property for Asia Pulp and Paper in Shanghai, China, one of the world’s largest forest product companies. Formerly, he was associate professor at the Institute of Paper Science and Technology (now the Renewable Bioproducts Institute) at Georgia Tech, and Corporate Patent Strategist and Senior Research Fellow at Kimberly-Clark Corporation. Jeff served a mission in the German speaking Switzerland Zurich Mission. He and his wife Kendra are the parents of four boys and have fourteen grandchildren.



# WE LIVE IN THE OLDEN DAYS: REFLECTIONS ON THE IMPORTANCE OF SCIENTIFIC AND THEOLOGICAL HUMILITY

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Steven L. Clark

**Abstract:** *Members of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints have a unique perspective on truth. Our knowledge that Salvation likely involves participation in complex eternal activities requiring significantly more understanding than we currently possess naturally leads us to seek truth and, in addition, to seek an understanding of that truth. Under these circumstances, our inability to fully understand many truths, both revealed and discovered, can lead to confusion. A lack of complete understanding of accepted scientific truth generally leads the serious truth-seeker to enhanced investigative and educational efforts without doubting the ultimate veracity of the concept under investigation; we all believe in gravity, but no one completely understands it. In a similar manner, the fact that an individual is bothered by such an incompletely understood truth is rarely seen as reason to reject it; gravity bothers me a lot — were it not for gravity, I could fly. Unfortunately, an inability to fully understand some revealed truths all too often leads to rejection of that truth rather than an acceptance of one's conceptual limitations and an enhanced effort at understanding the concept in question. Such an approach can be as disastrous (although often not as immediately disastrous) as disregard of the reality of gravity. Consideration of examples of both scientific and spiritual experience may lead to a more rational reaction to truths that we do not, and sometimes at our present level of understanding, simply cannot, completely comprehend.*

My professional responsibilities include conducting seminars with young physicians undergoing specialty and subspecialty training. Among other things, we commonly discuss twins. I often conclude these discussions by recounting a dilemma faced by medical scientists in the early twentieth century, namely, why is it that like-gendered

twins (boy/boy or girl/girl) may be born in one amniotic sac or separate amniotic sacs, but twins of different genders are always in separate sacs? For scientists today, the answer is straightforward and follows from basic principles of embryology and genetics. However, these principles were completely foreign to investigators of that time. A quote from the first edition of what was, in 1903, and remains today the most widely respected textbook in obstetrics recounts the author's consideration of various explanations of these puzzling observations. He then concludes that this phenomenon appears to demonstrate the intervention of "Providence," which "took this means of guarding their morals *in-utero*" by ensuring that the female fetus would never be in the same sac as her twin brother.<sup>1</sup>

At this point I pause, waiting for the inevitable smiles and polite snickers that follow. Having given these young doctors just enough time to dig themselves a hole, I then gently push them in with the reminder that the author of this text was at least as smart as any of us, and more widely published than most serious scientists ever hope to be. I suggest that 100 years from now, perhaps in this very room, a group of young physicians may be discussing some aspect of modern medicine that we today consider to represent absolute, unequivocally demonstrated truth, which will, in their eyes, seem as hopelessly simplistic, incorrect and downright silly as this early twentieth-century "truth" regarding twin pregnancy appears to us today. I remind them of the importance of humility in science and propose that in terms of ultimate truth, the lessons of history tell us that while our knowledge of the natural world may be highly advanced relative to those who came before, in terms of absolute truth, it is still likely to be primitive. I then conclude with an admonition to remember that in terms of our ultimate understanding of human physiology and disease, we still live in the olden days. As outlined below, the implications of this reality for both broader scientific and spiritual learning are significant.

### Scientific Hubris

Most scientists have historically tended to assume that their generation is near the pinnacle of investigative discovery. Few ever publish their findings with the admonition that these conclusions ought to be taken with a grain of salt, since our understanding of truth is likely to be rudimentary when viewed from the likely perspective of future

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1. J. Whitridge Williams, *Obstetrics*, facsimile ed. (Stamford, CT: Appleton and Lange, 1997), 329. First edition published in 1903 by D. Appleton (New York).

generations of investigators. This attitude was perfectly demonstrated by the now-famous observation of the Nobel prize winning physicist Albert Michelson in 1894: “The more important fundamental laws and facts of physical science have all been discovered, and these are now so firmly established that the possibility of their ever being supplanted in consequence of new discoveries is exceedingly remote. ... [O]ur future discoveries must be looked for in the sixth place of decimals.”<sup>2</sup> This just a few years before Relativity and Quantum Mechanics revolutionized the world of physics by demonstrating that almost everything we thought to be true was, at best, a rough approximation. Such errors continue to the present day. Michelson’s misguided prediction regarding physics is echoed with remarkable similarity in the field of natural science in the words of the current-day atheist/author Richard Dawkins who observed that our existence “once presented the greatest of mysteries but ... it is a mystery no longer because it is solved. Darwin and Wallace solved it, though we shall continue to add footnotes to their solution for a while.”<sup>3</sup> An even broader assumption of the transcendent nature of current scientific thinking is found in the prediction of Peter Atkins in 1981 that “fundamental science may almost be at an end and might be completed within a generation.”<sup>4</sup> While one might consider such statements

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2. Albert A. Michelson, “1894 dedication of Ryerson Physical Laboratory,” *Annual Register* (1896): 159. Also cited at Albert Abraham Michelson, Quotable Quote, Goodreads.com, <https://www.goodreads.com/quotes/953757-the-more-important-fundamental-laws-and-facts-of-physical-science>.

3. Richard Dawkins, *The Blind Watchmaker: Why the Evidence of Evolution Reveals a Universe without Design* (New York: W.W. Norton, 1986), xi. Also partially cited at <https://www.azquotes.com/quote/538440>. One wonders whether the religious intensity with which some authors attack any notion of the incompleteness of Darwinian evolutionary theory is unique to biology or represents a broader scientific miasma. I am always amused when, after detailing a sequence of possible evolutionary steps involved in some difficult to understand aspect of life on earth and reaching a scientific and logical dead-end still short of the mark, the expositor invokes the concept of “after hundreds of millions of years, it could all work out.” The concept of “hundreds of millions of years” being of course incomprehensible to mortals with a life expectancy measured in decades. That such magical hand-waving should be considered more rational than simply invoking God in the process seems strange. Is this not an example of the intolerance of one religion for another? Had the theories of relativity or quantum mechanics carried with them any implication of the potential existence of God, would the physics community still be desperately trying to force-fit all scientific observations on macro and micro scales into Newtonian physics?

4. Peter Atkins, *The Creation*, as quoted in John Horgan, “The Delusion of Scientific Omniscience,” *Cross-Check* (blog), *Scientific American*,

as remarkable examples of presumptive arrogance, such erroneous approaches to truth are not unique to the twentieth century. Consider the following two examples.

Imagine you are a highly intelligent proto-scientist living 1000 years ago. You only believe what can be proven by direct, repeatable observation and wear your skepticism as a badge of honor and a hallmark of your intellectual prowess. One day you are confronted with a strange new theory proposing that the Earth revolves around the sun, and that you are hurtling through space on this moving earth at 67,000 miles per hour. You decide to test the theory through direct scientific observation, set a chair in a field facing east early one morning, and begin to record data. You clearly observe the sun rising, moving across the sky, and disappearing in the west. And the next morning here it comes again. You repeat this observation over the course of several days, taking careful notes, and invite several of your scientific-minded colleagues to repeat these experimental observations. Such scientific study would inevitably conclude that this new theory is in error and could be believed only by a fool; you and your colleagues have observed the sun rotating around the earth in real-time through confirmed, repeatable observation. And in terms of 67,000 miles per hour, what nonsense! You have walked, you have run, and being a cosmopolitan individual, you have even ridden a fast horse — you know what it is like to move at 40 miles per hour, and your senses tell you that as you sat in that chair, you were not moving at all. These conclusions would, at that time, be data driven and scientifically indisputable. The intelligence of the observer is not in doubt. Neither random nor systematic error come into play. The experimental observations are accurate and reproducible. And completely incorrect.

To what can we attribute these gross errors? The answer is simple. There are perspectives and dimensions inaccessible to our early scientist that would render reaching the correct conclusions based on scientific observation categorically impossible. He does not have Galileo's telescope, nor can he travel to the international space station — seen from these latter perspectives, the correct conclusions are easy to reach. Without such perspectives, error is inevitable.

Now fast forward several hundred years and consider the case of Isaac Newton, arguably the greatest scientist who ever lived. He introduced laws of motion and an accompanying system of mathematics that formed the basis of much of the technical progress that created

our modern world. These laws are easily confirmed by repeatable experimental observations available and familiar to most students of high school physics. And they have been validated over the subsequent centuries by their use in the development of technology that works as expected in creating solutions to real-world mechanical challenges. And yet within a few years of Michelson's now-infamous boast, our ability to see things from previously unimagined perspectives was changed forever by the works of Einstein, Heisenberg, Schroedinger, and others. We now realize that the fundamental "truths" articulated by Newton are merely useful approximations applicable only to that small fraction of matter in the universe larger than an atom and smaller than an asteroid, and traveling very, very slowly with respect to the speed of light. In terms of most of our earthly human experiences, Newton's laws represent elegant and provable truth; for most of the matter and energy in the wider universe, Newton's laws are not even very good approximations. Until very recently it appeared that the basic components of the cosmos had been well figured out: electrons, protons, neutrons, photons, gravity. Then came the discovery that galaxies were moving in strange ways that cannot be accounted for based on the gravity of the visible matter within them, leading physicists to propose the existence of some form of matter (dark matter) that is more prevalent than the ordinary matter we see.<sup>5</sup> In a similar manner, observations of the motion of distant objects in the cosmos yielded data suggesting an accelerating expansion of the universe, driven by a mysterious force now called dark energy.<sup>6</sup> When evaluated in terms of energy, the combined effect of dark matter and dark energy accounts for 96% of the cosmos, totally overwhelming the matter and energy we thought was all there was. In other words, we currently have no idea of the nature of the matter and energy making up 96% of the cosmos. To say that we are currently just scratching the surface of an understanding of the nature of our universe is an understatement. Given these observations, in addition to mathematical models suggesting the inevitable existence of additional dimensions that, by definition, can never be experienced or experimentally proven, it seems unwise to assume that we have reached a scientific apogee in which things that cannot be proven or well understood cannot possibly be real. Such

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5. Lisa Randall, "What is Dark Matter?," *Nature* 557 (May 10, 2018): 56–57, <https://www.nature.com/articles/d41586-018-05096-y>.

6. Davide Castelvecchi, "New Dark Energy Could Solve Universe Expansion Mystery," *Nature* 597 (September 23, 2021): 460–61, <https://www.nature.com/articles/d41586-021-02531-5>.

considerations apply equally well to the biological sciences. Heredity and evolution once seemed a simple matter of chromosomes, genes, and natural selection acting on a gene pool occasionally spiced up by a rare, beneficial structural mutation. Enter epigenetics and the documentation that environmental influences can alter gene expression and inheritance without structural DNA changes.<sup>7</sup> When seen in the future through the lenses of dimensions and perspectives unavailable to us today, events currently considered incomprehensible or even miraculous will be as clear as the genetics of twin gestation, and any explanation as tautologic.

### Science vs. Religion: A False Dichotomy

The implications of these observations for men and women of faith are immense; neither Christ's miraculous healings, Joseph's translation of the plates, nor Moroni's appearance in Joseph's bedroom are in any way explicable or reproducible using current scientific methodology. When considering these events, we would do well to heed the admonition of Jacob, who cautioned us that, with respect to the works of the Lord, "it is impossible that man should find out all his ways" (Jacob 4:8) and the words of Nephi that for many learned men, "their wisdom is foolishness" (2 Nephi 9:28). Certainly, this latter caution applies to people of the past and of the present. In this sense, the adjective *miraculous* is perhaps best understood as a word we use to describe an event that cannot *currently* be fully understood in terms of the standard process of scientific investigation, rather than an occurrence that is fundamentally unexplainable. Within my own lifetime, the use of FaceTime on a handheld iPhone to speak with and see a relative on another continent has been transformed from science fiction to fully explainable fact. I suspect many more surprises are in store. These observations are in line with the explanations of apparent miracles offered by Brigham Young and James Talmage detailed in a previous essay by Godfrey Ellis in this journal.<sup>8</sup>

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7. Jacob Penny, "Epigenetics, Darwin and Lamarck," *Genome Biology and Evolution* 7/6 (June 2015): 1758–60, <https://academic.oup.com/gbe/article/7/6/1758/2467004>. While superficial similarities exist between concepts of epigenetics and Lamarckian theory, differences are far more significant. This article should not be taken as an affirmation of Lamarckian theory, but simply as an example of a theory not quite as kooky as we once thought it to be.

8. Godfrey J. Ellis, "Experiential Knowledge and the Covenantal Relationship in Alma 7," *Interpreter: A Journal of Latter-day Saint Faith and Scholarship* 51 (2022): 29–80, <https://journal.interpreterfoundation.org/experiential-knowledge-and-the-covenantal-relationship-in-alma-7/>; Brigham Young, in *Journal of*



In these considerations, a few words of caution are in order. First, these observations should not be seen as a criticism of science, or of the scientific method with which we investigate God's world. Nor do I mean to imply that all scientists or scientific writers share visions of present or impending scientific omniscience; a recent review by Peterson in this journal highlighted a series of historic scientific "bad calls" discussed in the popular lay journal *Scientific American*.<sup>9</sup> However, while most investigators today would avoid the type of explicit, conscious scientific hubris expressed by Michelson, subconscious assumptions in this regard may blind us to the potential limitations of current scientific dogma.<sup>10</sup> Rather, they should serve as a reminder of our limitations and that the science vs. religion dichotomy is a false one, generally articulated by those possessing only a rudimentary understanding of one or the other. Truth must be pursued either through rigorous adherence to the scientific method and application of sound, hypothesis-driven reasoning, through scriptural study and prayer, or, ideally, both. However, these equally valid approaches to the search for truth are best not mixed — to modify the pursuit of scientific investigation by simply claiming "God did it" is as inappropriate as trying to prove the truthfulness of the Book of Mormon with differential equations. Ultimately, both approaches to truth will converge at the same point. But not within our mortal lifetimes.

Second, both of these avenues to the pursuit of truth should be carried out with a fair dose of humility. Newton's laws represent very useful approximations to the physical laws that govern a limited portion of the universe; should we be surprised that Darwin's observations likewise clearly and accurately describe one piece of the process of

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*Discourses*, 13:140–41; James E. Talmage, *The Articles of Faith* (Salt Lake City: The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, 1977), 220.

9. Jen Schwartz and Dan Schlenoff, "Reckoning with Our Mistakes: Some of the Cringiest Articles in the Magazine's History Reveal Bigger Questions about Scientific Authority," *Scientific American*, 323/3 (September 2020): 36–41, <https://www.scientificamerican.com/article/reckoning-with-our-mistakes/>. This article is quoted in Daniel C. Peterson, "Reckoning with the Mortally Inevitable," *Interpreter: A Journal of Latter-day Saint Faith and Scholarship* 39 (2020): vii–xvi, <https://journal.interpreterfoundation.org/reckoning-with-the-mortally-inevitable/>.

10. Horgan, "Delusion of Scientific Omniscience." It is perhaps worth noting that neither of these summaries of scientific error appeared in actual professional scientific journals. On the other hand, such omissions may simply represent the reasonable assumption that any serious scientist would recognize the original errors from a reading of subsequent peer-reviewed manuscripts, since years may have passed since the original publication and the original authors may now be deceased.

diversification of life? As has been observed previously, evolution is intelligent design. But in a similar manner, why would the honest seeker of truth be willing to repeat Michelson's error by assuming that minor refinements of Darwinian evolutionary theory are all there is, or can ever be to the complete story of life on earth?

Finally, it is important to realize that recognition of these limitations of our intellectual and scientific pursuit of truth does not, by itself, prove anything. Rather, rejection of the arrogant belief that anything we cannot understand through the lens of current scientific investigative techniques cannot possibly be true simply opens the door to serious pursuit of truth, both through renewed vigor in skeptical questioning of what we currently believe to be scientifically proven, and through the complementary spiritual process involving study, contemplation, and prayer.

### Theological Hubris

When viewed in the proper light, scientific and spiritual approaches to truth are complementary and augment one another. Just how can an understanding of science help us better understand spiritual truths? First, by reminding us of the ultimate complexity of most important truths. On a hike in the mountains, a child is told to stay away from the edge of a cliff. She asks, "Why?" Consider the possible range of progressively complex answers to explain the effects of gravity. "Because you might get an owie." "Because you might fall down and hurt yourself." "Because all objects attract one another in proportion to their mass, and the earth is bigger than you are." "Because you exist in warped space-time." While all these answers are equally correct, our response to the child will vary according to her level of knowledge and sophistication. When considering concepts such as our pre-mortal existence, the Celestial Kingdom or Priesthood power, such considerations should help us realize that in terms of a complete understanding of these spiritual matters, most of us are probably at the "you will get an owie" stage. Thus, the scientific process contains potentially valuable lessons in epistemology in terms of our understanding of equally complex spiritual processes.

The response of Christ to questioning by the Sadducees regarding the ultimate marital fate of an unfortunate woman who was widowed six times is instructive in this regard (see Matthew 22:30). While often quoted, it is seldom observed that in his reply, Christ did not actually answer the question posed to him, a question which had nothing to do with the performance of marriages *after* this life. His response demonstrates two important principles with wider application to our

lives. First, the questioners in this instance were not humble truth seekers; rather, they were wicked men mocking the Savior and trying, through their questions, to discredit His teachings. The Lord's non-response teaches us that we, likewise, have no obligation to respond with a serious response to a non-earnest inquiry regarding Church doctrine. More importantly, we must ask ourselves just what a complete and truthful answer to this question would entail. "If she was married to one of these men in a temple of the Restoration through the New and Everlasting Covenant of Marriage by the power of the Melchizedek Priesthood, and if both partners lived worthy to inherit the Celestial Kingdom, she would be married to that man in the eternities. If not, she would not be married to any of them." To even a humble, earnest seeker of truth during Christ's life on Earth, this truthful answer would be meaningless. Temple of the restoration? New and Everlasting Covenant? Melchizedek Priesthood? Celestial Kingdom? Given the state of revealed knowledge at that time, an answer to the Sadducees' question would have been as impossible as explaining to Isaac Newton in a sentence or two quantum computing or the workings of an iPhone. The restoration of all things spiritual is an ongoing process, and to a large extent, we are still looking through a glass, darkly (1 Corinthians 13:12). There undoubtedly exist spiritual concepts, dimensions, and perspectives with which we are today unfamiliar and which render a completely satisfying answer to some of our purely spiritual questions equally impossible. At least today, both scientific and spiritual humility are important.

### **Science Complements Religion**

Science may also help us better understand scriptural references. For example, much of the conflict between Galileo and the early Catholic Church stemmed from the church's misinterpretation of Old Testament scriptures indicating that "the world also shall be stable, that it be not moved" (1 Chronicles 16:30). An appreciation of the value of science would perhaps have moved the early church fathers to seek one of the numerous non-literal interpretations of this verse and thus increased their understanding of the true meaning of the scripture, in addition to eliminating conflict with Galileo. My own understanding of the process of evolution strengthens my appreciation for the genius underlying God's use of this process as one part of the intelligent design of life on earth.

## Religion Complements Science

Faith in God likewise has the potential to augment scientific investigation. An acceptance of our profound human limitations (“For as the heavens are higher than the earth, so are my ways higher than your ways, and my thoughts than your thoughts” [Isaiah 55:9]) should be a powerful motivating force to continually seek new answers to old questions with an understanding that scientific dogma will, almost by definition, be always incomplete. Augustine viewed curiosity as sinful.<sup>11</sup> However, our knowledge that “the Lord by wisdom hath founded the earth; by understanding hath he established the heavens” (Proverbs 3:19) suggests that God is the ultimate scientist, not the ultimate magician. This understanding should spur us on to unending pursuit of the explanation of everything, whether by scientific or spiritual means, as we are commanded to “be instructed more perfectly ... of things both in heaven and in the earth, and under the earth; things which have been, things which are, things which must shortly come to pass” (D&C 88:78–79). In addition, it seems to me that any understanding of the “how” of creation is sterile without an understanding of the “why.” Leonardo da Vinci is reported to have said, “It’s not enough that you believe what you see. You must also understand what you see.”<sup>12</sup> As Elder Oaks has stated, “Those who do not learn ‘by study and also by faith’ (Doctrine and Covenants 88:118) limit their understanding of truth to what they can verify by scientific means. That puts artificial limits on their pursuit of truth.”<sup>13</sup> Of course the opposite is equally true — limiting our understanding of the truth to those fragments of knowledge that can be gleaned from revealed scripture puts similarly unnecessary limits on our pursuit of truth and our ultimate progress. My experience suggests that a more thorough understanding of the strengths and limitations of the scientific method would serve many Latter-day Saints well and dispel much distrust of the scientific approach to truth seeking. In addition, just as the serious scientist takes great care to limit his conclusions to those

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11. Beth Haile, “Casey Anthony and the Vice of Curiosity,” *Current Events, Catholic Moral Theology* (website), July 4, 2011, <https://catholicmoraltheology.com/casey-anthony-and-the-vice-of-curiosity/#:~:text=Augustine%20regarded%20curiosity%20as%20E2%80%9Cconcupiscence%20of%20the%20eyes%20E2%80%9D,definition%2C%20identifies%20curiosity%20as%20a%20vice%20against%20temperance.>

12. Leonardo da Vinci, “Leonardo da Vinci Quotes,” *AZquotes*, [https://www.azquotes.com/author/15101-Leonardo\\_da\\_Vinci](https://www.azquotes.com/author/15101-Leonardo_da_Vinci).

13. Dallin H. Oaks, “Truth and the Plan,” *Ensign* 48 (November 2018): 25, <https://www.churchofjesuschrist.org/study/ensign/2018/11/saturday-morning-session/truth-and-the-plan>.

fully supported by the data, the man or woman of faith must continually take great care to avoid promulgating untruths by creating new doctrine from vaguely defined scriptural sketches. Of course, we want to know more, but unfortunately, stretching conjecture into dogma does little in this regard, and is generally harmful in the long run.

Finally, to again quote Elder Oaks, “Jesus Christ *is* the Only Begotten and Beloved Son of God. . . . He *is* our Savior from sin and death. This is the most important knowledge on earth.”<sup>14</sup> To allow ourselves to become discouraged or distracted by a question about any other, less important truth seems very shortsighted. While there is a logical answer to every question, our current understanding of that answer is often obscured by the limited perspective available to us as mortals. As we consider the almost evangelical atheism with which some current writers promote their (dis)belief, it seems wise to consider the observation that fanaticism is generally born of doubt and is often an attempt at self-persuasion.

We have admittedly come a long way, both scientifically and spiritually, in the millennium since our proto-scientist made his observations of the movement of the sun around the earth. However, both scientific and religious arrogance continue to be dangerous to the serious seeker of truth; to reject anything out of hand because we cannot understand it is shortsighted. As Daniel Boorstin observed, “The greatest enemy of knowledge is not ignorance, it is the illusion of knowledge.”<sup>15</sup> In terms of a complete understanding of both scientific truths and religious miracles, we still live in the olden days.

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14. Dallin H. Oaks, “Teachings of Jesus,” *Ensign* 41 (November 2011): 90, 93, <https://www.churchofjesuschrist.org/study/ensign/2011/11/sunday-afternoon-session/teachings-of-jesus>.

15. Daniel J. Boorstin, QuotableQuote, Goodreads.com, <https://www.goodreads.com/quotes/68927-the-greatest-enemy-of-knowledge-is-not-ignorance-it-is>.



# PURITANS, PAGANS, AND IMPERFECT CHRISTMAS GIFTS

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David F. Holland

**Abstract:** *Early American campaigns against Christmas illustrate both the irrepressibility of the impulse to celebrate Christ and what is lost when we reject the good that comes from suspect sources. Both lessons point us toward the Savior's gracious acceptance of our own imperfect offerings.*

Christmas in rural New England is a mood. Snow falls softly on colonial-era farmhouses. Candles sit in the gabled windows that line little village streets. Townsfolk gather on the common to trim and light a tree. As the song suggests, it is nearly “like a picture print by Currier and Ives” — a land of pumpkin pies and Longfellow poems and Alcott’s literary visions of the March girls taking their Christmas feast to the needy.<sup>1</sup> When we suggested to our college-student children that, instead of bringing them home, we might travel to them for the holidays this year, there was near rebellion. New England, we were told, *is* Christmas.

Now, I enjoy all this yuletide sentimentality and its carefully curated aesthetic as much as anyone. I am a sucker for the spice-scented ambiance that settles upon our communities as Christmas approaches. It is indeed lovely. But I am also a historian who knows something about the religious values of New England’s past, and I cannot help but be somewhat amused by the fact that this effusion of holiday nostalgia would make the region’s Puritan progenitors sick. Maybe furious. Definitely disappointed. They had actually done their darndest to kill Christmas.

As early modern Britons, Puritans knew Christmas to be an annual excuse for too much drinking, too much ribaldry, too much irreverence and unrest. Worse still, as radical Protestants, they saw Christmas as

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1. Mitchell Parish, “Sleigh Ride,” music by Leroy Anderson (Nashville, TN: EMI Mills Music, 1950).

a reflection of Catholicism's paganizing influence in Christendom. Just as they rejected the Catholic mass as a jumble of sensory rituals that benumbed the soul with alluring sights, smells, and sounds, they suppressed "Christ mass" as a celebration unfit for their Savior. The observance of Christmas was not something that — by their reading — the scriptures sanctioned, and its extravagant imposition could only lead the gullible away from the spiritual demands of discipleship.<sup>2</sup>

They were serious about this. Boston made celebration of the holiday a finable offense for decades. Even after the lifting of such official punishments, stalwart Puritans sought to suppress the practice. In a December 25th diary entry, the prominent Boston judge Samuel Sewall exulted in the fact that most of the town's inhabitants still refused to acknowledge the day, going about their business as usual. Sewall spent a typical morning reading Psalms with his family and then took occasion "to 'dehort [them] from Christmas-keeping, and charged them to forbear.'"<sup>3</sup> Puritans like Sewall carefully observed their community to make sure it did not observe the holiday.

The story of how New England went from a region radically dedicated to the eradication of Christmas to a region identified by its iconic observance of the holiday is long and complicated. It has to do with demographic change, and economic development, and a host of other historical forces of limited relevance for the purposes of this essay. There are, however, a pair of implications in this history that seem worth noting.

First, I am struck by the irrepressible desire to rejoice in the birth of our Lord. Puritans were right about so much: December 25th *was* an unverified date for the advent; pagan influences *had* seeped into the modes of observance; riotous revelries *were* incongruous with claims of devotion. But they seemed dead wrong on one thing: they underestimated the power of even imperfect celebrations to meet a deep Christian desire to celebrate the Savior's arrival in our fallen world. Their best effort to suppress that celebratory impulse, albeit pursued in the name of strict

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2. Stephen Nissenbaum, *The Battle for Christmas: A Social and Cultural History of Our Most Cherished Holiday* (New York: Vintage Books, 1997), 3–48; David D. Hall, *Worlds of Wonder, Days of Judgment: Popular Religious Belief in Early New England* (New York: Knopf, 1989), 10.

3. Quoted in Stephen W. Nissenbaum, "Christmas in Early New England, 1620–1820: Puritanism, Popular Culture, and the Printed Word," *Proceedings of the American Antiquarian Society*, 106/1 (1996): 153, <https://www.americanantiquarian.org/proceedings/44539478.pdf>.



gospel purity, could not be sustained. This effort to honor God by eradicating Christmas failed.

I cannot help but see some parallels between the Puritans' ill-fated campaign against Christmas and the account in Luke of our Lord's triumphal entry into Jerusalem: as he arrived "the whole multitude of the disciples began to rejoice and praise God with a loud voice for all the mighty works that they had seen; saying, Blessed be the King that cometh in the name of the Lord: peace in heaven, and glory in the highest." When the Pharisees sought to silence the celebration, Jesus "answered and said unto them, I tell you that, if these should hold their peace, the stones would immediately cry out" (Luke 19:37–40). The same impulse to rejoice in the arrival of the world's great Hope, which could not be contained that day in Jerusalem, similarly cannot be suppressed among those who feel the meaning of his humble entrance into our shared mortality. Worship — when fueled by gratitude and adoration — will not be so easily silenced. It comes from somewhere deeply seated within us, an instinct we share with the very elements of the earth itself. It can be muted for a time, but it won't be gone for long. The history of New England would tell us as much. In this it is not alone.

This fact was poignantly on display in the First World War, when English and German combatants had an impromptu Christmas Day ceasefire, emerging from their trenches to sing and make merry together. What the Puritans could not do in the name of religious devotion, a World War could not do in the name of imperial conquest. Neither one could defeat the desire to honor the Prince of Peace by celebrating his birth. They hadn't stopped Christmas; it came just the same.<sup>4</sup>

Another lesson I take from the Puritans' campaign against Christmas is the very real risk of religious overcorrection. Folks like Samuel Sewall certainly saw themselves as doing God's work in their effort to eliminate the holiday, but they made the age-old mistake of defining this aspect of their faith in the negative. They weren't quite sure what they should do to recognize the Nativity, they just knew it wasn't going to be at all associated with what their theological opponents did. In critiquing medieval Christianity, they cast away everything that seemed stained by its unscriptural practices. If some reform was good, more must be better, they reasoned, and they were going to purify the House of God until it was immaculate.

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4. See Stanley Weintraub, *Silent Night: The Remarkable Christmas Truce of 1914* (London: Simon and Schuster, 2002).

This sort of theology by reaction tends to recoil at anything associated with those it deems its enemies, even if they actually have something of potential value to offer. This seems to be a tragic instinct of humanity in general, and perhaps it particularly affects religious disputants, given a tendency to seek absolute doctrinal purity. From 2 Nephi 29 to the most recent General Conference, where we were reminded of the good to be found in those with whom we may have even serious theological disagreement, Latter-day Saints have reasons to resist this inclination. As the Prophet Joseph declared, “One of the grand fundamental principles of Mormonism is to receive truth, let it come from whence it may.”<sup>5</sup> Elsewhere he wrote, “We believe that we have a right to embrace all, and every item of truth, without limitation or without being circumscribed or prohibited by the creeds or superstitious notions of men, or by the dominations of one another.”<sup>6</sup>

At times, we as a people have engaged in the tendency to theologize by overcorrection. A desire to avoid what we saw as the theological errors of evangelicalism, for instance, has occasionally made us too hesitant to acknowledge our profound dependence on divine mercy. Where Puritans tossed away Christmas because it was too pagan and too Catholic, we have too frequently muted an amazing grace because it seemed too Protestant. As we appear to be learning in our growing comfort with the language of grace, we can accept the truths cherished by others, even if we disagree on much else. We were too quick to suspect the theological gift that evangelical counterparts had already offered. Just as Christmas would not be killed, our need for divine grace could not be lastingly downplayed.

Among the instructive symbols of the Christmas story is the way in which various figures are remembered for their observance of the Lord’s advent. Shepherds marked the moment in their way; wisemen in theirs; and Simeon and Anna in theirs. The Christ received the blessings that each had to bring, regardless of the source. To borrow the prophet’s phrasing, he “let them come from whence they may.” Later in his mortal ministry, the Savior welcomed the dinners offered by Pharisees and the ministrations of a disgraced woman, even when the two seemed

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5. The Joseph Smith Papers, “History, 1838–1856, volume E-1 [1 July 1843–30 April 1844],” 1666, <https://www.josephsmithpapers.org/paper-summary/history-1838-1856-volume-e-1-1-july-1843-30-april-1844/36>.

6. The Joseph Smith Papers, “Letter to Isaac Galland, 22 March 1839,” 54, <https://www.josephsmithpapers.org/paper-summary/letter-to-isaac-galland-22-march-1839/4>.

fundamentally at odds. He accepted the good that many sought to do him, graciously receiving their imperfect offerings without minimizing his critique of the wayward in their lives. So he does for us, both receiving what we give him in good faith and calling us to repentance, knowing that in all of human history perhaps no one has ever presented him with a perfectly pure offering. If He were to reject the good things we present because they are intertwined with human folly and fault, he would never accept a thing any of us has ever brought to the altar.

As I consider the Puritan heritage of New England and the persistence of Christmas joy, I am struck by the beauty that can result when we make room for the imperfect gifts we encounter. I am profoundly grateful that some elements of that early New England asceticism have remained to temper the neo-pagan materialist excesses of a modern capitalist Christmas. Similarly, I am grateful that the desire to be generous and joyful at the commemoration of Christ's birth overcame the Puritans' theology of overcorrection. Even damaged offerings can enrich our lives when we resist the temptation to reject the truths therein because they strike us as coming from unlikely sources. And I am grateful for a Savior, represented in the Nativity narrative by his infant self, who patiently welcomes what we have to offer. Among *his* greatest gifts is his magnanimous willingness to accept *ours*.

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# STAINED SWORDS: A PSALM OF REDEMPTION

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Loren Blake Spendlove

**Abstract:** *The author proposes a novel ideal for understanding the stained swords of the Anti-Nephi-Lehies that involves repetition, parallelism, and metaphoric Hebrew wordplay.*

A favorite story in the Book of Mormon recounts the miraculous conversion of many of the Lamanites from the preaching of the sons of Mosiah. Although many were converted, we are told that those “which had not been converted and had not taken upon them the name of Anti-Nephi-Lehi were stirred up by the Amlicites and by the Amulonites to anger against their brethren” (Alma 24:1).<sup>1</sup> Within the framework of this looming threat, Mormon added an eloquent and moving speech by the king of the Anti-Nephi-Lehies, who himself had been renamed Anti-Nephi-Lehi. Part of his speech reads:

Now my best beloved brethren, since God hath taken away our stains and our swords have become bright, then let us stain our swords no more with the blood of our brethren. Behold, I say unto you: Nay, let us retain our swords that they be not stained with the blood of our brethren. For perhaps if we should stain our swords again, they can no more be washed bright through the blood of the Son of our great God, which shall be shed for the atonement of our sins. (Alma 24:12–13)

In this speech, the king admonished his people that “since God hath taken away our stains and our swords have become bright, then let us stain our swords no more with the blood of our brethren.” William Hamblin and Brent Merrill noted, “Two separate metaphors are used

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1. All Book of Mormon citations are from Royal Skousen, ed., *The Book of Mormon: The Earliest Text* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2009).

here: first, that the swords had been stained with blood, and second, that they had been made bright again by God.”<sup>2</sup> Observing that metal swords could be difficult to stain with blood, Hamblin and Merrill proposed an idea for the construction of these swords:

From the Mesoamerican perspective, the most likely candidate for the Book of Mormon sword is the weapon known in Nahuatl (Aztec) as the *macuahuitl* or *macana*. The *macuahuitl* was constructed from a long staff or large paddle-shaped piece of wood. Sharp obsidian flakes were fixed into the edges of the wooden blade, giving it a deadly cutting edge. There are numerous representations of the *macuahuitl* in Mesoamerican art, the earliest dating back to the Pre-Classical era.... [A]lthough not impossible, the metaphor of staining metal swords with blood is somewhat unusual. However, if the Nephite sword were the Mesoamerican *macuahuitl* with a wooden shaft, blood would naturally stain and discolor the wood when an enemy was wounded. Furthermore, if a metal weapon becomes bloody, the blade can be easily wiped clean. Removing a bloodstain from wood is virtually impossible since the blood soaks into the fibers of the wood.<sup>3</sup>

Hamblin’s and Merrill’s idea that swords in the Book of Mormon were constructed in a manner similar to the Mesoamerican *macuahuitl* is intriguing and convincing.<sup>4</sup> While I consider their proposal entirely plausible, I propose a different approach to the king’s speech that does not rely on any specific materials or method of construction for the swords. The proposal that I outline relies on repetition, parallelism, and metaphoric Hebrew wordplay.

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2. William J. Hamblin and Brent A. Merrill, “Swords in the Book of Mormon,” in *Warfare in the Book of Mormon*, eds. Stephen D. Ricks and William J. Hamblin (Provo, UT: Foundation for Ancient Research and Mormon Studies, 1990), 342, <https://archive.bookofmormoncentral.org/content/swords-book-mormon>.

3. *Ibid.*, 338–40, 342.

4. Other Later-day Saint scholars have also supported this idea. See Matthew Roper, “Swords and Cimeters in the Book of Mormon,” *Journal of Book of Mormon Studies* 8, no. 1 (1999): 34–43, 77–78, <https://scholarsarchive.byu.edu/jbms/vol8/iss1/7>.



**Figure 1.** Drawing from the 16th century Florentine Codex showing three Aztec warriors each wielding a macuahuitl.<sup>5</sup>

## Part 1: Prologue

I have divided the king's speech into five separate sections: a prologue, three internal sections, and an epilogue. In the prologue to his speech, King Anti-Nephi-Lehi used a type of rhetoric that I call *spiral progression*, based on a pedagogical approach of the same name<sup>6</sup> (see Table 1).

5. "Aztec Warriors (Florentine Codex)," *Wikimedia Commons*, last edited March 8, 2021, 21:14, [https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Aztec\\_Warriors\\_\(Florentine\\_Codex\).jpg](https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Aztec_Warriors_(Florentine_Codex).jpg).

6. Spiral progression is an instructional approach where a teacher introduces a concept to students and repeatedly returns to the same concept. Each time the concept is revisited, increased levels of depth or complexity are added.



Table 1. Prologue.<sup>7</sup>

- A 7 *I thank my God*  
 B       that *our great God* has in goodness sent *these our*  
           *brethren, the Nephites*
- A 8 *I thank my great God*  
 C       that we have *opened a correspondence*  
 B       with *these brethren, the Nephites*.
- A 9 *I also thank my God*  
 C       that by *opening this correspondence*  
 D       we have been convinced of *our sins and of the*  
           *many murders which we have committed*.
- A 10 *I also thank my God, yea, my great God*  
 D       that we might repent of these things, and also  
           that he hath forgiven us of these *our many sins*  
           *and murders which we have committed*
- E       and took away the *guilt* from our hearts  
           *through the merits of his Son*.

The first spiral in the progression begins with an expression of gratitude that God had sent “these our brethren, the Nephites” to teach them. In the next spiral the king repeats his thanks to God for the coming of “these brethren, the Nephites,” and he also adds a second element: that they had opened a correspondence with the Nephites. The third spiral, like the first and second, begins with another declaration of thanks to God, and the king repeats that a correspondence had been opened with the Nephites. Following these, the king adds that they have been convinced of their “sins and of the many murders” which they had committed. In the final spiral the king again leads off by expressing thanks to God, and then he repeats that they have committed “many sins and murders.” Completing the progression, the king adds his final thought, that “through the merits of his Son,” God has taken away “the guilt from our hearts.”

With his prologue building to a climax, the king laid out a four-step progression, with each spiral circling back to express thanks and to repeat the prior concept. The four-step progression can be summarized as follows:

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7. In order to simplify the analysis of these verses, I have removed all but the essential passages. See the Appendix for a full exposition of King Anti-Nephi-Lehi’s speech.



1. God sent the Nephites to preach to the Lamanites;
2. The Lamanites opened a correspondence with them. In other words, they responded to this preaching and positively engaged with the Nephites;
3. The Lamanites became convinced of their sins and murders; and,
4. They repented, were forgiven, and their guilt was taken away through the atonement of Jesus Christ.

## Part 2: Expanded Progression

In the next section of his discourse, verses 11–13, King Anti-Nephi-Lehi crafted an expanded progression built upon the framework of his message in verse 10: repentance and forgiveness of sins through the atonement of Christ (see Table 2).

**Table 2.** Expanded Progression.

- |   |   |
|---|---|
| A | 11 <i>Since it has been all that we could do</i> , as we were the most lost of all mankind, to repent of all <i>our sins and the many murders</i> which we have committed and <i>to get God</i> |
| B | to <i>take them</i> [our sins and the many murders] <i>away from our hearts</i> —   |
| A | for <i>it was all we could do</i> to repent sufficiently <i>before God</i>  |
| B | that he would <i>take away our stains</i> —   |
| B | 12 since God hath <i>taken away our stains</i>  |
| C | and our swords have <i>become bright</i> ,  |
| D | then let us <i>stain our swords no more</i> with the <i>blood of our brethren</i> .   |
| D | 13 Nay, let us retain <i>our swords</i> that they be <i>not stained</i> with the <i>blood of our brethren</i> .   |
| D | For perhaps if we should <i>stain our swords</i> again,   |
| C | they can no more be <i>washed bright</i>  |
| E | through the <i>blood of the Son of our great God</i> ,  |
| E | which shall be <i>shed for the atonement of our sins</i> .  |

The king begins this section (Part 2) by repeating many of the same expressions that he used in the final lines of the prologue: repentance, their many sins and murders, and the removal of the guilt/sins from their hearts. In the prologue and in the opening line of this section, the king repeated variations of the phrase “our many sins and murders.”

In this section, the king also introduced a metonymic replacement for the people's "many sins and murders": *stains*. Although he initially associated these stains with the people's sins and murders, calling them "our stains," the king promptly shifted these stains from his people to their swords: "let us stain our swords no more with the blood of our brethren."

The only other mention of *stain* in the Book of Mormon occurs in Alma's preaching to the members of the church in Zarahemla:

I say unto you: Ye will know at that day that ye cannot be saved; for there can no man be saved except his garments are washed white; yea, his garments must be purified until it is cleansed from all *stain* through the blood of him of whom it hath been spoken by our fathers which should come to redeem his people from their sins. And now I ask of you my brethren: How will any of you feel if ye shall stand before the bar of God, having your garments *stained* with blood and all manner of filthiness? Behold, what will these things testify against you? (Alma 5:21–22)

Alma's metonymic usage of *stain* in these verses parallels that of King Anti-Nephi-Lehi, with one variation. While King Anti-Nephi-Lehi transferred the people's sins/stains to their swords, Alma portrays their sins as stains on their garments. Like the king, Alma also explains that we can be "cleansed from all *stain* through the blood of him of whom it hath been spoken by our fathers which should come to *redeem* his people from their sins."<sup>8</sup> (We will later return to the significance of Alma linking "redeem" with "stains" in this passage.)

I propose that King Anti-Nephi-Lehi's metonymic shifting of the *stains* from the people to their swords represents wordplay on the Hebrew root ג-א-ל (*g-a-l*) with its derived verb גאל (*gaal*) and noun גאל (*goel*). This Hebrew root principally means to *pollute* or *defile* but can also carry the connotation of *to stain*. In the following passage from Isaiah, the prophet uses a nearly identical metaphor to that of King Anti-Nephi-Lehi when

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8. Jacob employed a similar metaphor when he removed his garments and shook them before the people: "O my beloved brethren, remember my words. Behold, I take off my garments and I shake them before you. I pray the God of my salvation that he view me with his all-searching eye. Wherefore ye shall know at the last day, when all men shall be judged of their works, that the God of Israel did witness that I shook your iniquities from my soul and that I stand with brightness before him and am rid of your blood" (2 Nephi 9:44).

he identifies the people's hands that have been defiled/stained with blood and their fingers that likewise have been defiled/stained with iniquity:

For your hands are *defiled* [נִגְאָלוּ *negoalu*] with blood, and your fingers with iniquity. (Isaiah 59:3 KJV)

The New International Version (NIV) renders these lines somewhat differently, translating נִגְאָלוּ (*negoalu*) as *stained* rather than *defiled*:

For your hands are stained [נִגְאָלוּ *negoalu*] with blood, your fingers with guilt. (Isaiah 59:3 NIV)

In a second passage from the KJV, Isaiah uses the same Hebrew verb to indicate that messiah's garments would be *stained* with the blood of the people:

I have trodden the winepress alone; and of the people there was none with me: for I will tread them in mine anger, and trample them in my fury; and their blood shall be sprinkled upon my garments, and I will stain [אֶגְאִלְתִּי *egalti*] all my raiment. (Isaiah 63:3 KJV; cf. D&C 133:46–52)

The many sins and murders of the Anti-Nephi-Lehies have *defiled* their hearts and *stained* their hands with the blood of their enemies. However, God in his mercy took away this guilt from them “through the blood of the Son.” In a metaphorical and literal sense, the swords of these converted Lamanites had also been *defiled* and *stained* with the blood of their enemies. By shifting the stains — their sins and many murders — from the people to their swords, the king expertly employed a form of enallage,<sup>9</sup> allowing his audience of converts to view their past iniquity from a distance. In addition, as “they did bury them up deep in the earth,” the people's swords became metaphorical scapegoats by absorbing and carrying away their stains.<sup>10</sup>

The wordplay in this section becomes even more intriguing when we recognize that another Hebrew root, with its accompanying verb and noun, shares the same spelling and pronunciation as the root for *defile*, *pollute*, or *stain*: to *redeem*. The Hebrew root for *redeem* — ל-א-ג

9. *Enallage* is “an intentional substitution of one grammatical form for another. This technique can be used to create distance or proximity between the speaker, the audience, and the message.” Loren Spendlove, “Limhi’s Discourse: Proximity and Distance in Teaching,” *Interpreter: A Journal of Latter-day Saint Faith and Scholarship* 8 (2014): 1, <https://journal.interpreterfoundation.org/limhis-discourse-proximity-and-distance-in-teaching>.

10. See Leviticus 16.

(*g-a-l*) — and its derived verb and noun — גָּאַל (*gaal*, to redeem) and גֹּאֵל (*goel*, redeemer)<sup>11</sup> — are true homonyms of the verb *to defile* or *to stain* (גָּאַל *gaal*) and the noun *defilement* or *stain* (גֹּאֵל *goel*). Seeing that the king’s discourse is focused on the people’s redemption from their sins (stains) through the atonement of Christ, this wordplay is both fitting and appropriate.

Knowing that both *stain* and *redeem* are derived from the same Hebrew root, it appears that Alma also employed the same Hebrew wordplay as King Anti-Nephi-Lehi when he linked the people’s *stains* with the *redemption* of Christ in Alma 5:21–22, previously quoted.

Another Hebrew wordplay in Part 2 of King Anti-Nephi-Lehi’s speech also merits discussion. The king explained that the people’s “swords have become *bright*.” In the following passages from Isaiah and Jeremiah, the italicized words are all derived from the Hebrew root כ-ר-ר (*b-r-r*):

He has made My mouth like a sharp sword, In the shadow of His hand He has concealed Me; And He has also made Me a *sharpened* [בָּרַר *barur*] arrow, He has hidden Me in His quiver. (Isaiah 49:2 NASB20)

Depart ye, depart ye, go ye out from thence, touch no unclean thing; go ye out of the midst of her; *be ye clean* [הִבָּרֵן *hibaru*], that bear the vessels of the LORD. (Isaiah 52:11 KJV)

*Make bright* [הִבָּרֵן *hivaru*] the arrows; gather the shields: the LORD hath raised up the spirit of the kings of the Medes: for his device is against Babylon, to destroy it; because it is the vengeance of the LORD, the vengeance of his temple. (Jeremiah 51:11 KJV)

Carrying the connotation of *to be sharp* or *be clean*, this Hebrew verb, most likely originating from the Ugaritic root<sup>12</sup> *brr* meaning *shining*,<sup>13</sup> can also mean *to be bright*. Given these definitions, it is likely that the swords of the Anti-Nephi-Lehies became bright through sharpening. It is very possible that these converted Lamanites, prior to burying their

11. Also, גֹּאֵל (*goel*).

12. In the Ugaritic language, the root *brr* carried the meaning of “to be or remain pure, clean, free.” Gregorio del Olmo Lete, Joaquín Sanmartín, *A Dictionary of the Ugaritic Language in the Alphabetic Tradition*, 3rd ed. (Leiden, NDL: Brill, 2015), 237.

13. Ludwig Koehler and Walter Baumgartner, *The Hebrew and Aramaic Lexicon of the Old Testament* (Leiden, NDL: Brill, 2001), s.v. בָּרַר.

swords as a testimony to God, also sharpened them to make them shine as a further testimony that they were buried unstained, or undefiled, with the blood of their enemies.

### Part 3: Chiasm

In Part 3 of his discourse, King Anti-Nephi-Lehi presents a well-crafted chiasm focused on God's mercy and love for his children:

Table 3. Chiasm.

A	14 And the <i>great God</i> has had <i>mercy</i> on us
B	and <i>made these things known unto us</i> that we might not perish.
B	Yea, and <i>he hath made these things known unto us beforehand</i>
C	because <i>he loveth our souls</i>
C'	as well as <i>he loveth our children</i> .
B'	Therefore in his mercy he doth visit us by his angels, that the plan of salvation <i>might be made known unto us</i>
B'	as well as <i>unto future generations</i> .
A'	15 O how <i>merciful</i> is our God!

### Part 4: Chiasm

In Part 4 we discover additional wordplay on the Hebrew root 7-7-2 (*b-r-r*). As discussed in Part 2, this root can mean to *be sharp*, to *be clean*, or to *be bright*. In the chiasm in this section, the king contrasted (1) the taking away of the people's *stains* (sins) and their *swords* that were *made bright* (sharpened) with (2) the preaching of *the word* that *made them clean* (see Table 4).

Table 4. Chiasm.

A	15 Since it has been as much as we could do to get our <i>stains taken away</i> from us and our <i>swords are made bright</i> ,
B	let us hide them away that they may be <i>kept bright</i>
C	as a <i>testimony</i> to our God <i>at the last day</i> —
C'	or <i>at the day</i> that we shall be brought to stand before him to be <i>judged</i> —
B'	that we have <i>not stained</i> our swords in the blood of our brethren
A'	since he imparted <i>his word</i> unto us and has <i>made us clean</i> thereby.

The wordplay in this section involving the root 7-7-2 (*b-r-r*) revolves around the parallel phrases “our swords *were made bright*,” and “*has made us clean* thereby.” While the swords would have been made *bright* through *sharpening*, the text does not explicitly explain how the people were made *clean*. However, the text might provide a clue. In Table 4, King Anti-Nephi-Lehi explained that the people’s stains (sins) were taken away from them, and in Table 2, we are told that this was accomplished through the atonement of “the Son of our God.” In the final line of Table 4, we are given a parallel teaching: the people were made clean because “he [God] *imparted his word* unto us.” Synonyms for *imparted* include *gave*, *communicated*, *proclaimed*, *divulged*, and *revealed*, among others. If we understand *his word* as a metonym for *his Son*,<sup>14</sup> then the final line of Table 4 could be rendered “since he revealed *his Son* unto us and *made us clean* thereby.” The king had previously taught his people that their swords were “washed bright through the blood of the Son of our great God, which shall be shed for the atonement of our sins.” In light of this teaching, it is reasonable to understand that through *his Word*, or through *Christ*, the people were made *clean*.

### Part 5: Epilogue

In this final section, the king repeats the same elements found in Table 4: their swords are to be hidden, or buried, to keep them bright as a testimony at the last day. Finally, King Anti-Nephi-Lehi concludes by adding that if their enemies do destroy them, all will be well because they will go to their God “and shall be saved” (see Table 5).

Table 5. Epilogue.

- |   |    |   |
|---|----|---|
| A | 16 | <i>If our brethren seek to destroy us,</i>                  |
| B |    | behold, we will <i>hide away our swords</i> ;               |
| B |    | yea, even we will <i>bury them deep in the earth</i> ,      |
| C |    | that they may be <i>kept bright</i>                         |
| C |    | as a testimony <i>that we have never used them</i> , at the |
|   |    | last day.   |
| A |    | And <i>if our brethren destroy us</i> ,                     |
| D |    | we shall <i>go to our God</i>                               |
| D |    | and <i>shall be saved</i> .                                 |

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14. 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/>.

In this section, the king proposed that the Anti-Nephi-Lehies bury their swords “deep in the earth” to keep them bright, or sharp. Since tools and instruments of war typically become dull through use, these sharpened swords would serve “as a testimony that we have never used them.”

## Conclusion

Through the use of repetition, parallelism, and Hebrew wordplay, King Anti-Nephi-Lehi delivered a discourse of redemption and salvation to his people. In a well-crafted sermon, the king elegantly used several Hebrew roots to accomplish this wordplay. The people’s many sins and murders — identified as stains by the king that he metonymically transferred to their swords — were washed clean through the blood of Christ.

In Ephesians 6:17, Paul counseled the saints to take up the “sword of the Spirit,” which he identified as “the word of God.” As previously discussed, the *Word of God* can be understood as a metonym for Christ. So, when King Anti-Nephi-Lehi transferred the stains/sins of the people to their swords — an act of atonement similar to the expiation ritual of the scapegoat in ancient Israel — this can be understood as a metaphor for Christ taking upon himself their sins. And just as their swords were buried in the earth, Christ also was buried for our sake and then raised from the dead so that we, like the converted Lamanites, can “go to our God” and “be saved.”

## Appendix: King Anti-Nephi Lehi’s Speech

I thank my God, my beloved people, that our great God has in goodness sent these our brethren, the Nephites, unto us, to preach unto us and to convince us of the traditions of our wicked fathers. And behold, I thank my great God that he has given us a portion of his Spirit to soften our hearts, that we have opened a correspondence with these brethren, the Nephites. And behold, I also thank my God that by opening this correspondence we have been convinced of our sins and of the many murders which we have committed. And I also thank my God, yea, my great God, that he hath granted unto us that we might repent of these things, and also that he hath forgiven us of these our many sins and murders which we have committed and took away the guilt from our hearts through the merits of his Son.

And now behold, my brethren, since it has been all that we could do, as we were the most lost of all mankind, to repent of all our sins and the many murders which we have committed and to get God to take them

away from our hearts — for it was all we could do to repent sufficiently before God that he would take away our stains — now my best beloved brethren, since God hath taken away our stains and our swords have become bright, then let us stain our swords no more with the blood of our brethren. Behold, I say unto you: Nay, let us retain our swords that they be not stained with the blood of our brethren. For perhaps if we should stain our swords again, they can no more be washed bright through the blood of the Son of our great God, which shall be shed for the atonement of our sins. And the great God has had mercy on us and made these things known unto us that we might not perish. Yea, and he hath made these things known unto us beforehand because he loveth our souls as well as he loveth our children. Therefore in his mercy he doth visit us by his angels, that the plan of salvation might be made known unto us as well as unto future generations. O how merciful is our God!

And now behold, since it has been as much as we could do to get our stains taken away from us and our swords are made bright, let us hide them away that they may be kept bright as a testimony to our God at the last day — or at the day that we shall be brought to stand before him to be judged — that we have not stained our swords in the blood of our brethren since he imparted his word unto us and has made us clean thereby. And now my brethren, if our brethren seek to destroy us, behold, we will hide away our swords; yea, even we will bury them deep in the earth, that they may be kept bright as a testimony that we have never used them, at the last day. And if our brethren destroy us, behold, we shall go to our God and shall be saved. (Alma 24:7–16)

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# “WE DON’T KNOW, SO WE MIGHT AS WELL”: A FLIMSY PHILOSOPHY FOR SAME-SEX SEALINGS

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Matthew Watkins

Review of Nate Oman, “A Welding Link of Some Kind,” *Thoughts from a Tamed Cynic* (Substack, September 27, 2022).

**Abstract:** *Nate Oman claims to demonstrate a theological path that allows for same-sex sealings within existing Latter-day Saint doctrine. In fact, he claims that such an adjustment would be not only compatible with most Church doctrine but more scripturally sound than current teachings and policies regarding same-sex relationships. However, he falls short of his declared objective. His essay sets up an exaggerated pattern of dramatic theological overhauls in Latter-day Saint theology, downplays existing revelation on the subject of sealings and exaltation, and proposes a new theology to justify his policy conclusions. In the end, his essay completely ignores the root cause of the contention surrounding the issue: the nature of doctrine and the truth claims of the restored Church.*

In the summer of 2021, the *Washington Post* published an article highlighting (and celebrating) the increasing acceptance of and advocacy for social progressivism within the membership of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints. The article briefly nods at various issues from vaccinations to Heavenly Mother to Donald Trump, but the bulk of the article centers on the growing desire among some members for the Church to reverse its teachings on same-sex marriage. The author concludes her article by quoting Patrick Mason, a prominent progressive advocate within the Church:

I can see multiple futures for Mormonism ... People have already started to do the work to sketch out a theological rationale that would allow for the kind of revelation that

allows for women's ordination, for same-sex marriage, all kinds of things ... What was once possible then becomes probable.<sup>1</sup>

Few members have accepted Mason's invitation to pave a theological path to Church-sanctioned same-sex marriage, but Nate Oman, a previous contributor to the Interpreter Foundation's journal, has taken up this charge. Exactly one year after the *Washington Post* article, Oman published an essay<sup>2</sup> describing a "theological possibility of same-sex marriage sealings in a way that requires minimal theological change and maintains maximum continuity with Church practices" (p. 1).

This audacious claim quickly gained attention among Church critics and adherents alike. Within the first few days of its release, the essay was featured prominently in publications ranging from *By Common Consent*<sup>3</sup> to *Public Square Magazine*<sup>4</sup> to the *Salt Lake Tribune*.<sup>5</sup>

However, Oman's essay claiming that adopting same-sex sealings "could be easily and simply explained" (p. 13) ultimately fails because:

1. He exaggerates the historical shifts in the Church's understanding of sealings.
2. He ignores what *has* been revealed regarding sealings and marriage.
3. His proposed replacement theology inherently contradicts the founding doctrines of the Restoration itself, yet he doesn't acknowledge these implications.

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1. Emily Kaplan "The rise of the liberal Latter-day Saints," *Washington Post* (27 September 2021), <https://www.washingtonpost.com/magazine/2021/09/27/rise-liberal-latter-day-saints/>.

2. Nate Oman, "A Welding Link of Some Kind," *Thoughts from a Tamed Cynic* (Substack, September 27, 2022), <https://nateoman.substack.com/p/a-welding-link-of-some-kind/>. A PDF version of Oman's essay can be found at [https://drive.google.com/file/d/1-9FcMPVVsCdpa4hcFsHaW\\_gUYbj76lEg/view](https://drive.google.com/file/d/1-9FcMPVVsCdpa4hcFsHaW_gUYbj76lEg/view). The page numbers cited in this review are from the PDF version.

3. "Oman, A Possible Theology of Same-Sex Marriage Sealings," *By Common Consent* (27 September 2022), <https://bycommonconsent.com/2022/09/27/oman-a-possible-theology-of-same-sex-marriage-sealings/>.

4. "It's Not Loving to Mislead People About Reality," *Public Square Magazine* (14 October 2022), <https://publicsquaremag.org/sexuality-family/its-not-loving-to-mislead-people-about-reality/>.

5. "Theological breakthrough? LDS scholar sees a path for same-sex temple sealings that honors church teachings," *Salt Lake Tribune* (4 October 2022), <https://www.sltrib.com/religion/2022/10/04/theological-breakthrough-lds/>.

## Historical Policy Changes, Exaggerated Conclusions

Oman asserts that the core doctrines of the Church regarding sealings were heavily rewritten multiple times throughout the history of the Restoration. He specifically breaks up the history of sealing practices into three “eras,” with the transition between these eras representing not minor changes in policy, but dramatic shifts into entirely new theologies.

The first “era” begins with Joseph Smith and ends with the nineteenth century. During this time, “sealings were less a matter of forming nuclear families than of becoming part of a royal priesthood network” (p. 6), or “a series of nested kingdoms created by networks of sealing ordinances” (p. 5). Oman calls this time the era of “kingdom theology.” This first era wound down in the 1890s under the administration of President Woodruff (p. 6), ushering in Oman’s second era, that of “lineage theology.” What was different in this new era? The only change Oman references is the replacement of outstanding cross-family adoptive sealings with sealings to earthly parents.

To say these two eras represent two acutely different theologies, however, is a stretch. While no one argues that adoptive sealings were commonplace prior to 1894, to say it was the primary focus of the Church in that era is not accurate. Parley Pratt, for example, was sealed to Joseph Smith in one of these “kingdom” sealings, yet it is not this sealing that Parley describes most fondly:

It was Joseph Smith who taught me how to prize the endearing relationships of father and mother, husband and wife; of brother and sister, son and daughter.

It was from him that I learned that the wife of my bosom might be secured to me for time and all eternity; and that the refined sympathies and affections which endeared us to each other emanated from the fountain of divine eternal love.<sup>6</sup>

Throughout Joseph Smith’s sermons, it is this sealing of families, not of “kingdoms,” that shines most clearly.<sup>7</sup> The 1890s policy update discontinuing the practice of cross-family sealings did not rewrite the

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6. “He Taught Me the Heavenly Order of Eternity,” *Ensign* 45, no. 8 (August 2015): 80, <https://www.churchofjesuschrist.org/study/ensign/2015/08/he-taught-me-the-heavenly-order-of-eternity/>.

7. Joseph Smith, “Family: The Sweetest Union for Time and for Eternity,” in *Teachings of Presidents of the Church: Joseph Smith* (Salt Lake City: The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, 2007), 479, <https://www.churchofjesuschrist.org/study/manual/teachings-joseph-smith/chapter-42>.

fundamental understanding of sealings any more than discontinuing polygamy rewrote the fundamental understanding of husband and wife. Yes, this policy change modified the perspective of the Church, but it is a stretch to classify it as an entirely new “theology,” as Oman claims.

In discussing the second era, that of “lineage” sealings (p. 7), Oman seems to anticipate that his readers may see similarities to the practices of the Church today. So, he is quick to note that even though so-called “lineage” sealings were now limited exclusively to families, they are not an analog for today’s familial sealings. Why? Because policies regarding remarriage applied equally to *both* genders at this time. The policies allowing only men to be sealed multiple times were not introduced until the 1950s and have not substantially changed to this day. Oman labels this period from the mid-twentieth century to the present time the era of “family” theology (p. 8).

Here again, his division between the “lineage” and “family” eras is a stretch, even more so than the division between his “kingdom” and “lineage” eras. Requiring women to annul previous sealings before entering into a new sealing represents a policy change, not a dramatic shift into a new theological “era” of sealing focus.

These disagreements about how to classify eras of sealing practice across history may seem a minor quibble, but they are important distinctions in the context of this discussion. By exaggerating policy adjustments into dramatic theological shifts, Oman constructs a narrative wherein Church leaders rewrite the entire theology of sealings every generation or so. Here we are, seventy years into the latest era. This exaggerated pattern implies — and not subtly — that perhaps it’s time to rewrite the theology again.

Even if this pattern were a true representation of theological trends, it should be noted that Oman’s pattern actually cuts *against* his ultimate thesis. For nearly 200 years, sealing requirements have been repeatedly *narrowed*, making it difficult to justify the radical expansion he proposes later in his essay.

### **We Don’t Know Everything, but We Know Enough**

Why does Oman spend significant effort to relate the history of sealing practices? To prove that when it comes to the eternities, our understanding has always lacked, and still lacks today. How will cross-family sealings be worked out? We don’t know. How will polygamous sealings work out? We don’t know. How will remarriage work out? We don’t know. Indeed, “we don’t know” becomes the dominant theme of

his essay; Oman reminds us that “we don’t know” no less than 11 times in 13 pages.

It is true that we do not know how the Lord will resolve today’s complex cases such as divorce, remarriage, or children from different sealings, let alone the inter-familial sealings of the nineteenth century. There is value in admitting what we do not know. When speaking about the post-mortal spirit world, President Oaks highlighted our lack of understanding:

What do we really know about conditions in the spirit world? I believe a BYU religion professor’s article on this subject had it right: “When we ask ourselves what we know about the spirit world from the standard works, the answer is ‘not as much as we often think.’”<sup>8</sup>

Similarly, Elder Renlund taught about the gaps in our knowledge of our Heavenly Mother:

Very little has been revealed about Mother in Heaven, but what we do know is summarized in a gospel topic found in our Gospel Library application. Once you have read what is there, you will know everything that I know about the subject. I wish I knew more.<sup>9</sup>

To Oman’s credit, it is vital to acknowledge what we do not know. Indeed, understanding what we know and where we are mistaken is necessary for our salvation, for “it is impossible for a man to be saved in ignorance” (D&C 131:6).

However, acknowledging existing holes in our understanding does not require us to artificially excavate new ones, which Oman’s essay unfortunately does. He downplays and at times even contradicts what *has* been revealed regarding marriage, sealing, and exaltation. For example, he asserts that:

The theology of heterosexual exaltation rests on [a] thin foundation in the canon. The idea of heavenly parents is not contained in the scriptures. The sexualized, procreative vision

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8. Dallin H. Oaks, “Trust in the Lord,” *Ensign* 49, no. 11 (November 2019): 26, <https://www.churchofjesuschrist.org/study/general-conference/2019/10/17oaks/>.

9. Dale G. Renlund, “Your Divine Nature and Eternal Destiny,” *Liahona* 46, no. 5 (May 2022): 70, <https://www.churchofjesuschrist.org/study/general-conference/2022/04/36renlund/>.

of divine spiritual parenthood is nowhere explicitly set forth.  
(p. 4)

In fact, Oman views the teachings of heavenly parenthood as not just doctrinally unfounded but an actual “threat to the continued vitality of the Lord’s work, and a wrenching internal contradiction in our theology” (p. 2). While he acknowledges that “references to God as father are ubiquitous,” he finds no support for the notion that any of us — including the Savior Himself (p. 4n6) — are literal spiritual offspring of God. When we ask, “In the heav’ns are parents single?”<sup>10</sup> Oman answers, “we don’t know.”

But, in fact, we *do* know. Many passages in both biblical and restoration scripture attest that we are the literal, spiritual offspring of a Heavenly Father.<sup>11</sup> As the interpretation of these passages is sometimes contested, I refer to the First Presidency’s authoritative teaching on the matter issued in the early twentieth century:

Jesus... is the firstborn among all the sons of God-- the first begotten in the spirit, and the only begotten in the flesh. He is our elder brother, and we, like Him, are in the image of God. All men and women are in the similitude of the universal Father and Mother and are literally the sons and daughters of Deity...

[M]an, as a spirit, was begotten and born of heavenly parents and reared to maturity in the eternal mansions of the Father, prior to coming upon the earth in a temporal body to undergo an experience in mortality....

Man is the child of God, formed in the divine image and endowed with divine attributes, and even as the infant son of an earthly father and mother is capable in due time of becoming a man, so the undeveloped offspring of celestial parentage is capable, by experience through ages and aeons, of evolving into a God.<sup>12</sup>

Children who grow to be like their Heavenly Father also attain His divine ability to bear and rear another generation of spiritual children.

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10. Eliza R. Snow, “O My Father,” *Hymns* (Salt Lake City: The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-Day Saints, 1985), 292.

11. See the numerous scriptures listed in the Topical Guide under “Man, a Spirit Child of Heavenly Father.”

12. First Presidency of the Church, “The Origin of Man” (November 1909), <https://www.churchofjesuschrist.org/study/ensign/2002/02/the-origin-of-man>.

This doctrine (which Oman terms “heterosexual exaltation”) was clearly revealed through the Prophet Joseph Smith:

If a man marry a wife by my word, which is my law, and by the new and everlasting covenant... [their marriage] shall be of full force when they are out of the world; and they shall pass by the angels, and the gods, which are set there, to their exaltation and glory in all things, as hath been sealed upon their heads, which glory shall be a fulness and a continuation of the seeds forever and ever. (D&C 132:19)

Since that revelation, this doctrine of exaltation has been repeatedly affirmed by subsequent prophets and apostles. Teachings in this dispensation regarding exaltation and spiritual parenthood are, as the First Presidency stated in an official letter regarding the subject, “too numerous and specific to require citation,”<sup>13</sup> but I shall include a few.

President Young elaborated on the promises revealed to his predecessor as follows:

[T]he Lord has bestowed on us the privilege of becoming fathers of lives. What is a father of lives as mentioned in the Scriptures? A man who has a posterity to an eternal continuance. That is the blessing Abraham received, and it perfectly satisfied his soul. He obtained the promise that he should be the father of lives.<sup>14</sup>

Elder Melvin J. Ballard also:

What do we mean by endless or eternal increase? We mean that through the righteousness and faithfulness of men and women who keep the commandments of God they will come forth with celestial bodies, fitted and prepared to enter into their great, high and eternal glory in the celestial kingdom of God; and unto them through their preparation, there will come spirit children.<sup>15</sup>

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13. “The Father and the Son,” *Improvement Era* (August 1916), <https://www.churchofjesuschrist.org/study/ensign/2002/04/the-father-and-the-son/>.

14. Brigham Young, *Journal of Discourses*, vol. 8 (Liverpool: George Q. Cannon, 1861), 63, quoted in “Preparing for Eternal Progression,” *Teachings of Presidents of the Church: Brigham Young* (Salt Lake City: The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, 1997), <https://www.churchofjesuschrist.org/study/manual/teachings-brigham-young/chapter-13/>.

15. Melvin J. Ballard, *Crusader for Righteousness* (Salt Lake City: Bookcraft, 1966), 211, <https://www.churchofjesuschrist.org/study/manual/>

The aforementioned First Presidency letter states that “resurrected and glorified beings can become parents of spirit offspring... spirits born to them in the eternal worlds.” Elder Bruce R McConkie added:

Mortal persons who overcome all things and gain an ultimate exaltation will live eternally in the family unit and have spirit children, thus becoming Eternal Fathers and Eternal Mothers.<sup>16</sup>

Exaltation grows out of the eternal union of a man and his wife<sup>17</sup>... if after their marriage they keep all the terms and conditions of this order of the priesthood, they continue on as husband and wife in the celestial kingdom of God.

If the family unit continues, then by virtue of that fact the members of the family have gained eternal life (exaltation), the greatest of all the gifts of God, for by definition exaltation consists in the continuation of the family unit in eternity.<sup>18</sup>

These are only some of the most direct statements. For further sources, I direct the reader to the Family Proclamation, the Gospel Topics essays, Sunday School manuals past and current, and General Conference addresses given on the subject.

In light of the many modern witnesses in agreement on the matter, it is factually false to affirm, as Oman does, that the doctrine of exaltation based on eternal marriage is purely unfounded and “we don’t know.” When it comes to these questions, “[we] do not know everything, but [we] know enough.”<sup>19</sup>

### Oman’s Proposed Theology

Once the reader accepts Oman’s philosophy, that “we don’t know” practically anything about the eternities, then no ideas are off-bounds. This creates space for the new theology Oman offers to the reader — a theology that provides an answer for cross-family sealings, plural sealings, re-marriage sealings, and yes, same-sex sealings. In this new model, “we don’t know” isn’t a limitation of Oman’s theology — it’s the

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eternal-marriage-student-manual/marriage-for-eternity/.

16. Bruce R. McConkie, *Mormon Doctrine* (Salt Lake City: Bookcraft, 1966), 517

17. *Ibid.*, 613.

18. *Ibid.*, 117.

19. Neil L. Andersen, “You Know Enough,” *Ensign* 38, no. 11 (November 2008): 13, <https://www.churchofjesuschrist.org/study/general-conference/2008/10/you-know-enough/>.



very foundation of the theology itself. I think it appropriate to say he considers this the hopeful next era in his pattern of sealing theologies. Kingdom theology, lineage theology, family theology, and finally, "we don't know" theology.

Oman quotes D&C 132:7, which states that:

All covenants, contracts, bonds, obligations, oaths, vows, performances, connections, associations, or expectations, that are not made and entered into and sealed by the Holy Spirit of promise ... are of no efficacy, virtue, or force in and after the resurrection from the dead; for all contracts that are not made unto this end have an end when men are dead.

Oman interprets this passage to imply that *all* interpersonal relationships — not just marriages — must eventually be sealed. He suggests that when the Lord finishes His work, all of humanity may be assimilated into one mass, communal sealing, forming a "great link that will weld all of the children of God together and save them from the curse of their alienation and mutual forgetfulness" (p. 12).

This theory easily answers cross-family sealings, adoptions, re-marriage sealings, divorce, children of the same household sealed to different parents, and all other complex questions regarding historical and contemporary sealings. Which sealings are valid? They are *all* valid, and will all be honored, each forming a small link in the sealing web that ties every member of humanity together.

Oman is careful not to state that this theory of a universal, communal sealing is true, just that "we don't know." And if we don't know, his proposed theology is just as valid as the one currently practiced, so we may apparently proceed under the assumption that it is true.

How does this justify same-sex marriage? In effect: "we don't know, so we might as well." It is here that Oman takes his most interesting logical leap, suggesting that we can bless same-sex unions in the temple "without endorsing the theology of eternal homosexuality" (p. 13). How?

[Same-sex] unions could fit under the [D&C 132] categories of "covenants," "bonds," "vows," and "connections." As to the precise theological status of sexual identity in the eternities, the Church could say, "We don't know." (p. 12)

As I understand it, Oman here suggests the Church seal same-sex couples but not call that sealing a "marriage." He doesn't go into the specifics of what this would entail. Presumably, this would require all promissory language to be stricken from the sealing ordinance itself,

effectively reducing it to a vague sense of covenantal “togetherness” within the communal web. Still, Oman is “confident that ‘the power of godliness’ (D&C 84:20) manifested in the ordinance will bless the [same-sex] couple,” notwithstanding the ambiguity about what the sealing accomplishes. We don’t know, so we might as well.

For readers concerned about how the existing doctrine of the family fits into this free-for-all model of “we don’t know” sealings, Oman assures us that his theology “need not imply the abandonment of eternal families and the hope that doctrine holds out.” However, he simultaneously admits that his model does, in fact, “[leave] the precise mechanics of salvation less clear than in the theology of heterosexual exaltation.” This sacrifice is ultimately deemed acceptable because his theory doesn’t rely on the “elaborate extra-scriptural ideas” of spiritual parenthood he previously dismissed (p. 12).

Oman tells us he “take[s] very seriously the need for continuity and loyalty to the Restoration” (p.13). Jettisoning the marriage sealing ordinance in favor of an ambiguous “we don’t know” sealing ordinance is the engine of that claim. This would presumably allow a believer to acknowledge dispensations worth of teachings while also justifying the practice of same-sex sealings in the temple moving forward, because same-sex sealings are not technically classified as a “marriage,” *per se*.

Oman claims such a change “could be easily and simply explained.” To that end, he helpfully drafted a First Presidency press release announcing the policy change permitting same-sex sealings under the theology of “we don’t know” (p. 13). Following his proposed press release, Oman notes that he does not claim to speak for the Lord on the issue, but reiterates that some change is necessary because the doctrine taught today “creates corrosive contradictions that pose an existential threat to the continued vitality of the Lord’s work.” He prays that the Lord will intervene against the current practice forbidding same-sex relations which “threaten[s] the future of the Lord’s Kingdom” (p. 13).

### Unacknowledged Implications of Oman’s Theology

Oman overpromises when he claims his model “requires minimal theological change and maintains maximum continuity” (p. 1). Spending minimal time addressing theological change does not make theological change minimal. He focuses his essay exclusively on the important but *peripheral* topics of sealing and exaltation yet ignores the core issue: that his theology invalidates the very foundation of the restored Gospel of Jesus Christ.

What makes The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints unique among Christendom? It is our claim of modern revelation, restored priesthood authority, and exclusive acceptance by God as “the only true and living church upon the face of the whole earth” (D&C 1:30). We claim that Jesus Christ stands as the Head of the Church, guiding its members through an unbroken line of true prophets who trace their priesthood keys back to the Savior. Such an audacious claim leaves little room for gray area. Many prophets and apostles have spoken on this subject; I will quote only President Hinckley:

It’s either true or false. If it’s false, we’re engaged in a great fraud. If it’s true, it’s the most important thing in the world. Now, that’s the whole picture. It is either right or wrong, true or false, fraudulent or true... That’s our claim. That’s where we stand, and that’s where we fall, if we fall.<sup>20</sup>

In light of this binary choice, how are we to reconcile the fact that prophets and apostles have made incorrect statements, even from the pulpit during General Conference? This is where honest seekers discover the nuance that accompanies the truth claims of the Gospel. We learn that “a prophet is only a prophet when he is acting as such.”<sup>21</sup> We learn that the Lord allows us to pursue the course that seems most reasonable to us in the absence of specific revelation.<sup>22</sup> We learn that statements by individual Church leaders represent a well-considered opinion and not necessarily the mind and will of the Lord, binding for the whole Church.<sup>23</sup> We learn that policies are subject to change as circumstances change, and leaders receive new guidance “line upon line, precept upon precept.”<sup>24</sup>

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20. Gordon B. Hinckley, interview, *American Experience*, PBS, January 2007, <https://www.pbs.org/wgbh/americanexperience/features/mormons-hinckley>. See also Jeffrey R. Holland, “True or False,” *Liahona* 20, no. 6 (June 1996), <https://www.churchofjesuschrist.org/study/liahona/1996/06/true-or-false>.

21. Joseph Smith Jr., *History of the Church* (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 1980), 5:265.

22. Dallin H. Oaks, “In His Own Time, in His Own Way,” *Ensign* 43, no. 8 (August 2013): 22–27, <https://www.churchofjesuschrist.org/study/ensign/2013/08/in-his-own-time-in-his-own-way/>.

23. Dallin H. Oaks, “Trust in the Lord,” *Ensign* 49, no. 11 (November 2019): 26–29, <https://www.churchofjesuschrist.org/study/ensign/2019/11/17oaks>.

24. Russell M. Nelson, “The Love and Laws of God” (address, Brigham Young University, Provo, UT, September 17, 2019), <https://newsroom.churchofjesuschrist.org/article/president-nelson-byu-transcript-september-2019/>.

With this nuanced understanding, every mature member of the Church instinctively begins to classify aspects of Church teachings and practice into two broad categories. Some aspects are peripheral practices or perspectives, subject to change. Others are fixed, foundational truths — unchangeable principles upon which we may build a testimony. For this writing, I will refer to these core, foundational principles as “doctrines.” This aligns with the definition of the term as it is used by modern Church leaders.<sup>25</sup>

For example, the Atonement of Jesus Christ is, by this definition, a doctrine — eternal and unchangeable. On the other hand, some details regarding the *application* of Christ’s Atonement in our lives — such as the wording used to instruct us in the temple — *are* subject to change (and often do). As another example, the priesthood of God is doctrinal, but the requirements for holding specific priesthood offices are not doctrinal.

Learning to separate unchangeable doctrine from changeable principles and policies keeps our faith supple so we do not lose our testimonies when services are reduced to two hours or the Church severs its relationships with the Scouting program. But this flexibility, when taken to the extreme, runs the risk of undermining rather than protecting faith.

This, I believe, is the root of the same-sex marriage debate: How do we classify the nature of marriage? Is it a doctrine, or is it subject to change? I believe the answer is clear.

The nature of marriage is attested throughout scripture.<sup>26</sup> It has been reinforced throughout dispensations.<sup>27</sup> It was reiterated from the start of this dispensation as a key element of the Plan of Salvation (see D&C 132). It has been and is currently taught consistently and frequently by the united voice of the Quorum of the Twelve Apostles and

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25. In earlier years, Church leaders used the term “doctrine” very loosely, referring to any teaching, true or false, on any subject. However, Church leaders in recent decades have been more selective in the usage of this term, only applying it to the unchanging, salvific truths of the Gospel. I refer the reader to the treatment of the definition of doctrine by Professor Michael Goodman. See Mike Goodman, “What is Doctrine?” interview by Laura Hales, *The LDS Perspective Podcast*, March 15, 2017, [http://traffic.libsyn.com/ldsperspectives/27LDSP\\_-What\\_is\\_Doctrine\\_with\\_Michael\\_Goodwin.pdf](http://traffic.libsyn.com/ldsperspectives/27LDSP_-What_is_Doctrine_with_Michael_Goodwin.pdf)

26. Refer to the many passages listed under the Guide to the Scriptures entry for “Marriage.”

27. The records of most dispensations include teachings on marriage and family.

the First Presidency,<sup>28</sup> including through formal statements explicitly invoking their authority as prophets, seers, and revelators,<sup>29</sup> telling us that this principle is an unchangeable, eternal doctrine that can never be modified.<sup>30</sup> In short, the nature of marriage and family may be one of the most definitive and core doctrines taught in this dispensation. Because the doctrine of marriage and family is so core to our theology, any attempts to remove it or demote it to a mere “practice” naturally undermines all other Restoration doctrines as well.

I spoke recently with a friend in the Church about the subject of same-sex marriage. He expressed his belief that same-sex relations were not inherently sinful, and that the Church would eventually “come around” and adopt same-sex sealings into temple practices. I asked how he squared this viewpoint with the numerous teachings mentioned earlier. My friend explained that in his view, there are only three great eternal truths:

1. God the Father lives and loves us.
2. Jesus Christ is the Savior.
3. The Book of Mormon is true.

It does not matter if something is taught to be an “irrevocable doctrine”<sup>31</sup> by the First Presidency and Quorum of the Twelve or even canonized. For him, any teaching aside from these three core truths represents only the “best judgment” of Church leadership at the time. It may or may not reflect the mind and will of God, and it is subject to change or even complete reversal at any point. In other words, “we don’t know.”

I hasten to note that my friend is not an advocate against the Church — he is a solid member, devoted to abiding by all Church standards regardless of his personal opinion, and faithfully serves on his stake’s high council. But while my friend does not advocate against Church teachings on same-sex relationships, his view on the Gospel is a primary force motivating those who *do*.

If every teaching that makes the Church unique is, as my friend believes, largely attributed to human judgment and subject to change,

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28. Oaks, “Trust in the Lord.”

29. See “The Family: A Proclamation to the World,” and many similarly authoritative statements in recent General Conference addresses.

30. Dallin H. Oaks, “Divine Love in the Father’s Plan,” *Liahona* 46, no. 5 (May 2022): 101–104, <https://www.churchofjesuschrist.org/study/liahona/2022/05/51oaks>.

31. *Ibid.*, 103.

what value does the Church offer the world? My friend's "expansive view"<sup>32</sup> of ultimate nuance and total flexibility has reduced his perception of the restored Church to little more than any other Christian denomination. Without the authority to bring the world eternal, unchangeable, revealed truths and God's authority, "where is our religion? We have none."<sup>33</sup>

While I do not agree with my friend's view of the Gospel, his conclusion — not Oman's — is the only logical path to justify a reversal of this magnitude. One must either reduce the restored Gospel to boilerplate Christian nondenominationalism or else assert that the prophets and apostles are knowingly lying while speaking in the name of the Lord (false prophecy). In either case, you destroy the restored Gospel's foundation of authorized apostles and prophets outlined in Ephesians 4. My friend acknowledges and embraces this logical theological conclusion which Oman meticulously avoids.

### Conclusion

I give Nate Oman credit. While many have advocated for same-sex sealings in the past, they have rarely implemented a "*theological rationale*" as Mason called for. I commend Oman for staying within those lines. I also do not wish to question Oman's faith, his sincerity, or his desire to bridge the gap between the Church and his deeply held personal beliefs.

However, Oman promised a pathway to "same-sex marriage sealings in a way that requires minimal theological change and maintains maximum continuity with Church practices" (p. 1). He fails in that promise because it is impossible. Advocates for same-sex sealings may distort history, dismiss scripture, and make flimsy arguments at the periphery, but they cannot skirt around the mammoth theological root of their problem: the doctrine of marriage and the family is inextricably bound to the pillars of the Restoration. There is no way to remove it without losing all confidence in modern revelation and prophetic authority and, by extension, the Book of Mormon, the First Vision, and everything else that makes the Church unique and true.

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32. My friend credits his "expansive view" of the Gospel in large measure to the influence of the Faith Matters Foundation (website), <https://faithmatters.org/>.

33. Joseph Smith Jr., *History of the Church* (Salt Lake City: Deseret News, 1904), 2:52.

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# AN IMPORTANT NEW STUDY OF FREEMASONRY AND THE LATTER-DAY SAINTS: WHAT'S GOOD, WHAT'S QUESTIONABLE, AND WHAT'S MISSING IN *METHOD INFINITE*

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Jeffrey M. Bradshaw

Review of Cheryl L. Bruno, Joe Steve Swick III, and Nicholas S. Literski, *Method Infinite: Freemasonry and the Mormon Restoration* (Salt Lake City: Greg Kofford Books, 2022). 544 pages. \$44.95 (hardback); \$34.95 (softcover).

**Abstract:** *There is much to celebrate in this important new study of Freemasonry and the Latter-day Saints. To their credit, the authors have succeeded in creating a work that is richer than earlier studies of the subject, probing many previously unexplored hints of Masonic influence on Latter-day Saint life and thought from the beginning of the Restoration through the end of the nineteenth century. That said, the book's dauntingly broad survey suffers from uneven quality on some of the many topics it ambitiously tackles. While recognizing the study's considerable merits, its shortcomings must also be considered. For this reason, I've divided this review into three parts: What's Good, What's Questionable, and What's Missing. I conclude with methodological observations about best practices in the use of the comparative analysis in studies of important and challenging subjects such as this one.*

Two paragraphs from the early pages of the book provide, perhaps, the best way to understand the authors' objectives in proper perspective:

While no one thing can entirely explain the rise of Mormonism, the historical influence of Freemasonry on this religious tradition cannot be refuted. This work ... offers a fresh perspective

on the relationship between Freemasonry and the Mormon restoration. It asserts that the Mormon prophet's firsthand knowledge of and experience with both Masonry and anti-Masonic currents contributed to the theology, structure, culture, tradition, history, literature, and ritual of the church he founded. There is a Masonic thread in Mormonism from its earliest days. ...

As an adult, Smith relied on Masonry as one of the primary lenses and means by which he sought to approach God and restore true religion. Yet this aspect of his work has been abandoned by his modern-day followers. Masonry in Mormonism has been placed upon the woodpile.<sup>1</sup>

Consistent with the ambitious agenda summarized in this paragraph above, I hope that this review will persuade readers that there is much to celebrate in this important new study of Freemasonry and the Latter-day Saints. Cheryl Bruno's well-crafted prose and her personal research contributions build on the copious investigations and preliminary writing of Nicolas S. Literski, JD, PhD, that began two decades ago. Joe Steve Swick III, for his part, contributed knowledge of the breadth and depth of the larger Masonic history that made an enormous difference in the final product.

To their credit, the authors have succeeded in creating a work that is richer than earlier studies of the subject, probing many previously unexplored hints of Masonic influence on Latter-day Saint life and thought from the beginning of the Restoration through the end of the nineteenth century.

That said, the book's dauntingly broad survey suffers from uneven quality on some of the many topics it ambitiously tackles. While recognizing the study's considerable merits, its shortcomings must also be taken into account. For this reason, I've divided the review into three parts.

In the first part, entitled "What's Good," I will describe what I think are the strongest contributions of the book — namely, those that draw on primary historical sources relating to Freemasonry and the Latter-day Saints. Significantly, as part of their new contributions to the intersecting history of these groups, the authors have included little-known material on Masonic influences within nineteenth-century expressions of the Restoration outside of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints. Commendably, the authors have also highlighted the role of women in their discussion of Freemasonry, including perspectives

on the organization and governance of the Relief Society. The attention given to the events surrounding the death and burial of Joseph Smith is also noteworthy.

Part two, entitled “What’s Questionable,” follows with a discussion of selected examples of portions of the book that rely on more tenuous evidence and arguments. The examples I have chosen are related to three topics: Joseph Smith’s early history, the perceived influence of Masonry on the translations and revelations of Joseph Smith, and the relationship of Freemasonry to the temple. These are controversial subjects and have generated a large amount of scholarly literature. On the one hand, the authors’ familiarity with the history and works of Freemasonry have allowed them to go further than any previous effort in unearthing possible connections with Latter-day Saint history and teachings. On the other hand, the book repeatedly invokes a handful of argumentation patterns that often overstate the strength of perceived Masonic connections — sometimes explicitly, at other times implicitly. Table 1, at the beginning of part 2, classifies selected examples according to the faulty argumentation patterns they exemplify.

In part three, entitled “What’s Missing,” I apply some of the principles of scholarship relating to comparative analysis to help illuminate the relationship between Freemasonry and the temple ordinances, arguably the subject of greatest interest for the typical Latter-day Saint reader. No serious scholar today would deny that there is an important relationship between these rites, but the nature and extent of that relationship is a complex and frequently debated question. Adding to the difficulty in discerning this relationship is that, as the authors correctly observe, some Masonic features that were part of the Nauvoo endowment have been eliminated in modern temple ceremonies, “sometimes at the expense of what their Masonic origins might reveal to the thoughtful Latter-day Saint.”<sup>2</sup> Further complicating the situation is that it is unknown whether any of the terminology and ritual dialogue patterns that are similar in Freemasonry and the temple ordinances were originally part of the endowment as given by Joseph Smith in the Red Brick Store or were introduced later as part of the revisions and standardization that occurred under the direction of Brigham Young.<sup>3</sup>

In addressing the relationship between Freemasonry and Nauvoo temple ordinances, *Method Infinite* makes the bold claim that Joseph Smith’s central project throughout his life was “restoring ancient Freemasonry” and he “believed his life to be the latter-day point and purpose for which that worldview existed.”<sup>4</sup> But, as in every work of

scholarship, that claim, like all others in the book, cannot stand on its own. Rather, it must be considered in light of the full spectrum of relevant information bearing on events, ideas, and their potential dependencies. Then, only after having considered in reasonable depth and breadth the entire ensemble of extant evidence, can scholars make the case for why their particular theory explains the most significant aspects of that body of data more completely and satisfactorily than the most likely competing hypotheses.

To help readers reach their own conclusions on the subject, I have summarized some of the most pertinent historical and source considerations relating to the origins of Latter-day Saint temple ordinances that are “missing” from the book in part three. I provide a simplified model illustrating the universe of possible dependencies among Freemasonry, the Bible, ancient sources, and nineteenth-century temple ordinances. To complete the picture, I summarize my personal judgments about the relative strengths of the similarities to and differences in the Nauvoo ordinances to these potential catalysts for temple-related revelations. In light of the results of comparative analysis, it is my view that while shared DNA between the rites of Freemasonry and those of modern temples is apparent — indicating both have some common ancestry in the Bible and also some nineteenth-century borrowing — Masonic and temple rituals are better characterized overall as distant cousins rather than members of the same nuclear family.

As a rationale for including what may seem to some readers a digression that goes beyond what is typical in a book review, I believe that helping readers of this essay become better acquainted with the tenets of comparative analysis sketched briefly in part three is valuable in its own right. I hope that exposure to the principles of comparative analysis will not only help them evaluate the comparisons between the ideas of Freemasonry and Latter-day Saint teachings made in *Method Infinite*, but that it will also serve the broader goal suggesting the kinds of improvements that could be made to the way scholars produce and readers evaluate comparative data that focuses on other important topics of Latter-day Saint history, theology, and scripture — thus, avoiding pitfalls and recognizing best practices.

By way of disclaimer, I should mention that I have recently written a book entitled *Freemasonry and the Origins of Latter-day Saint Temple Ordinances*,<sup>5</sup> an expansion of a 2015 journal article<sup>6</sup> I began to work on in the last half of 2021.<sup>7</sup> After receiving a copy of *Method Infinite* earlier this year that was kindly provided by Loyd Ericson on behalf of Greg Kofford

Books, I decided that in addition to writing a detailed review of *Method Infinite*, it would be relatively easy to turn my research on Freemasonry and the temple to into a book — expecting that I would be able to finish both the book and the review before beginning a lengthy period of travel beginning at the end of July. Wanting to make sure that I represented both the subject matter and the views of the authors of *Method Infinite* accurately and fairly, I contacted Cheryl Bruno and Nicholas S. Literski and let them know about both efforts. During the initial writing of the book, they kindly gave significant feedback on the chapters and provided helpful perspectives and answers to questions I had along the way. They also generously granted permission to publish quotations from their book and excerpts from their private communications with me. Earlier conversations with Joe Steve Swick III during the writing of the previous journal article had also been very helpful and supportive. I am grateful for the resultant friendly dialogue with these three scholars throughout the writing process.

As will be seen in this lengthy review, *Method Infinite* addresses an impressive breadth of subjects, and in most cases I had to start my research and writing about these many topics from scratch. As the authors had done previously with the book, they graciously provided feedback on an early draft of this review and have also had an opportunity to read and correct errors in a near-final version of this review. However, they did not attempt to do a thorough reading of the review, and I accept full responsibility for any remaining errors. I appreciate not only the scholarship of these authors but also their examples of how dialogue on differences need not jeopardize mutual respect and collegiality. I am also grateful for the efforts of other unnamed friends who have contributed their perspectives to this review.

## 1. What's Good

The strongest portions of *Method Infinite* are those that draw directly from new discoveries and insights within the historical record — namely chapters 1, 3, 9, 10, 11, 12, 13, 15, 17, and 18. Notably, the book cites many primary sources that have not appeared in comparable works and, in other cases, makes important corrections to them. In these historical sections, the book supersedes the previous groundbreaking but now incomplete and dated studies of Michael W. Homer.<sup>8</sup> These are what I see as the significant strengths of *Method Infinite* and what makes the book an important new study of the subject:

- Valuable overview of Freemasonry (chapter 1)

- Solid history of the “Morgan affair” (chapter 3)
- Well-documented account of the reorganization of the Illinois Grand Lodge (chapter 11)
- Nuanced account of the establishment and controversies of the Nauvoo Lodge (chapter 11)
- Relatively complete history of all the Latter-day Saint Lodges (chapter 13)
- Masonic themes and precedents in the history of the Relief Society (chapter 12)
- Aspects of the founding of Nauvoo, though overreaches on Masonic themes (chapter 10)
- Summary of the death and burial of Joseph Smith (chapter 17)
- Good account of Masonic and quasi-Masonic activities in Utah and elsewhere (chapter 18)
- Well-crafted prose
- Relatively few typos

Chapter 1 gives a valuable overview of Freemasonry, starting with its prehistory in the traditions of operative stonemasons and ending with its nineteenth-century manifestations in America. Chapter 3 continues the story by providing a solid history of what has become known as the “Morgan affair.” This incident had significant consequences for nineteenth-century Freemasonry, especially in the period immediately preceding the establishment of the Nauvoo Lodge. In brief, an anti-Mason named William Morgan mysteriously disappeared and was probably murdered in 1826. The disappearance of Morgan was widely blamed on the Masons and became an issue of national importance. The shadow that this accusation cast on the fraternity — when added to false rumors that Masonry’s secrets were part of a broader conspiracy to undermine American government and ideals — led to a precipitous decline of membership that lasted for nearly two decades.

Following a hiatus, the Illinois Grand Lodge was reestablished in 1840. By that time, public indignation about the Morgan affair had had time to fade. When the Saints made application for a Nauvoo lodge in 1841, the Grand Lodge was already beginning to grapple with tensions between Masons who favored aggressive regrowth of the fraternity in the state and those who saw the race to establish new lodges as courting various dangers to the integrity of the organization. Among other feared consequences of unchecked growth during this tumultuous time was the initiation of men who were unworthy or unprepared for membership. This accusation, among others, dogged the incredibly fast-growing

Latter-day Saint lodge in Nauvoo as well as additional Latter-day Saint lodges that eventually sprung up in the surrounding area.

Chapter 11 includes a well-documented account of the reorganization of the Illinois Grand Lodge. The chapter also chronicles the events that led to the establishment and initial controversies surrounding the Nauvoo Lodge. The authors provide a nuanced view of the accusations of Latter-day Saint apostate and critic John C. Bennett, distinguishing between those of Bennett's claims likely to be false or exaggerated and those that had a plausible basis in actual events.<sup>9</sup>

Chapter 13 continues the story of the Nauvoo Lodge and documents with great care the establishment of additional Latter-day Saint Lodges in the surrounding areas. The authors also discuss the dedication of the Nauvoo Masonic Hall and various proposals for the establishment of a "Mormon Grand Lodge" because of the Saints' sense of righteous indignation for the revocation of the provisional charter that had originally been granted to the Nauvoo Lodge.

In a notable contribution, chapter 12 reviews Masonic themes and precedents in the organization of the Relief Society, including a discussion of events relating to the introduction of plural marriage to various members of the society.

Chapter 10 is entitled "The Grand Design: Joseph's Masonic Kingdom on the Mississippi." The authors review the Saints' accomplishments in the founding of Nauvoo and in the politics, economic, education, and social aspects of the rapidly expanding city. Continuing the book's general penchant to view every development through the lens of Freemasonry,<sup>10</sup> it argues that, in Nauvoo, the Prophet "began to move from a covert to a more overt Masonic model."<sup>11</sup> Regrettably, however, arguments that Joseph Smith was primarily following an "overt Masonic model" in his vision for Nauvoo are made without considering additional, significant crosscurrents discussed in other, broader histories of the Nauvoo period.<sup>12</sup>

Likewise, chapter 15, which provides a description of the "political kingdom of God," strives to tie Joseph Smith's inspiration for the Council of Fifty, the planned exodus to the West, and his candidacy for the United States presidency to his Masonic interests as a primary motive. Here, again, the argument would be more persuasive if additional perspectives on the dynamics at work in these councils had been included in the context of discussion and also evaluated for their merits.

Chapter 17 provides a summary of the death and burial of Joseph Smith. Commendably, it gives an excellent account of credible



Masonic connections (e.g., the words Joseph uttered just before he fell to his death from a window of the Carthage jail). However, some of the claims (e.g., efforts to relate Masonic legends about the death of Hiram Abiff thematically to the history of Joseph Smith's assassination) are pursued with less substantial evidence and arguments.

Largely breaking new ground, chapter 18 pulls together selected events relating to nineteenth-century Masonic and quasi-Masonic initiatives in Utah and within other branches of the Restoration that proliferated after the death of Joseph Smith. This chapter, pulling threads together from many scattered and little-known sources, is one of the most notable new research contributions of the book.

## 2. What's Questionable

In chapters 2, 4–8, and 14, we encounter evidence and arguments that are typically more questionable than those provided in the largely historical sections of the book. I have grouped the themes from these chapters into three sections — the first exploring the question of the importance of Freemasonry in Joseph Smith's early years, the second discussing Masonry and modern scripture, and the third dealing with temples and temple ordinances. Additional discussion of temple themes is found in part three of this review.

Table 1 summarizes selected examples that rely on the following faulty argumentation patterns that are repeated throughout the book. These include:

- *Advancing positions that lack strong evidence.* A straightforward example is when the book claims that in Cain's announcement, "I am free" (Moses 5:33), he was "apparently alluding to the Free-Mason."<sup>13</sup> In such cases, the book merely asserts what, for the reader's sake, ought to be supported by specific evidence. As another simple instance, the book states, without convincing argumentation, that "the Masonic Enoch legend as described by George Oliver seems a likely source for Mormon teachings surrounding Adam-on-di-Ahman."<sup>14</sup>
- *Failing to engage with previous scholarship on relevant subjects.* For instance, the book advocates ideas originally proposed by John L. Brooke and Clyde R. Forsberg, Jr. that Joseph Smith's translations and teachings early on in his ministry should be characterized as part of his effort to reform "spurious" Masonry.<sup>15</sup> However, the book fails to grapple with criticisms of Brooke's and Forsberg's approaches raised previously by Latter-



day Saint and non-Latter-day Saint scholars. Scholars can, of course, be forgiven for their initial impulse to avoid relying on the work of critical scholars who have themselves used weak and faulty argumentation, including sarcasm and ad hominem attacks, to advance their views. However, it is my opinion that no scholar can afford to ignore good arguments simply because of their source. This is true even when the authors of a given argument may not have deep expertise in Freemasonry. Indeed, what is wanting in most of the questionable arguments in *Method Infinite* is not more knowledge of Freemasonry — the book cannot generally be faulted in this regard — but rather better application of the principles of sound historical writing, comparative analysis, and in some cases (e.g., the Book of Abraham) specific knowledge from complementary fields of scholarship. In scholarly venues, good evidence and sound arguments for opposing views, regardless of their source, must be met with respectful responses so that the strengths and weaknesses of different views can be laid bare for all readers to see and evaluate for themselves.

- *Implicitly overstating resemblances to purported Masonic sources of influence by omitting mention of significant differences.* For example, the book describes some largely nonspecific similarities between Enoch's gold plate in the Masonic Royal Arch rite and the golden plates of the Book of Mormon. Disappointingly, however, it omits any discussion of the substantial *differences* between these plates and the underlying stories of their discovery that have been described in previous publications.<sup>16</sup> Discussion of both similarities and differences is needed to assess the strength of a given claim of correspondence.
- *Ignoring pertinent, alternative correspondences outside of Freemasonry.* For instance, the book cites Masonic parallels to Joseph's kneeling and praying vocally prior to the First Vision but does not compare these gestures with general Christian prayer practices in Joseph Smith's milieu. Before drawing the conclusion that the Prophet was acting more in the role of a proto-Mason than of a typical Christian, the relative strength of each of these competing hypotheses would need to be considered.

- *Occasionally introducing idiosyncratic errors of other kinds.* For example, on p. 164 the authors say they are citing Joseph Smith’s “diary” from July 14, 1835, when the text was actually composed at least eight years after the dated entry.<sup>17</sup> As another example, the book mistakenly identifies a figure in Book of Abraham Facsimile 2 as having “his right arm ... ‘raised to the square,’ surmounted by a pair of compasses”<sup>18</sup> and incorrectly includes “square and compasses” and “penalties”<sup>19</sup> as Masonic items that were included in Joseph Smith’s explanations of the facsimiles. Such errors should not be dismissed as simple differences of opinions but rather are the kinds of things that can be minimized through careful reading of primary sources and familiarity with current scholarship in the relevant disciplines.

**Table 1.** Selected Examples of Questionable Arguments.

	Positions weakly supported	Arguments of others unmentioned	Significant differences downplayed	Alternative resemblances downplayed	Errors of other kinds
<b>Joseph Smith’s Early Life (chs. 2, 4)</b>					
Treasure-seeking and Royal Arch Masonry	✓				
The First Vision and Masonic ritual	✓			✓	
<b>Modern Scripture (chs. 5–7)</b>					
<i>The Book of Mormon</i>					
Spurious Masonry in Book of Mormon and life of JS	✓	✓		✓	
Plate of Enoch and golden plates of Book of Mormon	✓	✓	✓		
Masonic themes and Book of Mormon translation	✓				
Masonry and Anti-Masonry in the Book of Mormon		✓			
<i>The Book of Moses</i>					
Creation from unorganized matter				✓	
Teachings of the angel to Adam and Eve	✓			✓	
Oaths and naming of Cain	✓			✓	
Book of Moses account of Enoch			✓	✓	
<i>The Doctrine and Covenants</i>					
The Saints John	✓				
Keys	✓			✓	

	Positions weakly supported	Arguments of others unmentioned	Significant differences downplayed	Alternative resemblances downplayed	Errors of other kinds
Degrees of glory	✓			✓	
Receiving the fulness	✓			✓	
The “celestial lodge”	✓			✓	
Adam-ondi-Ahman	✓		✓	✓	
Eternal matter	✓			✓	
Eternal bonds	✓			✓	
<i>The Book of Abraham</i>					
Translation vs. “midrash”	✓	✓			
Priesthood authority	✓				
Spirits and intelligences	✓				✓
The divine council the Book of Abraham	✓			✓	
<i>Book of Abraham Facsimiles and KEP</i>					
History of the facsimiles	✓	✓			✓
Facsimile 1	✓	✓	✓	✓	
Facsimile 2	✓	✓		✓	
Facsimile 3	✓	✓			✓
Kirtland Egyptian Papers	✓	✓			✓
<b>Temples (chs. 8, 14)</b>					
<i>Kirtland Period</i>					
Overall Kirtland Temple design and supervision	✓		✓		
Kirtland Temple cornerstone laying	✓		✓		
Kirtland Temple pulpits	✓		✓	✓	
Kirtland ritual greetings, washings, and anointings	✓		✓	✓	
Hosanna shout	✓		✓	✓	
Passing of the temple veils in Kirtland	✓		✓		
<i>Nauvoo Period</i>					
Sacred garments			✓	✓	
High-priestly clothing			✓	✓	
Ritual ascent			✓	✓	
Quorum of the Anointed	✓				✓
Nauvoo Temple architecture and furnishings	✓		✓	✓	

## Chapters 2 and 4: How Important Was Freemasonry to Joseph Smith Early in His Life?

The general premise of chapter 2 is sound — namely that Joseph Smith’s first encounters with Freemasonry occurred long before he came to Nauvoo. Indeed, it may be said that the Prophet, like many Americans of his era, “grew up around Masonry. His older brother Hyrum ... was a Mason in the 1820s,<sup>20</sup> as were many of the Smiths’ neighbors. ... To not be at least dimly aware of Masonry in western New York in the middle to late 1820s was impossible.”<sup>21</sup>

That said, exactly what Joseph Smith knew about the specifics of the *rituals* of Freemasonry and when he came to know these details is a debated question. A ready source of information about Masonry for the young Prophet would have been the exposés of the anti-Masonic movement, whose epicenter was not far from the Smith home. He undoubtedly talked with his friends and family about Masonic ideas and controversies — including the Morgan affair.<sup>22</sup> Moreover, enlightenment ideals cherished by Freemasonry were certainly in the air. But the book does not support its claims that the Smith family’s early treasure-seeking practices and the First Vision were based on Freemasonry with convincing evidence.

*Were the Smith family’s early treasure-seeking practices modeled on the rites of Royal Arch Masonry?*

After a lengthy description of treasure-seeking, the book cites an 1875 newspaper article containing the statement that treasure-seeking might be seen by believers as “an allegory practically expressed of a searcher after truth.”<sup>23</sup> From this single general assertion the book leaps to the claim that the “Smiths’ treasure seeking activities” were “similar to how they appear in Masonic ritual.”<sup>24</sup>

However, those who are familiar with the rites of Royal Arch Masonry will know that the most interesting details of the practices of New England treasure-seekers are not found in the ritual drama of the relevant Masonic legend. That is not to say that there is no connection between the *magical* practices of treasure-digging and *Masonry* broadly speaking — indeed, this relationship invokes a complex and important subject that deserves a more thorough and up-to-date treatment of its own. However, in my view, the book fails to make a strong case for its claim of a meaningful connection between the details of treasure-digging and the specifics of what is described in relevant Masonic *ritual*

and legend. See more about the differences between the story of Enoch's plate and the story of the Book of Mormon golden plates below.

*Was the First Vision modeled on Masonic ritual?*

Equally problematic are the book's claims in chapter 4 that the First Vision was "a literal manifestation of the Masonic initiation ritual,"<sup>25</sup> including "elements of the archetype that he used to share the experience [that] came from his exposure to Freemasonry."<sup>26</sup> For example, the book seeks to compare the general theme of "confusion and strife amongst the different denominations" experienced by the Prophet prior to his retiring to the grove in prayer to "Masonic allegory" that "similarly traces man's initial spiritual darkness and subsequent search for illumination" as it is manifested in the Masonic practice of the "'hoodwink' of cloth or leather that is placed over the candidate's eyes" in which "Freemasonry undertakes to remove ... human unawareness of spiritual truth."<sup>27</sup> Here, as frequently elsewhere in the book, the parallels hold in only a very general way, while details specific to Masonry lack convincing correspondences across Joseph Smith's varying accounts.

In the book's repeated efforts to tie events of Joseph Smith's life with Freemasonry in near cradle-to-grave extent, even the most mundane details of the First Vision account do not escape claims of Masonic influence. Of course, there is nothing wrong in itself with undertaking detailed examination of this sort. However, Occam's razor is brazenly defied when specific Masonic influence is attributed to details that are more easily explained as coming from the Christian milieu in which Joseph Smith was raised. For example, "the detail that Smith knelt as he prayed"<sup>28</sup> is compared to two references to kneeling prayer in Masonic ritual without mentioning the more likely inspiration for both the Masonic gesture and the Prophet's personal experience being that kneeling in prayer has been a common practice for Christians since the time of Christ.<sup>29</sup>

Similarly, the book parallels the fact that the Masonic initiate may "make a personal oblation, either silently or vocally, as he prefers" with "Smith's confession that his experience in the grove was the first time he had attempted to pray vocally."<sup>30</sup> No attempt is made to justify why the option of praying vocally is a distinctive feature of Masonry rather than merely a common element of Christian prayer practices in Joseph Smith's time. It should be further observed that Masonic legend and ritual makes no effort to hide, and often explicitly cites, biblical precedents for its elements.

Joseph Smith's understanding of the temple developed over decades. But it is almost as if he had a vision of the whole before him from the very beginning of his ministry. Indeed, Don Bradley has argued that the First Vision was Joseph Smith's initiation as a seer and constituted a kind of heavenly endowment. Acknowledging that the earliest extant account of the First Vision does not appear to modern readers to be anything like an endowment experience, Bradley writes:

Smith's vision looks like a typical conversion vision of Jesus (insofar as a Christophany can be typical — that is, it shares a common pattern) when the account from his most "Protestant" phase is used and is set only in the context of revivalism. Yet there is no reason to limit analysis only to that account and that context. All accounts, and not only the earliest, provide evidence for the character of the original experience. Indeed, literary scholars Neal Lambert and Richard Cracroft have argued from their comparison of the respectively constrained and free-flowing styles of the 1832 and 1838 accounts that the former attempts to contain the new wine of Smith's theophany in an old wineskin of narrative convention.<sup>31</sup> While the 1838 telling, in which the experience is both a conversion and a prophetic calling, is straightforward and natural, the 1832 account seems formal and forced, as if young Smith's experience was ready to burst the old wineskin or had been shoehorned into a revivalistic conversion narrative five sizes too small.<sup>32</sup>

Noting that "latter-day revelation gives us the fuller account and meaning of what actually took place" on Mount Sinai when Moses experienced a heavenly ascent that took him into the presence of the Lord,<sup>33</sup> Elder Alvin R. Dyer wrote that it was "similar to that which was experienced by Joseph Smith in the Sacred Grove."<sup>34</sup> Thus, one might more fruitfully compare Joseph Smith's personal experiences with visions and revelations to the heavenly ascents of ancient prophets such as Enoch, Moses, Abraham, and the brother of Jared than to either nineteenth-century revivalist visions of God or the allegories of Masonic ritual.<sup>35</sup>

## **Chapters 5–7: Masonry and Modern Scripture**

With respect to the relationship of Masonry and modern scripture, the book makes the following bold claim:

Because the building blocks of his work were typically Masonic beliefs that permeated his environment, Masonic-like expansions are found in every Mormon scripture from the Book of Mormon to Joseph Smith's inspired revision of the Bible, and from the Doctrine and Covenants to the Book of Abraham. Numerous ideas from these works that Latter-day Saints have come to believe are uniquely Mormon have antecedents in popular Masonic sources of Smith's day.<sup>36</sup>

Below, the discussion of examples drawn from the book demonstrates that this claim is overstated.

### **Suggestions of Masonic Themes in the Coming Forth of the Book of Mormon**

The history of the Book of Mormon given in chapter 5 begins with common tropes relating to treasure-digging and magical practices. However, because the book does not explicitly connect these themes to Freemasonry, I will say no more about them here.

That said, the book does go on to advance the claim that the “accounts of the recovery of the golden plates are intimately connected with the backstory of the Royal Arch Degree.”<sup>37</sup> *Method Infinite* characterizes the discovery of the Book of the Law<sup>38</sup> described in the Bible and taken up in the legends and rites of Freemasonry as a “restoration of true religion,” purportedly making the story of the coming forth of the Book of Mormon “archetypally Masonic” and “a fulfillment of Masonic expectations.”<sup>39</sup> In the following sections I discuss the strength of this claim.

*To what extent can Joseph Smith's life and translation of the Book of Mormon be seen as a fulfillment of Masonic expectations — in particular, as a reformation of “spurious” Masonry?*

Before reaching chapter 5, the reader has already been introduced to the book's argument that the Book of Mormon — and, indeed, all the key events in Joseph Smith's life and teachings — are best understood through the lens of Masonry. Chapter 1 summarizes the ideas of Christian Freemasons such as William Hutchinson, George Oliver, and Salem Town that imaginatively posited a conflict between “authentic” and “spurious” Masonry that purportedly dated back to the time of the earliest Old Testament patriarchs.<sup>40</sup>

The argument that the primary impetus for Joseph Smith's religious life was to reform “spurious” Masonry is arguably the predominant theme of the entire book. The roots of this idea date back at least to a 1994

volume by John L. Brooke.<sup>41</sup> Unfortunately, *Method Infinite* makes no mention of the problematic aspects of Brooke's arguments that have been raised by several Latter-day Saint and non-Latter-day Saint scholars.<sup>42</sup> A similar argument to Brooke's, positing that Oliver's refashioning of G. S. Faber's account of the origin of pagan idolatry made its way into the Book of Mormon, later appeared in the widely criticized 2004 book on Freemasonry among the Latter-day Saints by Clyde R. Forsberg, Jr.<sup>43</sup>

It is important to know that the arguments about the early relevance of Oliver's "authentic" and "spurious" Masonry that were raised by Brooke, continued by Forsberg, and revived in *Method Infinite* are modern inventions that, so far as I am aware, are not backed by any nineteenth-century statements by Joseph Smith or anyone else. Though Joseph Smith was aware of Freemasonry from a young age and the establishment of the fraternity certainly became an important element of the Prophet's plans in Nauvoo, the book does not provide compelling evidence from Joseph Smith's early ministry (or later) that he presented himself as a "Masonic restorer."<sup>44</sup>

Instead, his life and mission were invariably couched in sermons and scripture as a realization of the prophecies of biblical figures<sup>45</sup> rather than as "a fulfillment of Masonic expectations."<sup>46</sup> The coming forth of the record of the Nephites was similarly envisioned as a confirmation of biblical prophecy.<sup>47</sup> As to the purpose of the Book of Mormon, the climax of its preface explicitly informs us that it was written to convince "the Jew and Gentile that Jesus is the Christ, the Eternal God, manifesting himself to all nations."

*How similar are Masonic legends relating to the finding of the plate of Enoch to the discovery of the golden plates of the Book of Mormon?*

Although the book describes some loose similarities, it offers no nineteenth-century evidence that Saints, skeptics, or Masons in Joseph Smith's day saw noteworthy resemblances between the actual historical events of the coming forth of the Book of Mormon and the ritual-related legends of Freemasonry.

In addition, in making its claims, the book fails to cite scholars who have previously questioned the strength of supposed resemblances between the plate of Enoch (described in Masonic legends but not an explicit part of the Royal Arch degree at the time of Joseph Smith<sup>48</sup>) and the plates of the Book of Mormon. For example, William J. Hamblin, Daniel C. Peterson, and George L. Mitton have noted that<sup>49</sup>



the differences between the two stories are far greater than the alleged similarities: Enoch is not mentioned in the coming forth of the Book of Mormon. The main Enochian text is inscribed on a stone pillar<sup>50</sup> [an idea that the Masons derived and elaborated from Jewish and early Christian traditions<sup>51</sup>], not on golden plates. The gold plate in the Enoch story was a single inscriptional plate, not a book; it was triangular rather than rectangular; and it contained the ineffable name of God, which plays no role in the Book of Mormon story.<sup>52</sup> ... Joseph's golden plates were in a small stone box, while Enoch built a huge underground temple complex with "nine arches" and a huge "door of stone."<sup>53</sup> And whereas the Book of Mormon is composed of history and sermons, Enoch's pillar contains "the principles of the liberal arts, particularly of masonry."<sup>54</sup>

*Are there Masonic parallels to the seer stones, spectacles, and the Urim and Thummim used in the translation of the Book of Mormon?*

In relation to this question, the book points out that the Masons, like many Christians of their day who were attracted to esoteric themes, were interested in biblical and other accounts relating to such artifacts. The book then attempts to connect the literal key used to open the "ark of the covenant" in Masonic legend and the key for the cipher used to read Enoch's gold plate by relying on a single mention by Joseph Smith that the spectacles or Urim and Thummim constituted a "key" by which he could both translate and also "ascertain the approach of danger either to himself or the record."<sup>55</sup> Any reader who could be persuaded that the slender thread of this remark might be adequate to suspend a heavier argument should also be reminded that there is nothing uniquely Masonic about the use of the term "key" in any of these usages.<sup>56</sup>

*Claims that the Book of Mormon is a Masonic or Anti-Masonic "Bible."*

The question of whether the Book of Mormon is "Masonic" or "Anti-Masonic" has been a debated theme. Most scholars agree with Martin Harris, who called the Book of Mormon an "anti-masonick Bible."<sup>57</sup> By way of contrast, *Method Infinite* disputes "the common assumption that [Joseph] Smith drastically reversed his views of Masonry over time from being 'anti-Masonic' during the period of the [Book of Mormon] translation to fully adopting Masonry in the final years of his life."<sup>58</sup>

Personally, I acknowledge the importance of the views of those who, at the time of the book's publication, saw its potential influence for good or evil as a function of whether it was perceived as siding with or arguing against the Masons. However, the issue of Masonry in the Book of Mormon bears not only on how it was received by readers but also on how it was produced by Joseph Smith.

For instance, those who believe the Prophet was entirely bound to a character-by-character, word-by-word reproduction of the source text as described by David Whitmer,<sup>59</sup> any suggestion that Masonic vocabulary made its way into the Book of Mormon contradicts the view of the book as an ancient work. However, what evidence exists seems consistent with Brant Gardner's view that the English translation of the Book of Mormon more often than not exhibits functionalist rather than literalist equivalence with the original record. In other words, "unless a very specific, detailed textual analysis supports an argument that particular words or passages are either literalist or conceptual," Gardner favors the idea that Joseph Smith's translation "adheres to the organization and structures of the original [plate text] but is more flexible in the vocabulary."<sup>60</sup>

Importantly, even in those instances where the Prophet's Book of Mormon translation seems to have reproduced archaic literary features of the original plate text (which some scholars take as evidence that Joseph Smith was "reading" rather than composing his dictations<sup>61</sup>), the historical record suggests that ensuring a divinely adequate English expression of the Nephite source was an exhausting effort that is better described in terms of active, immersive spiritual engagement than as passive reception and recital.<sup>62</sup> In that light, it may be significant that the Book of Mormon itself refers to the process of rendering a text from one language to another under divine direction — whatever the exact nature of that process ultimately turns out to be<sup>63</sup> — more frequently as "interpretation" than as "translation."<sup>64</sup> As Kathleen Flake puts it, Joseph Smith did not see himself merely as "God's stenographer. Rather, he was an *interpreting* reader, and God the confirming authority."<sup>65</sup>

To sum up, even though I see the claims of direct influence of modern Freemasonry on its account as unlikely, the evidence of modern scholarship leads to the view that in Joseph Smith's divinely inspired translation of the Book of Mormon, there is room for the introduction of vocabulary and phraseology that was not, strictly speaking, present on the gold plates.

In any event, my view is that believers in the antiquity of the Book of Mormon like Martin Harris as well as skeptics who see it as a modern production err — or at least overstate the case — when they characterize the book either as a pro-Masonic or anti-Masonic Bible. This is because, although there are some terms and themes scattered throughout the five-hundred pages or so of the Book of Mormon that can be easily imagined as relating in some way or another to Freemasonry, these ideas can hardly be thought of as the account's predominant message.

Three items are frequently cited by proponents of Masonic influence in the Book of Mormon:

1. The use of the term “secret combinations”
2. Satan's use of a flaxen cord to lead the wicked, and
3. Lamb-skin aprons of the Gadianton robbers.

So much ink has been spilled on these three items already that I think I can add little to the discussion except to refer the reader to representative studies that reach conclusions different from the book.<sup>66</sup> Disappointingly, *Method Infinite* does not mention previous research on these issues by other scholars, leaving the typical reader with the impression that the views and arguments presented in the book are unprecedented and unopposed.

Going further, however — to the credit of the authors — chapter 6 extends the discussions of Masonry in the Book of Mormon beyond the three common items to include more rarely explored topics. For example, it mentions Book of Mormon passages drawing on biblical and Jewish sources that refer to the exodus of the Israelites from Egypt, traditions about beheading and “smiths,” themes about lineage and language, the shining stones of the Jaredite barges,<sup>67</sup> passing through the veil,<sup>68</sup> bees,<sup>69</sup> and the titles of “prophet, priest, and king.”<sup>70</sup> However, when read in light of the important body of Latter-day Saint scholarship on these issues that goes unmentioned in the book,<sup>71</sup> the discussion of these topics in *Method Infinite* actually strengthen arguments that the Book of Mormon is more strongly ancient and biblical than Masonic.

### **Proposed Allusions to Freemasonry in the Book of Moses**

As evidence of Masonic influence, the authors cite Joseph Smith's teachings about creation from unorganized matter, the teachings of the angel to Adam and Eve about animal sacrifice (Moses 5:6–7), the oaths and naming of Cain as “Master Mahan” (Moses 5:29–31, 49–51), and the Joseph Smith account of Enoch (Moses 6–7).

*Creation from unorganized matter (Moses 2:1–2; Genesis 1:1–2; Abraham 4:1–2)*

The book rightly observes that Masonic texts published in Joseph Smith's era state that the earth was originally "without form or distinction" or that it went from "chaos to perfection."<sup>72</sup> However, these ideas are not specific to Masonry. Rather, they are common themes in scholarly exegesis of Genesis 1:2 based on the underlying Hebrew of "without form and void."<sup>73</sup> That said, what is more significant in Joseph Smith's teachings are statements where he went beyond standard Bible commentaries of his day to argue that the word "created" should be rendered "formed, or organized"<sup>74</sup> Though these additional teachings currently appear to be unknown in nineteenth-century Freemasonry, they resonate with contemporary Bible scholarship.<sup>75</sup>

*Teachings of the angel to Adam and Eve (Moses 5:6–8)*

The book correctly observes that "the idea that sacrificial animals were first introduced to Adam as a representation of the Lamb of God is in accordance with popular Bible commentaries of the time."<sup>76</sup> Hence, these teachings are not indicative of specific Masonic influence. However, research by Latter-day Saint scholar David Calabro goes further in indicating the ritual basis for Jewish and early Christian elaborations of stories of Adam and Eve.<sup>77</sup> Unlike the few and brief mentions in the legends and rites of Freemasonry that focus more on the Fall than on the Redemption of Adam and Eve, the context of the Adam and Eve account given in the temple endowment bears strong resemblance to these early Christian precedents.

*Oaths and naming of Cain as "Master Mahan" (Moses 5:29–31).*

As to the oaths and self-imprecations of those who lived before the Flood mentioned by the authors, see, for example, the similar language in 1 Enoch,<sup>78</sup> which the book rightly concludes "may have been available on the western frontier by 1830."<sup>79</sup> With much less warrant, however, the book goes on to claim that in Cain's announcement, "I am free" (Moses 5:33), he was "apparently alluding to the Free-Mason."<sup>80</sup>

With respect to the reference to "Master Mahan" in the Book of Moses (5:49), the book supposes that "Master Mahan" is a simple corruption of "Master Mason." Commendably, the older work of Hugh Nibley<sup>81</sup> and D. Michael Quinn<sup>82</sup> are mentioned by the book as advocating ancient derivations of the term as a competing hypothesis.<sup>83</sup> Regrettably, however, the authors did not also consult more recent work by scholars

on this question.<sup>84</sup> For example, as Stephen O. Smoot observes, there is a perfectly good Semitic etymology for “Mahan,” namely “Hebrew *māḥa*’ (‘to wipe out, annihilate’), which would be thematically consistent with Cain’s declaration at Moses 5:31.”<sup>85</sup> For that matter, a similar use is attested in Genesis 4:18 in the name Mehujael and in later appearances of a related verb in Genesis 6 and 7.<sup>86</sup>

*Book of Moses account of Enoch (Moses 6:22–8:2)*

The book examines possible nineteenth-century sources for the Enoch account in chapters 6 and 7 of Joseph Smith’s Book of Moses. While not dismissing the possibility that *1 Enoch* was available to Joseph Smith, it correctly discounts the idea that Moses 6–7 was inspired by *1 Enoch*,<sup>87</sup> the only significant ancient Enoch account Joseph Smith could have known directly in his environment. Instead, it (incorrectly) argues — after having examined what it considers to be the “many similarities” between Moses 6–7, Freemasonry, and ancient sources — that “Smith’s Enoch most closely resembles that of the Masonic legend.”<sup>88</sup>

Elsewhere, I have published one of two brief and highly similar texts of the Masonic Enoch legend cited in *Method Infinite* so readers can compare it to the Book of Moses Enoch chapters for themselves.<sup>89</sup> I have also described many ancient affinities to the ancient Enoch literature, in particular the significant Dead Sea Scrolls work entitled *The Book of Giants*.<sup>90</sup> These additional, ancient sources, which Joseph Smith could not have known, closely parallel Joseph Smith’s Enoch account almost from start to finish.

By way of contrast, a reading of the Masonic Enoch legend will reveal that most of the resemblances to the Book of Moses Enoch — for example, the degeneracy of mankind, a call to preach, a gathering of prophets, a vision on a mountain, a divine transfiguration — are of a general nature, common to several Old Testament prophets. On the other hand, most of the unusual features of the Masonic story — for example, the recovery of the sacred name or word, the building of a subterranean temple, a golden triangle containing ineffable characters, the erecting of marble and brass pillars — are absent from Moses 6–7.

## **The Doctrine and Covenants**

The book’s discussion of the Doctrine and Covenants confidently claims that many of its sections “included Masonically inspired midrash.” However, from the points discussed below readers will see that most of

the examples given in the book have greater affinity to the Bible than to Masonry.

*The Saints John (D&C 7; 84:27–28)*

After a brief explanation of the importance of John the Baptist and John the Beloved in Freemasonry, the authors claim that “Joseph Smith’s writings show a familiarity with the Masonic veneration of the ‘Saints John.’”<sup>91</sup> As evidence, they cite two Doctrine and Covenants passages: (1) the revelatory expansion of John 20:21–23 in section 7 describing the Apostle John’s mission to tarry on earth till Christ comes, and (2) the verses 27–28 of section 84 describing John the Baptist’s ordination to the lesser priesthood that was restored at the time of Joseph Smith. The authors conclude, without specific warrant or further argument, that “these two sections of the Doctrine of Covenants provide examples of Joseph Smith’s use of the Masonic concepts of a bifurcated Priesthood, restoration, and the Saints John in order to create a distinctive Mormon midrash.”<sup>92</sup> However, the book does not identify anything distinctively Masonic in either of these revelations other than the names of “John,” and neither revelation provides evidence of any special joint “Masonic veneration” of the “Saints John” among the Latter-day Saints.

*Keys (D&C 6:28; 7:7; 13:1; 27:5–6, 9, 12, 13; 28:7; 35:18, etc.)*

The book tries to connect the visual symbol of the “key” in Masonry, signifying secrecy, to statements by Joseph Smith about secrecy — one of which explicitly refers to Freemasonry. But, despite the focus on the claim of Masonic influence in the Doctrine and Covenants in this section of the book, no specific scriptural references are given as examples of instances where the term “keys” refers to “secrets”<sup>93</sup> rather than to priesthood authority — as in the well-known New Testament example of Matthew 16:18–19 and in Doctrine and Covenants verses that specifically equate keys to “authority.”<sup>94</sup> In addition, even if examples from the Doctrine and Covenants equating “keys” to “secrets” had been provided in *Method Infinite*, it should be noted that *none* of the senses of the term “key” in Joseph Smith’s time and place is unique to Masonry.<sup>95</sup>

*Degrees of Glory (D&C 76)*

After describing section 76, which details the three kingdoms of glory, the book includes a paragraph from the Christian Mason George Oliver.<sup>96</sup> Oliver cites biblical verses referring to the third heaven (2 Corinthians 12:2), differences in glory (1 Corinthians 15:41), and many mansions

(John 14:2). However, these New Testament passages were also well-known to other Christians in Joseph Smith's day. The brief comment by Oliver from a Masonic work that follows adds little to the obvious general meaning of the verses and contains nothing that is specifically relevant to the highly detailed requirements and blessings described in section 76 itself.

*Receiving the Fulness (D&C 93:12)*

The book mentions D&C 93:12, which details how the fulness is not received all at once, but rather from "grace to grace." As evidence that the revelation is influenced by Freemasonry, it summarizes a general concept found in some Masonic writings that "men are brought to the truth by receiving 'light' or knowledge progressively."<sup>97</sup> Of course, the idea of incremental acquisition of knowledge is neither novel nor unique to Freemasonry. Indeed, the expression of this idea in D&C 93:12 is more similar to a New Testament verse, John 1:16, that is not mentioned in the discussion within *Method Infinite*: "And of his fulness have all we received, and grace for grace."

*Celestial Lodge (D&C 93:22)*

The book cites the Masonic term "celestial lodge" to describe the intimate fellowship of the faithful in heaven after death.<sup>98</sup> While a loving community of a similar nature is envisioned by most Christians, the book does not demonstrate that the term "celestial lodge" is used in Latter-day Saint teachings or scripture. Lacking an exact equivalent of the term in the Doctrine and Covenants or anywhere else in modern scripture, the book attempts to equate the Masonic concept of a "celestial lodge" to D&C 93:22, which refers to "the church of the Firstborn." Surprisingly, however, while arguing for Masonic influence on D&C 93:22 from the non-scriptural term "celestial lodge," the book fails to consider the influence of the context surrounding the identical biblical phrase "church of the Firstborn" that appears in Hebrews 12:23.

*Adam-ondi-Ahman (D&C 116)*

The book correctly notes the historical and eschatological importance of the gathering of Adam's posterity at Adam-ondi-Ahman as described in D&C 116. What it fails to do is to provide adequate justification for the conclusion that "the Masonic Enoch legend as described by George Oliver seems a likely source for Mormon teachings surrounding Adam-ondi-Ahman."<sup>99</sup>



As in previous instances of claimed parallels of Masonic literature to Latter-day Saint scripture and ritual, there are more differences than similarities. In the Masonic legend, it is Enoch rather than Adam who initiates the gathering, the assembly is characterized as a “special assembly of Masons” in which Enoch presides rather than a calling together of Adam and Eve’s children in which Adam takes center stage, rather than focusing on an enumeration of the “enormous evils which were desolating the earth” in which Enoch “implored their advice and assistance in stemming the torrent of impiety which threatened an universal corruption,”<sup>100</sup> the purpose of the gathering was to give Adam and Eve’s posterity a patriarchal blessing.<sup>101</sup> Rather than culminating in a “terrible prophecy, that all mankind, except a few just persons” would die by water and fire (necessitating the building of Enoch’s legendary nine-arched temple),<sup>102</sup> the gathering culminated in a moment of supernal glory when “the Lord appeared in their midst.”<sup>103</sup> No mention is made in Masonic sources about a future eschatological reunion at Adam-on-di-Ahman.

Readers will find accounts that are more similar to the gathering of Adam and Eve’s children described by the Prophet in early Christian literature than they will discover in the Masonic tradition.<sup>104</sup>

#### *Eternal Matter (D&C 130:22; 131:7)*

The book cites William Hutchinson’s 1775 Masonic work stating that “matter ... was eternal” in connection with Joseph Smith’s statement “the pure principles of element are principles which can never be destroyed.”<sup>105</sup> It should be noted that a belief in these statements at this time was not unique to Masonry or Joseph Smith since the principles of conservation of mass had already been established by the eighteenth century. However, the book omits discussion of the more remarkable and original teaching of Joseph Smith that *everything* is matter.<sup>106</sup> In other words, as Latter-day Saint astrophysicist Ron Hellings has written: “Whatever Joseph meant by ‘matter,’ it is clear he meant that nothing else exists.”<sup>107</sup> Though the concept that “everything is matter” currently appears to be absent from the literature of nineteenth-century Freemasonry, it seems to resonate with modern inflationary cosmology.<sup>108</sup>

#### *Eternal Bonds (D&C 128:18; 132:6–21)*

The book compares a Masonic statement that speaks of science and knowledge that “link mankind together in the indissoluble chain of sincere affection” to the “welding link” available in Latter-day Saint priesthood ordinances. While both groups embodied the New Testament ideal of



“brotherly love”<sup>109</sup> and while Joseph Smith appreciated the emphasis of Masonry on certain “grand fundamental principles,<sup>110</sup>” it is assuming too much to explain the Latter-day Saint “doctrine of eternal union through the priesthood” as something that “evolved” from “Masonic principles.”<sup>111</sup> It seems likely that most Christians of Joseph Smith’s day, including Christian Masons, would have ascribed the human yearning for peace on earth and continuing sociality in heaven as germinating in the basic tenets of Christianity rather than as a development that owed its genesis to Freemasonry

## The Book of Abraham

### *Translation or imaginative “midrash”?*

In chapter 7, the focus turns to the Book of Abraham. The chapter subtitle “Advancing the Interests of True Masonry” hearkens back to the book’s pervasive theme of Joseph Smith as “a Masonic restorer, bringing to light the heretofore concealed Masonic and priestly mysteries”<sup>112</sup> in the Book of Abraham. As in previous applications of this theme to the work of Joseph Smith, the book provides no evidence that the Prophet or his contemporaries considered him to be “a Masonic restorer” as he took up the production of what perhaps became his most controversial book of modern scripture. Rather, he consistently claimed he was translating, or revealing, an ancient record from Abraham — and both Joseph Smith’s supporters and detractors took this self-characterization of what he understood the Book of Abraham to be at face value.

Commendably, the book cites multiple examples of the spectrum of opinions relating to the production of the Book of Abraham text,<sup>113</sup> including the missing papyrus theory,<sup>114</sup> the “mnemonic device” theory,<sup>115</sup> and what is often called the “catalyst theory.”<sup>116</sup> However, as is also evident in the book’s discussions of other works of modern scripture, the premise that the Book of Abraham “was influenced by nineteenth-century Freemasonry”<sup>117</sup> contradicts the consensus of professionally trained Latter-day Saint Egyptologists who have concluded on the basis of extensive corroborative evidence that the Book of Abraham derives from authentic, ancient records.<sup>118</sup> Disappointingly, the book fails to engage with the substantive body of research cited by these scholars. Instead, as will be further exemplified below, it simplistically asserts that Joseph Smith “selectively took [allegorical] Masonic stories or traditions” and transformed them “into literal or factual spiritual history.”<sup>119</sup>

In further support of the book's premise that the Book of Abraham was a fully nineteenth-century development, readers are asked to accept the following statement: "Although some authors exult in pointing out the similarities of Mormon scripture, especially the Book of Abraham, with the ancient past, one must follow the chain of influence from the closest to the furthest out."<sup>120</sup> But why? If Joseph Smith was translating or revealing an actual ancient text from Abraham, then one must do nothing of the sort. On the contrary, if the Book of Abraham is what Joseph Smith professed it to be, then seeking nineteenth-century Masonic parallels and preferring those over ancient parallels is exactly methodologically backwards. This comment only makes sense if one already assumes the Book of Abraham is a modern text.

By means of a series of such assertions, the book ignores historical evidence that indicates Joseph Smith viewed his work as translation of an ancient record in favor of an unsupported and narrow view of the development of the Book of Mormon, the Book of Moses, and the Book of Abraham as a process of purely imaginative midrash undertaken in an attempt to "resolve problems" within "difficult passages of the Hebrew Bible."<sup>121</sup> Rather than uncritically adopting this older, more constricted view of scriptural expansion, readers should consult the more up-to-date views on "midrash" summarized by scholars such as Avram Shannon.<sup>122</sup>

#### *The question of priesthood authority (Abraham 1:26)*

With respect to the question of priesthood authority, the book merely asserts what it is attempting to prove: "Through this story [in Abraham 1:26], Smith reveals both his attitude toward the contemporary and spurious craft of Masonry and his reliance upon George Oliver's 'two traditions' theory."<sup>123</sup> The book provides no evidence for this assertion other than the earlier claims that build on the discredited arguments of Brooke and Forsberg described above. Moreover, I see no hint in the Book of Abraham text or anything from Joseph Smith's comments on the text that makes it obvious that Pharaoh's imitation priesthood was thought to have anything to do with Freemasonry.

The book goes on to say: "Assuming that Smith's midrash is meant to address the issue of Masonic authority, it warns that Freemasons may be righteous and good men, but at best, they can only imitate that ancient order that is the property of the holy priesthood."<sup>124</sup> Yes, if we *assume* a connection with Freemasonry, then we can somehow turn the Book of Abraham's teachings about priesthood into a coded cipher about Masonry. But why should we make this assumption?

*Spirits and intelligences (Abraham 3:22–23)*

The book describes the Book of Abraham's views on spirits and intelligences as "a tripartite theory of spirit creation. In this theory, intelligence exists in non-created form unorganized into a spirit being by God. The spirit can then inhabit a human body and become a mortal being."<sup>125</sup> However, there is no evidence that Joseph Smith ever taught this tripartite creation sequence.<sup>126</sup> And it's not obvious that the Book of Abraham teaches this either. "Spirits," "souls," and "intelligences" seem to be used synonymously in the Book of Abraham, unlike how these terms have sometimes been used by later Latter-day Saint writers. Likewise, a quick check of the 1828 Webster dictionary would have revealed that the book's quotes from Masonic writer Will Hutchinson reflect the use of "intelligences" as a common way of speaking about "spiritual beings" rather than as a special notion reflecting specific Latter-day Saint teachings.<sup>127</sup>

*The divine council (Abraham 3:22–28)*

Pertaining to the book's discussion of the Grand Council, Stephen O. Smoot,<sup>128</sup> David E. Bokovoy,<sup>129</sup> and Terryl L. Givens,<sup>130</sup> among others,<sup>131</sup> have shown how the Book of Abraham's depiction of the divine council fits perfectly in a biblical and ancient Near Eastern perspective. There is no need to resort to vague Masonic parallels. The ancient parallels are indisputable and, as mentioned in the book itself, the idea can be easily discerned in the Bible itself.<sup>132</sup>

**Dating and Descriptions of the Facsimiles and the KEP**

In this section, the book states that Joseph Smith's journal entry for October 1, 1835, is "evidently"<sup>133</sup> referring to the bound grammar ("Grammar and Alphabet of the Egyptian Language"). This assertion ignores John Gee's well-reasoned arguments that in fact this entry is referring to the three documents Joseph, Phelps, and Cowdery worked on together called "Egyptian alphabet," which is not the bound grammar.<sup>134</sup> More generally, with respect to the descriptions and translations of the Joseph Smith papyri, the book cites Klaus Baer's outdated 1968 translation of the Joseph Smith Papyri<sup>135</sup> and does not mention Michael Rhodes' or Robert Ritner's better translations from the past decade.<sup>136</sup>

The section concludes with this statement: "Thus, the facsimiles' connection of Abraham with the patriarchal priesthood and with a knowledge of astronomy *persuasively* derives from Freemasonry and

substantially dates from 1835.”<sup>137</sup> As seen above, the section offers only assertions, not carefully argued evidence, in support of both claims.

### *Facsimile 1*

The authors attempt to make a connection between Facsimile 1 and Freemasonry by citing Masonic scholar George Oliver’s citation of a summary of ancient mysteries wherein the aspirant was required to

*lay himself down upon the bed, which shadowed out the tomb or coffin of the Great Father. This process was equivalent to his entering into the infernal ship; and while stretched upon the holy couch, in imitation of his figurative deceased prototype, he was said to be wrapped in the deep sleep of death. His resurrection from the bed was his restoration to life, or his regeneration into a new world; and it was virtually the same as his return from Hades, or his emerging from the gloomy cavern, or his liberation from the womb of the ship-goddess.*<sup>138</sup>

After citing a portion of this passage, the book comments as follows:

This could correspond to the scene Smith saw of Abraham on the sacrificial bed in Facsimile 1. The resulting Mormon midrash involved Abraham’s forced immolation on the lion couch by the idolatrous Priests of Pharoah. Hands raised in the grand hailing sign of a Master Mason, Abraham was raised from that bed and initiated into the higher mysteries.<sup>139</sup>

At first glance, what is most striking about this attempted parallel is the paucity of corresponding elements in the two accounts. Unlike Oliver’s initiate, the lion couch does not represent a tomb or coffin, there are no clues that Abraham is “wrapped in the deep sleep of death,” and his raising from the “bedstead” (Abraham 1:13) is portrayed in the Book of Abraham as a rescue from actual physical harm (Abraham 1:15) rather than as figurative episode in a ritual drama. Moreover, there are no clues in the Prophet’s explanation of the facsimile that hint at anything in a scene such as that described by Oliver. Instead, the explanation hews quite closely to what is shown in the papyrus itself.

Going further, there is a long-sustained tradition of Abraham’s near-sacrifice at the hands of his idolatrous kinsmen reaching back at least to the second or third century BCE.<sup>140</sup> There’s no need to posit Masonic parallels. Second, neither the Book of Abraham nor Facsimile 1 say anything about “Abraham’s forced immolation on the lion couch.” Neither does the text or the facsimile describe immolation or the use

of fire in the attempted sacrifice of Abraham. Third, in contrast to the conclusion in the book that the papyrus represents the grand hailing sign of a Master Mason, it seems more reasonable to suppose that the raised hand represents a well-known ancient gesture of prayer and supplication in the Bible and the ancient Near East with which Joseph Smith was no doubt already familiar from prayer traditions in his own day.<sup>141</sup>

### *Facsimile 2*

In the book's discussion of facsimile 2, an effort is again made to tie the Book of Abraham to George Oliver: "Just as George Oliver did in his Masonic writings, Smith pictured Abraham as the recipient of heavenly instruction concerning astronomy and mathematics."<sup>142</sup> But Oliver in turn lists Josephus as an informant for Abraham's teaching of astronomy to the Egyptians,<sup>143</sup> and ideas from the writings of Josephus may have been more widely known than Oliver's in Joseph Smith's day.<sup>144</sup> Indeed, the authors commendably admit that "the writings of Josephus were available to the Latter-day Saints in 1835."<sup>145</sup>

Going further, the book incorrectly states that "in Reuben Hedlock's facsimile of the hypocephalus, a stylized figure of God on His throne appears to be giving a Masonic sign. His right arm is 'raised to the square,' surmounted by a pair of compasses; His other arm is extended at His side."<sup>146</sup> However, Latter-day Saint Egyptologist D. Michael Rhodes more correctly identifies this figure, consistent with the latest scholarship on the subject,<sup>147</sup> as follows: "A seated, [probably<sup>148</sup>] ithyphallic god with a hawk's tail, holding aloft a flail. This is a form of Min, the god of the regenerative, procreative forces of nature, perhaps combined with Horus, as the hawk's tail would seem to indicate."<sup>149</sup> Rhodes continues:

Joseph Smith said this figure represented God sitting upon his throne revealing the grand key-words of the priesthood. Joseph also explained there was a representation of the sign of the Holy Ghost in the form of a dove. The Egyptians commonly portrayed the soul or spirit as a bird, so a bird is an appropriate symbol for the Holy Ghost.<sup>150</sup>

### *Facsimile 3*

The authors assert, "Egyptologists have agreed that the image on Facsimile 3 represents the judgment of the dead before the throne of Osiris."<sup>151</sup> The authors find this important because of an Egyptian judgment scene that is integral to the thirty-first degree of Scottish Rite Masonry<sup>152</sup> — though it should be noted that it's unlikely that Joseph Smith would have known

much if anything about this degree.<sup>153</sup> Importantly, however, Quinten Barney has reviewed extensively how *at a minimum* it's a presentation scene but may or may not be a judgment scene, since it is missing many elements needed for such an event.<sup>154</sup>

The authors again point out that the depiction of Abraham as delivering astronomy to the Egyptians “parallels Masonic tradition.”<sup>155</sup> However, because the two pillars mentioned by Oliver Cowdery are mentioned in connection with Enoch, they are no doubt correct in concluding that the details attributed to Josephus in Cowdery’s account came “through Freemasonry.”<sup>156</sup>

It should be observed that in a list of terms known in Freemasonry that were included in the explanation of the facsimiles (though most were not part of the Book of Abraham itself), the book incorrectly includes “square and compasses” and “penalties.”<sup>157</sup>

### *The Kirtland Egyptian Papers*

Much more might be said about the book’s discussion of the admittedly complex and difficult subject of the Kirtland Egyptian Papers than can be included in the present review. One of the major concerns with the section is that it takes several disputed points as matters of fact, including, but not limited to, an assertion concerning Joseph Smith’s supposed involvement with all aspects of the creation of these documents.<sup>158</sup>

Besides these major concerns, there are smaller but sometimes very consequential mistakes that reduce the trustworthiness of the analysis. For example, on p. 164 the authors say they are citing Joseph Smith’s “diary” from July 14, 1835, but then cite a portion of Joseph Smith’s manuscript history that was actually composed at least eight years after the dated entry.<sup>159</sup>

## **Chapters 8, 14: Temples**

### *Kirtland Period*

The introduction to chapter 8 begins by citing Nehemiah 4:17, where the Jews returning from exile worked with one hand holding a weapon. The book mentions that “Freemasons visually depict this scene with an emblem of the temple masons holding the implements of Masonry: a trowel and mortar in one hand, and a sword in the other for defense.”<sup>160</sup> Wanting to connect this theme to the Book of Mormon, the book states that Nephi’s temple workmen built their temple “with tools of masonry in one hand and swords in another.”<sup>161</sup> While it is true that 2 Nephi 5:14

does mention the sword of Laban in a general way, the allusive suggestion that the Book of Mormon account makes either literal or figurative mention to the “tools of masonry” has no basis in the scripture text. The passage is emblematic of much of the rest of the chapter: while biblical parallels to temples in the Kirtland and Missouri period are numerous, evidence of specific Masonic influence is frequently lacking.

The examples below are selective, not comprehensive.

### *Overall Kirtland Temple design and supervision*

The book acknowledges that the Kirtland Temple was built according to instructions given to Joseph Smith and two others. Straining for similarities, it points out that in the symbolism of the legends of Freemasonry, “King Solomon’s Temple was built under the direction of three principals: Solomon, King of Israel; Hiram, King of Tyre; and Hiram Abiff, skillful artificer.”<sup>162</sup> But that is as far as Freemasonry can take us. Though Joseph Smith’s role as head of the Church could be compared in a very loose sense to Solomon, there is little parallel in the roles or activities of his counselors to the two Hiram of Freemasonry. More importantly, in contrast to any hint from Masonic lore of a similar idea, the Kirtland Temple followed the governing precedent in the Bible and elsewhere in the ancient Near East that the design of temples is to come through revelation.<sup>163</sup> Indeed, the Kirtland Temple was shown simultaneously to Joseph Smith and his counselors in the First Presidency in fulfillment of latter-day prophecy — “after the manner which I shall show three of you” (D&C 95:14) — in an open vision.<sup>164</sup>

With reference to the “Kirtland Temple’s counterpart in Missouri,” Matthew B. Brown notes the architectural description of those who witnessed the vision above. This description included:

an arched ceiling, Gothic doors and windows with Venetian blinds, a belfry, slip pews, choir seats, a fanlight, painted shingles, tiered pulpit stands or coves for the high (west) and lesser (east) priesthoods, curtains to divide the main chamber into four sections, and also veils to divide the pulpit stands into private areas.<sup>165</sup> None of these features are considered to be a Masonic invention or a distinctive architectural style of speculative Masonry. A check of some of the popular architectural manuals of the day reveals that those manuals

were the source of the decorative motifs associated with the Kirtland Temple — not the Freemasons.<sup>166</sup>

### *Kirtland Temple cornerstone laying*

The book correctly points out that the first cornerstone of the Kirtland temple was laid at the southeast corner. It goes on to quote Masonic scholar Albert Mackey's statement that the laying of the cornerstone in the east represents the dawn of a new day, "dissipating the clouds of intellectual darkness and error."<sup>167</sup> However, there is nothing exclusive to Freemasonry in the symbolism of the eastern sunrise — indeed, Mackey himself connects it to traditions of the ancient world. Moreover, while early eighteenth-century Masonic manuscripts locate the cornerstone of "Solomon's Temple" in the southeast corner (consistent with the location of the cornerstone in the 1793 United States Capitol building<sup>168</sup>), sometime "in the period 1772–1829"<sup>169</sup> Masonic tradition began to standardize the practice of laying the first stone at the northeast corner,<sup>170</sup> a practice that continues to this day. While the authors state that the laying of the first stone of the Kirtland Temple "was an overt Masonic reference that followed the example set by Washington and his Masonic companions,"<sup>171</sup> it should have also been noted that by the time the Kirtland Temple was constructed, laying the foundation at the southeast corner was no longer the most common practice in the rituals of Freemasonry.

Other "marked dissimilarities" between Latter-day Saint and Masonic cornerstone ceremonies are noted by Matthew B. Brown. In contrast to Latter-day Saints, Masons:

- Dedicate one stone rather than four stones
- Use corn, wine, and oil during their rite
- Use an architectural tool to "try the trueness of the cornerstone"
- Can carry out their ceremony with "only a handful of people participating" vs. "a large, set number of priesthood holders"<sup>172</sup>

### *Kirtland Temple pulpits*

Elder Orson Pratt stated that the pattern for the Kirtland Temple priesthood pulpits, like others of the most important or unusual features of the building, were specifically revealed by God,<sup>173</sup> serving both practical and pedagogical functions by their prominent grouping of quorum presidencies in hierarchical ascent.



In the book we are told that “this arrangement is related to the Royal Arch,”<sup>174</sup> a rite of Freemasonry, yet there is nothing that closely links the formation or function of the pulpit to the gestures and “vaulted chamber containing nine arches”<sup>175</sup> related to this rite except the number nine. We are also informed that the formation “emphasizes the sacred character of the number three, which suggests the presence of divine power”<sup>176</sup> — plausibly true, but this is a common Christian conception, not something specific to Freemasonry. It is noted that the abbreviations for priesthood offices on each pulpit, which use “the first letter for each word,” each word followed by a period, is “widely employed throughout”<sup>177</sup> Masonry. But, regrettably, the book does not inform the reader that “the concept of ... formation” of such initialisms was “effortlessly understood (and evidently not novel)”<sup>178</sup> to general readers of the 1830s.<sup>179</sup>

Matthew B. Brown lists additional divergences between the use of the pulpits and Masonic concepts and practices:

While it is true, in a general sense, that officiators in the Kirtland Temple and Masonic lodges were seated in the east and the west, there were significant differences between the two arrangements. For instance, there were twenty-four Mormons but only seven Masons. In the temple, there were twelve people stationed in both the east and the west while the Masons placed four in the east, two in the west, and one in the south. The Mormon individuals were priesthood holders of the Melchizedek and Aaronic orders while the Masons were supervisors and administrators. The highest Mormon authority sat on the west side of the Kirtland Temple while the highest Masonic authority always sat in the east. The Mormon pulpits rose in four tiers on both the east and the west ends of the room while the Masons raised the highest eastern officiator (only) on three steps, the highest western officiator (only) on two steps, and the sole southern officiator on two steps. The only corresponding office between the two sets of dignitaries was that of deacon. In the Kirtland Temple, the three-man presidency over the deacons quorum sat together on the east side while in the lodge, the Senior Deacon sat in the east, but the Junior Deacon sat in the west. The Masons had a Senior and Junior Warden, a Secretary, a Treasurer, and a Worshipful Master sitting in their assigned places. The Mormons had no such officers sitting in their pulpits. The bottom tiers of the Mormon pulpits, on both sides, were equipped with

sacrament tables. The sacrament was not served during the procedures of the lodge. Cloth partitions were utilized in the various compartments of the Mormon pulpits to facilitate privacy in prayer. No partitions of this sort were used [for privacy in Masonic prayer]. ... Lastly, it should be noted that the twenty-four seats for priesthood holders in the Kirtland Temple mirror the twenty-four seats in the heavenly temple where kings and priests are seated (Revelation 4:4; 5:8–10).<sup>180</sup>

*Kirtland ritual greetings, washings, and anointings*

Descriptions of some practices from the Kirtland School of the Prophets seem loosely reminiscent of the kinds of ritual language patterns one finds in Masonry.<sup>181</sup> However, no specific parallels to language in Masonic rites are mentioned in the book.<sup>182</sup>

That said, the book does mention the practice of prayer with uplifted hands. In response, it should be observed that this practice is also frequently mentioned in ancient sources.<sup>183</sup> Indeed, some texts specifically assert that its exercise goes back to the very beginning. For example, in one Christian text we read that “Adam was then offering on the altar, and had begun to pray, with his hands spread unto God.”<sup>184</sup> Even today, this gesture is widely recognized as a sign of distress, a call for help, and a demonstration of peaceful intent.<sup>185</sup> Not surprisingly, Christians have also long connected the tradition with the posture of crucifixion.<sup>186</sup>

The washing of feet, modeled on the Gospel of John, was practiced in Kirtland. The book claims a parallel in “the Masonic Order of High Priesthood” that mentions Abraham’s partaking of bread and wine but, significantly, does not say anything about the washing of feet.<sup>187</sup> It seems reasonable to that Joseph Smith first learned about both well-known events from the Bible itself rather than in a biblical passage cited in the middle of Thomas Smith Webb’s *Freemason’s Monitor*.

Similarly, Joseph Smith was certainly well-aware of initiatory washings and anointings through the events he encountered verse-by-verse as he translated the Old and New Testaments. “Nonetheless,” the book tells us, “these types of ceremonies had been adopted decades before in Freemasonry and exposed in Webb’s *Monitor* and Bernard’s *Light on Masonry*.”<sup>188</sup> While it is true that these exposés mention rites of washing and anointing performed in one or two relatively obscure degrees outside of Craft masonry — rites that Joseph Smith is less likely to have known than the scriptures themselves — it should be noted that, in each case,

the text of these rites explicitly mentions or alludes to related biblical traditions.

Thus, the claim that Joseph Smith “acted as a ‘keen Mason,’” following a procedure that was “similar” to the “development of new degrees in Masonry”<sup>189</sup> supports an unlikely and unnecessary hypothesis. Why should readers find this difficult argument compelling in view of the more straightforward conclusion that in the inspired restoration of these ordinances the Prophet was able to draw directly on what seem to be closer precedents of washing and anointing in Israelite temples and Jesus’s ministry?

### *Hosanna shout*

Attempting to relate the “hosanna shout” to Masonic sources, the book mentions the ritual of the Heroines of Jericho, “a concordant Masonic body associated with the Royal Arch,”<sup>190</sup> which is still practiced today by some Black Americans as part of Prince Hall Masonry. The authors cite an 1884 description of a ritual based on the biblical stories of Ruth and Rahab in which women form three successive circles and give various praises to God. This ritual is mentioned in support of the idea that “the clapping of hands and waving of handkerchiefs” described is “very similar” to the “hosanna shout” that first took place in the Kirtland temple.<sup>191</sup> However, the authors provide no evidence that “the clapping of hands and waving of handkerchiefs” described in the 1884 publication were part of an early nineteenth-century version of the Heroines of Jericho rites that the Nauvoo Saints could have known. A more plausible parallel for the context and actions of the Latter-day Saint hosanna shout is the John 12:13 account of the waving of palm branches and shouting “hosanna” during the triumphal entry of Jesus into Jerusalem. Joseph Smith would have also encountered these same themes of praise, pleading for deliverance, and the waving of branches in the Lord’s instructions for celebrating the Feast of Tabernacles<sup>192</sup> and in extended liturgies for such festal pageantry that are found in the Psalms.<sup>193</sup>

### *Passing of the temple veils in Kirtland*

In the book, a comparison is made between the vision of Joseph Smith and Oliver Cowdery of Moses, Elias, and Elijah in the Kirtland Temple and the Masonic Royal Arch Rite of Exaltation wherein candidates cite biblical verses at four different veils before being crowned in the presence of a Masonic king, high priest, and scribe-prophet.<sup>194</sup> However, the parallel is very loose, since there is no hint in D&C 110 that Joseph and

Oliver performed any tests of knowledge, passed through a series of veils, entered “the presence of a Divine council consisting of a prophet, priest, and king,” or were crowned at that time. Instead, we are told that these three Old Testament figures, along with Jesus Christ Himself, restored specific keys of knowledge and priesthood that would be necessary for them to continue the work of gathering scattered Israel and performing temple ordinances.

## **Nauvoo Period**

### *Sacred garments*

Although Masonic rites do not provide initiates with a sacred garment in likeness of Adam and Eve’s “coats of skins” that are worn every day throughout one’s life, the book rightly points out some commonalities: namely, that the Masonic apron is worn at ceremonial occasions and is buried with Freemasons in death.<sup>195</sup> Perhaps of greatest significance is that both the Masonic fraternity and the temple ordinances use the ancient tools of the compass and the square to teach essential lessons about progress toward heavenly virtues in the life of the maturing initiate.<sup>196</sup> In Masonry, these two key symbols of the Lodge are pressed directly upon the bodies of candidates to underscore lessons of honesty, self-control, and respecting the confidentiality of Lodge secrets.<sup>197</sup>

However, it should be noted that, in contrast to Masonic practice, Latter-day Saint garments bear sacred marks that are tied to specific symbolism of Christ’s flesh on the veil, consistent with allusions in the Bible.<sup>198</sup> Apart from the important related symbolism of the square and compass, the clothing element of the initiatory ordinance is more similar to analogues in the ancient world and the Bible, as I have argued elsewhere.<sup>199</sup>

### *High-priestly clothing*

By way of contrast to the additional priesthood-related clothing of the endowment, “in the Masonic system the apron consists almost entirely of [the] ritual dress minus the clothes for the initiate.”<sup>200</sup> The clothing put on in the temple endowment is patterned after the clothing of the Israelite high priest described in the Bible and symbolizes the heavenly clothing that is to be given to faithful individuals in the next life.<sup>201</sup>

*Ritual ascent*

The idea that Masonic rites describe an ascent to the heavenly temple is briefly discussed in the book.<sup>202</sup> Although Freemasonry is not a religion<sup>203</sup> and, in contrast to Latter-day Saint temple ordinances, does not claim saving power for its rites, threads relating to biblical themes of exaltation are evident in some Masonic rituals. For example, in the ceremonies of the Royal Arch degree of the York rite, candidates pass through a series of veils and eventually enter into the divine presence.<sup>204</sup> In addition, Christian interpretations of Masonry, like Salem Town's description of the "eighth degree," tell of how the righteous will "be admitted within the veil of God's presence, where they will become kings and priests before the throne of his glory for ever and ever."<sup>205</sup> Such language echoes New Testament teachings<sup>206</sup> and also, broadly, rites of initiation and kingship in Egypt and the ancient Near East.<sup>207</sup> Thus, apart from specific ritual language patterns and symbols, a more general form of resemblance between Latter-day Saint temple ritual, some Masonic degrees, the Bible, and other ancient sources can be seen in their shared views about the ultimate potential of humankind.<sup>208</sup>

However, by way of contrast to the general sequence of the Latter-day Saint temple endowment that draws on the scriptural story of Adam and Eve and its analogue in older rites described in the Bible and other ancient sources, Masonic scholar Walter Wilmschurst (among other predecessors<sup>209</sup> and successors<sup>210</sup>) suggested that the three rites of the Craft Lodge (Entered Apprentice, Fellow Craft, and Master Mason) find their closest parallel in three initiatory rites of the early Christian Church (Catechumen, Leiturgoi, and Priests/Presbyters).<sup>211</sup> Note also that the important Masonic symbols of ascent in the first two degrees — "Jacob's Theological Ladder in the First Degree, the Winding Stair which one ascends to obtain a reward in the Second Degree"<sup>212</sup> — are not mentioned in the temple endowment.

Going further, the book mentions "the 'raising' of the candidate in mystical embrace in the Third degree."<sup>213</sup> However, in its discussion, the book fails to mention the embraces of Jacob with the angel and his brother Esau in the story of Jacob.<sup>214</sup> Imagery showing these embraces of Jacob that specifically recall the "five points of fellowship" is currently traceable as far back as the twelfth century, centuries before the formal organization of speculative Freemasonry.<sup>215</sup> In addition, such medieval depictions took inspiration from the earlier Old Testament stories of Elijah and Elisha each raising a child back to life.<sup>216</sup> Indeed, the stories of Elijah and Elisha are specifically referenced in what is perhaps the

earliest reference to the “five points of fellowship” in Masonry — the 1696 Edinburgh Register House Manuscript.<sup>217</sup>

During this five-point embrace — which, incidentally, is not connected with a veil and does not figure as part of the rites of exaltation in the Masonic Royal Arch degree — two Masons exchange a “tri-syllabic code word,”<sup>218</sup> a substitute for the original “Mason’s word,” which was lost.<sup>219</sup> They were also told (in Morgan’s version of the 1826 rite) that this substitute word signified “marrow in the bone,”<sup>220</sup> a term of ancient significance.<sup>221</sup> The book informs us that within Master Mason rite, “the brief ritual embrace instructed the Mason in fraternal duties, emphasizing the need for brotherly love, co-operation, and unity; it provided a mode of recognition; and, significantly, it stood as a symbol of the Mason’s hope of a resurrection.”<sup>222</sup>

For many years, the Latter-day Saint endowment also included “five points of fellowship”<sup>223</sup> and the similarity in particular gestures and nomenclature leaves no doubt that these were adopted and adapted from Freemasonry by Joseph Smith. However, like other symbolic gestures in the endowment that will be discussed in part three of this review, its primary purpose was not as a token of brotherly love or as a mode of recognition among mortals,<sup>224</sup> but rather — consistent with the rest of the endowment — had a distinct symbolism specifically related to the life and mission of Jesus Christ. Unlike Freemasonry but similar to temple practices in the ancient world, such embraces are associated with a ritual passage through the veil into the presence of God.<sup>225</sup> (See Figure 3.)

### *Quorum of the Anointed*

The book includes a brief discussion of the Quorum of the Anointed.<sup>226</sup> In this connection, the most direct and specific connection with Freemasonry mentioned is in a testimony given as part of the “Temple Lot” legal proceedings. These proceedings took place in the 1890s, five decades after the Saints left Nauvoo.

The book quotes the testimony from a secondhand source<sup>227</sup> and mistakenly attributes the statement to Lucy Meserve Smith rather than to Bathsheba W. Smith.<sup>228</sup> In addition, it conflates Bathsheba’s responses with the questions introduced by her interrogator, Mr. Hall.<sup>229</sup> Examination of the original transcript shows that it is Mr. Hall, not Bathsheba, who “intermingled the Mormon ceremony with contemporary women’s Freemasonry.”<sup>230</sup> When Mr. Hall is the first to introduce the subject, Bathsheba states that the *Order of Rebecca* was “not anything like” the

temple ceremony.<sup>231</sup> In fact, Bathsheba never mentions the “side degree of Masonry” called the *Order of Rebecca* herself, and when her interrogator persists, she is tentative about whether she was ever initiated into such a degree and cannot tell when it was given to her (“I don’t know”) or what it was called (“I can’t remember to save my life what degree it was”). Finally, in exasperation after Mr. Hall’s continued pestering of the evidently forgetful and struggling elderly woman, Bathsheba’s counsel objects on the grounds that “it is incompetent, irrelevant, and immaterial, and not proper cross examination.”<sup>232</sup> Elsewhere, David H. Dodd and I have published a study showing how introducing leading questions of this sort is liable to lead witnesses to construct false memories of situations that may never have occurred in the first place.<sup>233</sup>

### *Nauvoo Temple architecture and furnishings*

The book makes expansive claims about resemblances of architecture, layouts, and furnishings in Masonic lodges and the Nauvoo Temple.<sup>234</sup> Elsewhere I have made a detailed comparison of the Nauvoo Temple and Masonic Lodges, and came to the following conclusions:

- In overall conception, Masonic lodges and Latter-day Saint temples both strive to emulate ideas from ancient temples. In their broad design, Latter-day Saint temples are arguably closer to their biblical counterparts.
- While the Nauvoo Temple uses a small handful of individual elements important in Masonry, its external building features were inspired by direct revelation and draw more directly on New Testament symbolism.
- Apart from the presence of a series of veils used during the Royal Arch rite, the layout and furnishings of the ritual space for that degree (and the Craft degrees) are more different than similar. The ritual objects within the Lodge are more numerous and symbolically rich than the simpler furnishings required by the temple endowment and, except for the presence of an altar, have little overlap.<sup>235</sup>

## 3. What’s Missing

In this section, I’ll discuss some of “what’s missing” in the book, with a focus on the relationship between Freemasonry and the temple ordinances. In my view, the influences of Freemasonry on the temple ordinances can be placed in their proper context only when their relative

strengths are also compared to other potential sources of inspiration — for example, revelations stemming from Joseph Smith’s study of the Bible. Giving due consideration to these sources of inspiration that are “missing” in the book will help us better untangle the nature and extent of Freemasonry’s influence on the Nauvoo Temple ordinances.

The omission of these sources in *Method Infinite* is not accidental. The book explicitly argues against the belief that ritual similarities between temple ordinances and Masonic rituals can be explained through “common ancient sources,” holding that such a view is

untenable for several reasons, the foremost being that the further one goes back in time, the more dissimilar Mormon and Masonic rituals become. Moreover, the Masonic ritual source (i.e., the Entered Apprentice, Fellowcraft, and Master Mason degrees, including the Royal Arch) cannot be reliably traced beyond the early eighteenth century.<sup>236</sup>

I am sympathetic to the view expressed in the book given that some Latter-day Saints have taken extreme positions, mistakenly arguing that there is *no* real relationship between Freemasonry and the restoration of temple ordinances. However, while agreeing that the extreme position is mistaken, I would like to make two observations about the statement from the book cited above:

- First, the book argues that ritual similarities between temple ordinances and Masonic rituals cannot be explained through “common ancient sources” because “the further one goes back in time, the more dissimilar Mormon and Masonic rituals become.”<sup>237</sup> This is certainly true in some instances — as, for example, in the Nauvoo Temple version of the “five points of fellowship,” which is closer to Morgan’s 1826 version than to earlier versions by Preston and Webb.<sup>238</sup> However, more commonly, when elements of Masonic rites and temple ordinances intersect it is not due to specific similarities in Masonic rituals that have varied over time. Rather, it is usually because the rites of Masonry and temple ordinances share broader “family resemblances” to many themes and practices that stretch back to the Bible and temple-related rituals in antiquity — for example, washing, anointing, clothing, and requirements for secrecy. In these instances, it is not unreasonable for believing Latter-day Saints to posit



that “common ancient sources” may have informed the development of both temple ordinances and Masonic rites.

- Second, though the book correctly states that “the Masonic ritual source ... cannot reliably be traced beyond the early eighteenth century,”<sup>239</sup> this should not be taken to mean that Freemasonry lacked important antecedents. For example, Masonic scholar Walter Wilmschurst (among others<sup>240</sup>) has suggested that the three rites of the Craft Lodge predate the early eighteenth century, noting a source of parallels in three initiatory rites of the early Christian Church.<sup>241</sup> It is also commonly held by Masonic scholars, each in their own fashion, that many elements of the rites and symbols of Freemasonry can be traced back even further in time. As one simple example, Masonic rites contain many explicit citations and implicit allusions to the Bible.

## Perspective and Basic Approach

*Method Infinite* is essentially two things: 1. a history of events directly relating to Freemasonry and the Latter-day Saints; and 2. an exploration of how Freemasonry may have influenced other events, people, ideas, scriptures, practices, and ordinances of the Church. In the earlier sections of this review, I’ve tried to complement the book’s exploration by considering additional data and arguments. For many topics, I thought the book’s discussions of *similarities* to Freemasonry needed to be counterbalanced with descriptions of *differences* and *missing or underplayed* sources of inspiration that were also at work throughout early Church history.

Given the degree of interest in the relationship between Masonic rites and the temple ordinances for the Latter-day Saints, this section will draw on the tenets of scholarship on comparative analysis to examine this important relationship from additional, varying angles.<sup>242</sup> Though this short and somewhat superficial sampling of comparative methods will be limited here to temple ordinances and goes somewhat beyond what would typically be found in a typical book review, I hope that readers will get a glimpse of how analogous approaches could be adapted as models for deeper explorations of many of the purported parallels between Freemasonry and Latter-day Saint history and thought that have been suggested in *Method Infinite*.

More generally, in my view, the readers’ indulgence in this digression will serve the interest of suggesting how initial ideas such as these can

improve the kinds of comparisons that are frequently made in studies of Latter-day Saint history, theology, and scripture — thus, avoiding pitfalls and recognizing best practices.

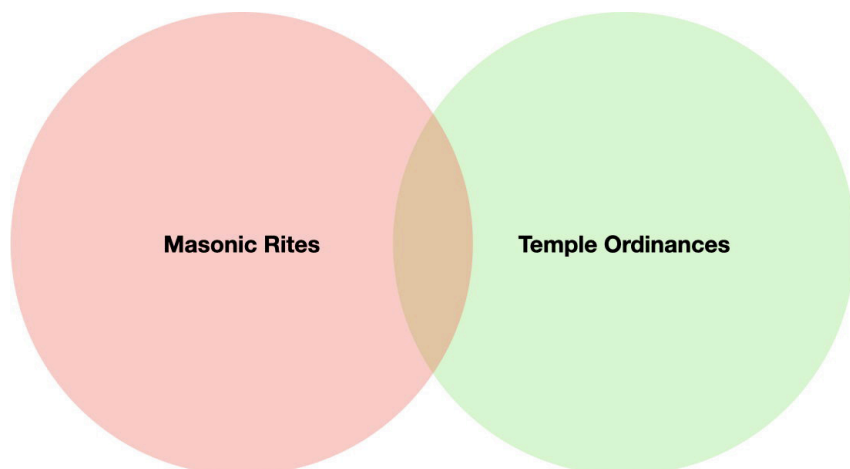
Due to the need for brevity, arguments underpinning the conclusions presented here will be rapidly sketched rather than fully drawn. Readers who are interested in examining the underlying data for themselves in order to reach their own conclusions may wish to consult a longer study published elsewhere.<sup>243</sup> For the sake of this review, I will frame the discussion using five simple questions:

1. How much do the text of the Masonic rites and the temple ordinances overlap?
2. What common and unique sources could have contributed to Masonic rites and temple ordinances?
3. What elements of the temple ordinances can be best attributed to Masonic influence?
4. How many of the thematic elements of the temple ordinances are spanned by the resemblances to potential catalysts?
5. What is the relative strength of the resemblances for each of these potential catalysts?

### **How much do the text of the Masonic rites and the temple ordinances overlap?**

Perhaps the most basic tenet of the comparative method is that the examination should include a discussion of both similarities and differences. A close runner-up in importance is the tenet that relative similarity between two or more texts cannot be assessed by simply totaling the number of resemblances. Rather, the *density* of these resemblances must also be considered.<sup>244</sup> “Shotgun” approaches, where the text of primary interest is analyzed in relation to a much larger comparative text, almost inevitably pick up similarities in wording scattered sparsely throughout the longer text.

Although I have not performed word counts to determine the relative sizes of the texts of Masonic rites and temple ordinances, nor have I done a statistical analysis to determine how much vocabulary and phrasing they have in common, I expect that most knowledgeable readers would agree that the diagram shown in Figure 1 provides a reasonably satisfactory notional view about their degree of commonality.



**Figure 1.** Notional overlap between the texts of Masonic rites and temple ordinances.

That said, every thoughtful reader will differ in the details — preferring either to nudge the overlapping circles somewhat closer together or separating them more widely. For instance, Latter-day Saint scholar Eugene Seach saw the two circles as having less overlap than I do. In my opinion, he certainly understated the extent of similarity — even if repeated ritual dialogue forms are only counted once — when he wrote:

It is particularly noteworthy that of all the extensive Masonic ritual, which occupies more than two-hundred double-columned pages in *Richardson's Monitor of Freemasonry*, the Prophet accepted as genuine only that which might fill a single page in the same format, *even correcting it in major points*.<sup>245</sup>

On the other hand, as I've showed earlier in this review, *Method Infinite* often overstates the extent of similarities between Freemasonry and Latter-day Saint thought on many topics, not just those having to do with the temple. Of course, some of what I consider to be exaggerated emphasis is implicit and probably unconscious, due to lack of discussion factors that were apparently seen to be of lesser relevance to the focus of the book.

In any case, I think it is safe to say that no reasonable individual who is familiar with both Masonic ritual and the temple ordinances would claim either that the two circles are entirely disjoint nor that they overlap almost completely. In my view, the situation can be roughly characterized as follows:

- On the one hand, most of the narrative and ritual content of temple ordinances (mostly based on the Creation, the Fall, and the giving of ordinances to Adam and Eve) has no counterpart in Masonic ritual.
- On the other hand, most of the narrative and ritual content of the Masonic rites (mostly based on legendary and biblical events having to do with the building of temples in Jerusalem) has no counterpart in the temple ordinances.
- In most respects, Masonic rites and temple ordinances are more like distant cousins than immediate family members.

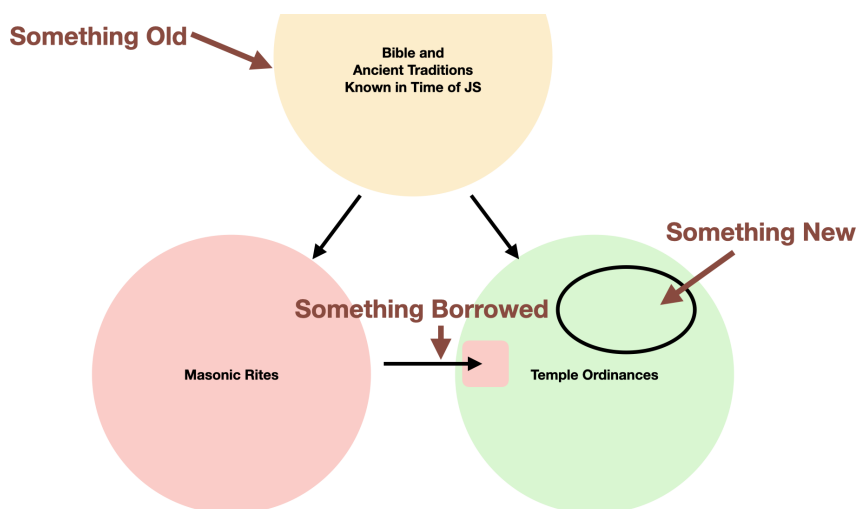
It should not be surprising that there are more differences than similarities in Masonic rites and the temple ordinances. As George L. Mitton has observed:<sup>246</sup> “Manifestly, a prophet’s mission could include a determination of what is sound in the environment and what is not.” From his encounter with Freemasonry, Joseph Smith adopted and adapted a relatively small set of elements he deemed useful as he restored ancient temple ordinances, while rejecting the greater part of what is contained in Masonic rites as irrelevant.<sup>247</sup>

### **What common and unique sources could have contributed to Masonic rites and temple ordinances?**

As a memorable way to characterize the diverse origins of various elements of the temple ordinances, Joe Steve Swick III, a scholar of Masonry and an endowed member of the Church, played on the rhyme describing a Victorian gift-giving custom. According to custom, for good luck, brides were given “Something old, something new, something borrowed, and something blue.”<sup>248</sup>

Varying the traditional wording, he suggested that modern temple ordinances are “Something old, something new, something borrowed, *but it’s all true*.”<sup>249</sup> Teachings, symbols, and ritual restored from antiquity through revelation (the “old”), freshly revealed to meet the needs of modern Saints (the “new”),<sup>250</sup> and adapted from the Bible, Masonry, and other sources known to Joseph Smith that served as catalysts for additional, elaborating and confirming revelation (the “borrowed”) can all come together in the House of the Lord under prophetic guidance and authority.

While Figure 1 provides a notional view of the extent of similarities and differences between Masonic rites and temple ordinances, Figure 2 attempts to give a feel for the universe of possible catalysts for temple-related revelations and teachings.



**Figure 2.** The Bible and ancient traditions known in the time of Joseph Smith (something old) are influences common to both Masonic rites and temple ordinances. The Prophet’s own revelations added “something new.” And selected elements of Masonic rites were “borrowed” and adapted for temple ordinances. The sizes of the colored areas are arbitrary — what is important is the universe of possible relationships implied by the arrows, not its size or strength.

### *Something old*

Another important tenet of comparative research is to discover what common factors known to authors of the texts being compared may account for some of the similarities among them.

In this case, both ancient and modern Masonic historians agree with the general observation that despite Freemasonry’s relatively late origins, some things in its rites draw on the Bible and other ancient traditions.<sup>251</sup> Joseph Smith and subsequent prophets have said the same about temple ordinances.<sup>252</sup> Notably, the Prophet’s focus on Bible translation from 1830–1833 would have given him deep exposure to many temple- and priesthood-related ideas in the Old and New Testaments,<sup>253</sup> including many things that are not found to any significant extent in Masonic rites. Though the Prophet occasionally mentions selected Masonic themes overtly beginning in 1842<sup>254</sup> — three years after his arrival in Nauvoo — quotations and allusions drawn directly from scripture overwhelmingly predominate in the sermons the Prophet gives in explanation of his beliefs — from the beginning of his ministry to the end of his life.<sup>255</sup>

Regrettably, however, *Method Infinite* discusses the Joseph Smith Translation of the Bible only in terms of the possibility that certain

revisions were influenced by Freemasonry.<sup>256</sup> So far as I have been able to discover, it does not discuss the Prophet's intense work on the Bible as a likely direct *source* of inspiration for many aspects of temple ordinances.

### *Something new*

New revelation and new adaptations to the capacities and situation of the people have taken place continually since the temple ordinances were first introduced. Thus, we would expect to find Joseph Smith's restored temple rites deviating at times from the wording and symbolism of ancient ordinances in the interest of clarity and relevance to modern disciples. Richard E. Turley, Jr., former Assistant Church Historian, has wisely suggested that individuals "should look for the differences between the endowment and Masonic rituals if they want to find the essence of what the Lord revealed to Joseph."<sup>257</sup>

In addition to resemblances to the Bible, Freemasonry, and other sources known in Joseph Smith's time, Latter-day Saint scholars have discovered significant evidence that ancient temple-related traditions and practices *not* available to the Prophet appear in modern temple ordinances and teachings. To the degree these ancient temple ideas and practices cannot be found in Masonry or anywhere else in Joseph Smith's world, believers in his prophetic mission can be reasonably confident that he learned them by revelation — unless and until new evidence comes along showing that they originated in the nineteenth century.<sup>258</sup>

### *Something borrowed*

As to borrowing, I agree with the position of Richard Turley that some things were originally adopted from Freemasonry<sup>259</sup> (and potentially other sources) and then adapted to the context of temple ordinances. As Joseph Smith stated:

The first and fundamental principle of our holy religion is, that we believe that we have a right to embrace all, and every item of truth, without limitation or without being circumscribed by the creeds or superstitious notions of men, ... including whatsoever is manifest unto us by the highest degree of testimony that God has committed us, as written in the Old and New Testament, or anywhere else, by any manifestation, whereof we know that it has come from God.<sup>260</sup>

To the degree specific terminology, gestures, and phrases are currently known only to be found in nineteenth-century Masonry and

the temple but nowhere else, we can be confident that they originated there — at least unless and until new discoveries prove otherwise.

*But it's all true!*

As Joseph Smith himself described it, “One of the grand fundamental principles of Mormonism is to receive truth, let it come from where it may. ... If, as a skillful mechanic in taking a welding heat, I use a borax and aluminum, etc. and succeed in welding ... all together, shall I not have attained a good object?”<sup>261</sup>

With this in mind, individuals who accept revelation as a source for the temple ordinances don't need to decide whether Joseph Smith's initial spark of inspiration relating to a given feature of the temple ordinances originated with his exposure to sources available to him or came through direct divine intervention. Instead, they are free to adopt a stance something like the following:

1. To the degree a given element of the temple ordinances can be found in the Bible or extant ancient sources, it suggests that these sources may have been catalysts for temple-related revelations.
2. When a given element of the temple ordinances is closer to Freemasonry than what can be found in the Bible or extant ancient sources, it provides support for Heber C. Kimball's view that Masonry has “now and then a thing that is correct.”<sup>262</sup>
3. When a given element of the temple ordinances varies from Freemasonry or is absent altogether from its ritual and teachings, believers can take Richard Turley's view that “the differences between the endowment and Masonic rituals” constitute “the essence of what the Lord revealed to Joseph.”<sup>263</sup>
4. To the degree a given element of the temple ordinances agrees in non-trivial ways with relevant ancient sources that Joseph Smith could not have known, the fact becomes difficult to explain as a mere coincidence. Such findings can be taken as potential evidence (though always tentative and fallible) of his prophetic calling. We now possess abundant evidence of this kind.

## What elements of the temple ordinances can be best attributed to Masonic influence?

Employing a tenet of the comparative method that BYU Professor Nicholas J. Frederick calls “dissimilarity,”<sup>264</sup> it is important to take note of significant instances where Masonic rites and the temple ordinances uniquely share unusual ritual terminology, phrases, or actions that are not specifically found in sources Joseph Smith could have known. In my current assessment of the data, there are three classes of elements within the temple ordinances where this seems most likely to be the case: ritual gestures, ritual language patterns, and the sacred embrace.<sup>265</sup>

This finding is of special interest in part because of a late statement by Elder Franklin D. Richards, where he said:

Joseph, the Prophet, was aware that there were some things about Masonry which had come down from the beginning and he desired to know what they were, hence the lodge. The Masons admitted some *keys* of knowledge appertaining to Masonry were lost. Joseph enquired of the Lord concerning the matter and He revealed to the Prophet true Masonry, as we have it in our temples.<sup>266</sup>

Thus, Joseph Smith’s desire to learn or to confirm his existing knowledge about “some *keys* of knowledge appertaining to Masonry” — in other words some of the ritual gestures, including the sacred embrace — may have been one of the significant reasons for Joseph Smith’s having formed the Nauvoo Lodge in the first place.

The rituals of the Lodge enabled Latter-day Saint Masons to become familiar with symbols and forms they would later encounter in the Nauvoo temple. These included specific ritual terms, language, handclasps, and gestures as well as larger patterns such as those involving repetition and the use of questions and answers as an aid to teaching.

While the specificity of certain resemblances of ritual gestures, terminology, and dialogue patterns in Masonic rites lends support to the idea that these elements were initially adopted from Freemasonry and then modified through revelation for use in temple ordinances, it should be remembered that none of ritual gestures and language patterns are without older precedents in ancient traditions and the Bible.<sup>267</sup>

Going further, as I have studied elements of temple ordinances that were good candidates for having been adopted and adapted from nineteenth-century sources, I have often found that in those cases where Joseph Smith seems to have borrowed an idea as an initial



catalyst, the final form of the idea in the temple ordinances is sometimes closer in line with ancient precedents. Saying this a different way, things that seem to have originated in borrowings were more often than not nudged in the direction of older forms.

For example, unlike the utilitarian emphasis of gestures of recognition such as “tokens” (grips), “signs,” and “penalties” (penal signs) in Freemasonry,<sup>268</sup> Joseph Smith’s temple teachings stressed the other-worldly significance of the words and gestures, performed in elegant simplicity. The allegorical and practical uses of signs and tokens in Freemasonry were subordinated to his understanding that the keys of the priesthood were primarily of religious significance. In this respect his interests were more closely allied with those of the ancient world who saw salvific significance in ritual gestures.

For example, in Hans Memling’s striking fifteenth-century depiction of the gates of Paradise,<sup>269</sup> a sacred grip is featured alongside other, more conventional symbols of heavenly ascent after death (see Figure 3). The doors at the top resemble the porch and façade of an imposing gothic cathedral, flanked by musical angels. Other angels prepare the elect for entry



**Figure 3.** Hans Memling (ca. 1433–1494):  
The Gates of Paradise with St. Peter,  
1471–1473.

by helping them don priestly vestments. A crown shaped like a mitre is placed on their heads, prefiguring by three centuries later Masonic rites.<sup>270</sup> Significantly, as a precursor to the climb of the righteous up the final stairway, Peter himself personally extends his hand to approaching men and women in a sacred handclasp.<sup>271</sup> The scene recalls an image from the tenth-century *Bamberg Apocalypse*, where John is admitted to the New Jerusalem by a special handclasp.<sup>272</sup>

### **How many of the thematic elements of the temple ordinances are spanned by the resemblances to potential catalysts?**

An additional consideration in comparative analysis is to determine what proportion of the two texts contain resemblances: Do they span the entire target text or only limited segments?<sup>273</sup> As Samuel Sandmel observes in his well-known essay on “parallelomania”: “Detailed study is the criterion, and the detailed study ought to respect the context and not be limited to juxtaposing mere excerpts.”<sup>274</sup> The results of comparative studies are most convincing when strong evidence of common themes and narrative elements can be found across a *large proportion* of the text of primary interest. In addition, commonalities in *sequence* are important. A high correlation in the sequence of major narrative elements of the text of primary interest and its comparative cohorts is a powerful form of evidence.<sup>275</sup>

Consistent with these considerations — and in order to broaden the field of comparison beyond the smaller set of resemblances that would be found if the analysis were limited only to exact matches in terminology and phrases — I identified thirty-one themes that were meant to describe various elements found somewhere within the entirety of the temple ordinances, as shown in Table 2. Whenever a meaningful resemblance between the Bible, other ancient sources, and Freemasonry was found to one of these themes, I took note. Though the elements I used to make these judgments are rough and preliminary, I hoped they would be a useful starting point for a natural breakdown of the topic.

I tried to be generous in the comparisons. For example, since the rites of Freemasonry are designed to accommodate people of all faiths (not just Christians), they make no explicit mention of Jesus Christ. However, because many Christian Masons in Joseph Smith’s day saw Jesus as being present in Masonic rites allegorically, I counted it as a thematic resemblance to temple ordinances. I also counted loose thematic resemblances discovered outside of Craft and Royal Arch Masonry that are less likely to have been known to Joseph Smith.

**Table 2.** Thematic Elements of Temple Ordinances.

		Bible	Ancient Sources	Freemasonry	Joseph Smith
<b>General Comparisons to Latter-day Saint Temple Ordinances</b>					
1.	Central Role of Jesus Christ	✓	✓	✓	✓
2.	Essential for Salvation	✓	✓		✓
3.	Ancient Beginnings	✓	✓	✓	✓
4.	Need for Priesthood Authority	✓	✓		✓
5.	Exaltation for the Righteous	✓	✓	✓	✓
6.	Overall Sequence of the Endowment	✓	✓		✓
7.	Joint Exaltation of Man and Woman	✓	✓		✓
8.	Rituals Performed by Proxy	✓	✓		✓
<b>Comparisons to the Latter-day Saint Initiatory Ordinances</b>					
9.	Washing	✓	✓	✓	✓
10.	Anointing	✓	✓	✓	✓
11.	Clothing	✓	✓	✓	✓
12.	New Name	✓	✓	✓	✓
<b>Comparisons to Ritual Gestures and Language Patterns</b>					
13.	Ritual Gestures	✓	✓	✓	✓
14.	Ritual Language Patterns	✓	✓	✓	✓
<b>Comparisons to the Endowment</b>					
15.	Reversing the Fall of Adam and Eve	✓	✓	✓	✓
16.	Three Messengers	✓	✓	✓	✓
17.	Ladder-like Progression of Covenants	✓	✓		✓
18.	Ladder-Like Progression of Names	✓	✓		✓
19.	Ladder-like Progression of Priesthoods	✓	✓		✓
20.	Ladder-like Changes of Clothing	✓	✓	✓	✓
21.	True Order of Prayer	✓	✓		✓
<b>Comparisons to Traversing the Veil in the Endowment</b>					
22.	Sacred Embrace	✓	✓	✓	✓
23.	Conversations in Most Holy Places	✓	✓	✓	✓
<b>Comparisons to Sealing Power</b>					
24.	Sealing Power	✓	✓		✓
<b>Comparisons to the Fulness of the Priesthood</b>					
25.	Fulness of the Priesthood	✓	✓	✓	✓
26.	More Sure Word of Prophecy	✓	✓		✓

		Bible	Ancient Sources	Freemasonry	Joseph Smith
Comparisons to Nauvoo Temple Architecture, Layout, and Furnishings					
27.	Overall Conception	✓	✓	✓	✓
28.	External Building Features	✓	✓		✓
29.	Layout and Furnishings	✓	✓		✓
Comparisons to the Two Crowning Adornments of the Nauvoo Temple					
30.	Holiness to the Lord	✓	✓	✓	✓
31.	Symbolism of the Angel Weathervane	✓	✓	✓	✓

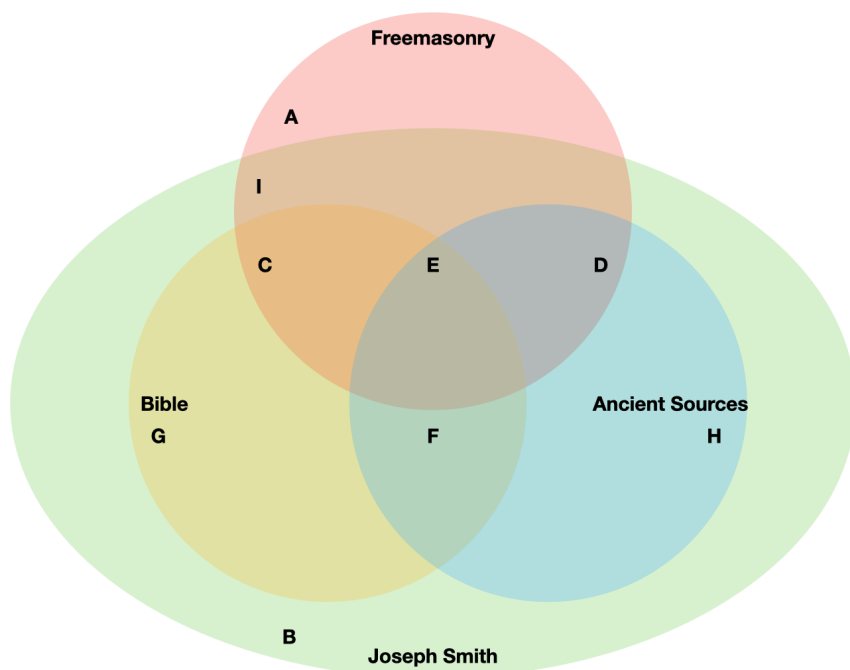
Afterward, I located each of the thirty-one elements being compared in the appropriate place in the Venn diagram shown in Figure 4. For example, elements of the temple ordinances that showed up in some fashion in all three categories being compared — the Bible, Ancient Sources, *and* Freemasonry — were placed in the diagram in the space labeled “E.” This categorization was intended to provide some qualitative idea of how frequently different combinations of similarities appeared.

What was most interesting at first blush is that only two of these nine possible areas in the diagram, E and F, are populated with data. In brief, this finding tells us that:

- With respect to the area labeled E, taking currently available data into account, the rites of Freemasonry, the Bible, and ancient sources are all seen as being related in some fashion to a greater or lesser degree to eighteen of the thirty-one elements of the temple ordinances examined.
- With respect to the areas E and F taken together, I found that the Bible and ancient sources were both related to all thirty-one elements of temple ordinances examined — all eighteen that were related to Freemasonry plus thirteen more that are not. For this reason, I lumped together the results for the Bible and other ancient sources in the later analysis of relative strength discussed below.

In addition, the fact that there is currently no data in area B reveals that, from a broad-brush perspective, there is very little that is purely original in the temple ordinances. No element is entirely unique to Joseph Smith. In other words, every element of the temple ordinances

examined is related in some fashion to the Bible, ancient sources, and/or Freemasonry.



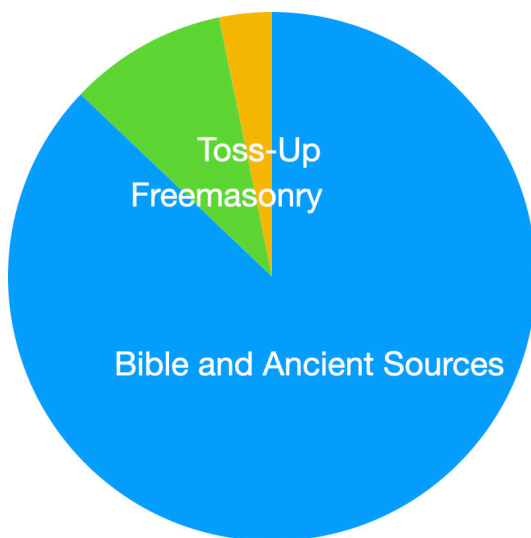
**Figure 4.** Venn diagram of the universe of possible relationships of rites and concepts from the rites of Freemasonry, the Bible, and ancient sources to temple ordinances revealed through Joseph Smith. The sizes of the circles are arbitrary.

### What is the relative strength of the resemblances for each of these potential catalysts?

Whenever the Bible/Ancient Sources and Freemasonry were both related in some fashion to a given element of temple ordinances, it seemed useful to determine which of the two resemblances was stronger in each case. Figure 5 summarizes my conclusion that the temple ordinances, while not fully paralleled in any single source, are more strongly related to biblical and ancient sources than to Freemasonry. In other words, with some important exceptions, the relationship of Masonic rites to temple ordinances is mostly a comparison of contrasts.

Saying it another way, with the exception of the three elements discussed earlier — ritual gestures, ritual language patterns, and the sacred embrace — it is my view that all but one of the remaining Nauvoo

Temple ordinances examined were closer to the Bible and other ancient sources than Freemasonry.<sup>276</sup>



**Figure 5.** Elements of temple ordinances classified according to their strongest relationships.

By way of contrast to the list of elements themselves, the relative strength of a relationship for a given text in the Bible, ancient sources, or Freemasonry to the temple ordinances admittedly required a more subjective judgment. Specific relationships and judgments about their strength is likely to change as new evidence appears in future studies. In the original study, I tried to provide enough data from primary sources that readers can easily examine these relationships for themselves and come to their own conclusions.

The finding that in all but a handful of instances the temple ordinances more closely resembled the Bible and other ancient sources than Freemasonry provides (plausible but always tentative) evidence that the ordinances are largely ancient and biblical in character. This does not rule out additional resemblances with Freemasonry beyond the three that were discussed earlier, but it implies that these additional resemblances are secondary — that is, they are likely due to the fact that the Bible and other ancient sources independently influenced both Freemasonry and, subsequently, modern temple ordinances.

## Conclusions

Besides the many valuable new insights into underappreciated corners of Latter-day Saint history that *Method Infinite* shares with attentive readers, there is an additional, unintended lesson it exemplifies — namely, that the events and ideas of the early Restoration are multidimensional, complex, and overdetermined. As Latter-day Saint historian Richard L. Bushman has written:

When writing about the place of Mormonism in American culture, one can easily make the mistake of thinking that the key to the subject has been discovered. Entire books have been written about Mormonism and republicanism, Mormonism and the magic worldview, Mormonism and hermeticism — and seeker religion, and millenarianism, and restorationism. In the enthusiasm of writing and reading these works, one comes to believe that the central impulse, the main source, and the chief attraction of Mormonism have been found. Individually each study is persuasive and exciting. Each one opens new vistas. Only when we view them together do we realize that while each study tells us something, no single study tells us everything about the subject. ... A commitment to one approach inevitably involves the individual in its limitations.<sup>277</sup>

My hope is that the considerable efforts of the authors to create this pioneering volume on Freemasonry and the Latter-day Saints will prove to be the first in a new flowering of relevant studies that will further illuminate additional dimensions relating to this important and challenging subject. More generally, I am also confident that as future studies embrace the additional rigor of scholarship on comparative research methods, readers will be in a better position to reject simplistic discussions of parallels and to understand and evaluate the roles of the “multitudinous connections” that “can potentially illuminate and enrich” the current subject under study.<sup>278</sup>

Above all, I am grateful for the example of Bushman in pointing out that in conversations with other scholars generally, as with the productive dialogue I’ve had with the authors of *Method Infinite*, we can realize that in

a truly deep friendship, we don’t have to be the same. We celebrate and love our differences. We should be able to point out our differences with others and then make disagreement



not only acceptable but an act of love. Some cultures show their affection by arguing. We don't. We [incorrectly] choose [either] perfect harmony or enmity. We should find a middle ground where we permit our differences to shine.<sup>279</sup>

Cheryl Bruno, Joe Steve Swick III, and Nicholas S. Literski have been commendable examples of how such friendship can be extended despite important differences of opinion. For example, speaking for himself and not necessarily for his co-authors, Literski frankly admits that he attributes novel elements in the Nauvoo Temple ordinances to “human genius,” while graciously acknowledging that others, like myself, will see the process as involving “divine inspiration.” In a personal communication, he said the following: “You come down on divine inspiration, and I respect your position. I come down on human genius and hope you can afford the same spaciousness for my views. In the end, we may well be looking at a combination of the two!”<sup>280</sup> I pray that such examples of mutual respect within the community of scholars will continue to multiply and flourish.

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## Endnotes

- 1 Cheryl L. Bruno, Joe Steve Swick III, and Nicholas S. Literski, *Method Infinite: Freemasonry and the Mormon Restoration* (Salt Lake City: Greg Kofford Books, 2022), ix, xvi.
- 2 Bruno, Swick, and Literski, *Method Infinite*, 447.
- 3 As one example of the development of the temple endowment drama after the death of Joseph Smith, it is known that Brigham Young expanded the narrative to include Peter, James, and John. See Heber C. Kimball Journal kept by William Clayton, entry for December 13, 1845, published in Devery S. Anderson, ed., *The Development of LDS Temple Worship, 1846–2000: A Documentary History* (Salt Lake City: Signature Books, 2011), 21.
- 4 Bruno, Swick, and Literski, *Method Infinite*, 250.
- 5 Jeffrey M. Bradshaw, *Freemasonry and the Origins of Latter-day Saint Temple Ordinances* (Orem, UT, and Salt Lake City: The Interpreter Foundation and Eborn Books, 2022).
- 6 Jeffrey M. Bradshaw, “Freemasonry and the Origins of Modern Temple Ordinances,” *Interpreter: A Journal of Mormon Scripture* 15 (2015): 159–237, <https://journal.interpreterfoundation.org/freemasonry-and-the-origins-of-modern-temple-ordinances/>.
- 7 Some initial ideas relating to this new research were presented in a lecture series in October 2021 that I hope will be published, along with essays by other scholars on Joseph Smith’s Nauvoo teachings, in the next year or so. The Interpreter Foundation, “Jeffrey M. Bradshaw: Freemasonry and the Origins of Modern Temple Ordinances,” video, 1:18:20, October 18, 2021, “Come, Follow Me” virtual fireside presentation, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=H6VxyY2Y7ac>. Jeffrey M. Bradshaw, “Freemasonry and the Origins of Latter-day Saint Temple Ordinances,” in *Joseph Smith: A Life Lived in Crescendo*, ed. Jeffrey M. Bradshaw (Orem, UT, and Tooele, UT: The Interpreter Foundation and Eborn Books, forthcoming).
- 8 Michael W. Homer, “Masonry and Mormonism in Utah, 1847–1984,” *Journal of Mormon History* 18, no. 2 (1992): 57–96; Michael W. Homer, “Similarity of Priesthood in Masonry: The Relationship between Freemasonry and Mormonism,” *Dialogue:*

*A Journal of Mormon Thought* 27, no. 3 (Fall 1994): 1–113, <https://www.jstor.org/stable/45225960>.

- 9 For a more detailed account of these events from a Latter-day Saint historian with a somewhat different perspective, readers should consult the careful and balanced research in Brady G. Winslow, “Irregularities in the Work of the Nauvoo Lodge: Mormonism, Freemasonry, and Conflicting Interests on the Illinois Frontier,” *The John Whitmer Historical Association Journal* 34, no. 2 (Fall/Winter 2014): 58–79, <https://www.jstor.org/stable/43200598>; and Brady G. Winslow, “‘It was by Reason of Being Mormons That We Were Kept at Arms Length’: Mormonism, Freemasonry, and Conflicting Interests on the Illinois Frontier” (master’s thesis, Baylor University, 2014), <https://baylor-ir.tdl.org/handle/2104/9198>.
- 10 In an email, Stephen T. Whitlock remarked, “I’m surprised at this as that is similar to the approach taken in William Preston, *Illustrations of Masonry*, new ed. (London: G. Wilkie, 1781), <https://books.google.com/books?id=cGljAAAACAAJ> and earlier Masonic works. An approach largely discredited by modern Masons who no longer claim Masonry influenced every development in the ancient world. It’s a bit ironic that *Method Infinite* repeats this same general approach although in a microcosm centered around the life of Joseph Smith.” Stephen T. Whitlock, email message to author, October 17, 2022.
- 11 Bruno, Swick, and Literski, *Method Infinite*, 248.
- 12 See, e.g., Glen M. Leonard, *Nauvoo: A Place of Peace, A People of Promise* (Salt Lake City and Provo, UT: Deseret Book and Brigham Young University Press, 2002); Richard Lyman Bushman, *Joseph Smith: Rough Stone Rolling: A Cultural Biography of Mormonism’s Founder* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 2005), 500–25.
- 13 Bruno, Swick, and Literski, *Method Infinite*, 134.
- 14 Ibid., 143. See George Oliver, *The Antiquities of Free-Masonry; Comprising Illustrations of the Five Grand Periods of Masonry from the Creation of the World to the Dedication of King Solomon’s Temple* (London: G. and W. B. Whittaker, 1823), 88–89, [https://books.google.com/books/about/The\\_Antiquities\\_of\\_Free\\_masonry.html?id=KjoiAAAAMAA](https://books.google.com/books/about/The_Antiquities_of_Free_masonry.html?id=KjoiAAAAMAA).
- 15 See, e.g., John L. Brooke, *The Refiner’s Fire: The Making of Mormon Cosmology, 1644–1844* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press,

- 1994), 169; Clyde R. Forsberg, Jr., *Equal Rites: The Book of Mormon, Masonry, Gender, and American Culture* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2004), 109–10.
- 16 See, e.g., William J. Hamblin, Daniel C. Peterson, and George L. Mitton, “Mormon in the Fiery Furnace: Or, Loftes Tryk Goes to Cambridge,” *Review of Books on the Book of Mormon 1989–2011* 6, no. 2 (1994): 53, <https://scholarsarchive.byu.edu/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=1207&context=msr>. Compare William J. Hamblin, Daniel C. Peterson, and George L. Mitton, “Review of *The Refiner’s Fire: The Making of Mormon Cosmology, 1644–1844* by John L. Brooke,” *BYU Studies* 34, no. 4 (1994): 178, <https://byustudies.byu.edu/article/the-refiners-fire-the-making-of-mormon-cosmology-16441844-2/>.
  - 17 See Stephen O. Smoot, “Framing the Book of Abraham: Presumptions and Paradigms,” *Interpreter: A Journal of Latter-day Saint Faith and Scholarship* 47 (2021): 274, <https://journal.interpreterfoundation.org/framing-the-book-of-abraham-presumptions-and-paradigms/>.
  - 18 Bruno, Swick, and Literski, *Method Infinite*, 156.
  - 19 *Ibid.*, 160.
  - 20 Freemasons; Nauvoo Lodge (Illinois), Nauvoo Masonic Lodge minutes, 1841–1842, Church History Library, The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, Salt Lake City, 5, <https://catalog.churchofjesuschrist.org/assets/67a0bf8a-a1d2-4099-a3f7-e8f51b644b2d/0>. The Lodge minutes record that Hyrum Smith had been a member of the Mount Moriah Masonic Lodge.
  - 21 Samuel Morris Brown, *In Heaven as It Is on Earth: Joseph Smith and the Early Mormon Conquest of Death* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012), 174.
  - 22 For example, nineteen months after Joseph Smith Sr.’s call as a missionary in D&C 4, he paid a visit to Eli Bruce, then in jail in Canandaigua for his supposed part in the William Morgan affair. Bruce recorded the visit in a journal entry:
 

*November 5th [1830].* — Not so much pain in my head as yesterday. Had a long talk with the father of *the Smith*, (Joseph Smith,) who, according to the old man’s account, is the particular favorite of Heaven!

To him Heaven has vouchsafed to reveal its mysteries; he is the herald of the latter-day glory. The old man avers that he is commissioned by God to baptize and preach this new doctrine. He says that our Bible is much abridged and deficient; that soon the Divine will is to be made known to all, as written in the *new Bible*, or *Book of Mormon*.

Rob Morris, *The Masonic Martyr: The Biography of Eli Bruce, Sheriff of Niagara County, New York, Who, For His Attachment to the Principles of Masonry, and His Fidelity to His Trust, Was Imprisoned Twenty-Eight Months in the Canandaigua Jail* (Louisville, KY: Morris & Monsarrat, 1861), 266–67, [https://books.google.com/books/about/The\\_Masonic\\_Martyr\\_The\\_Biography\\_of\\_Eli.html?id=DcQ8kgAACAAJ](https://books.google.com/books/about/The_Masonic_Martyr_The_Biography_of_Eli.html?id=DcQ8kgAACAAJ).

- 23 Bruno, Swick, and Literski, *Method Infinite*, 42.
- 24 Ibid.
- 25 Ibid., 86.
- 26 Ibid., 88.
- 27 Ibid., 70–71.
- 28 Ibid., 77.
- 29 According to *The Catholic Encyclopedia*, in Jewish practice, standing was the usual posture of prayer (see, e.g., 1 Samuel 1:26; Nehemiah 9:3–5; Matthew 6:5; Mark 11:25; Luke 18:11, 13), except on special occasions of deep supplication (e.g., 1 Kings 8:54; 2 Chronicles 6:13; Ezra 9:5; Daniel 6:10; Luke 22:41; Mark 1:40, 10:17). Sometime in the early Christian era, “the kneeling posture for prayer speedily became habitual among the faithful” (see, e.g., Acts 7:59, 20:36, 21:5; Ephesians 3:14; Philippians 2:10). The common practice of kneeling prayer among Christians has continued to our day. Frederick Thomas Bergh, “Genuflexion,” in *The Catholic Encyclopedia* (New York: Robert Appleton Company, 1909), <https://www.newadvent.org/cathen/06423a.htm>.
- 30 Bruno, Swick, and Literski, *Method Infinite*, 78.
- 31 Neal E. Lambert and Richard H. Cracroft, “Literary Form and Historical Understanding: Joseph Smith’s First Vision,” *Journal of Mormon History* 7 (1980): 33–42.

- 32 Don Bradley, “Acquiring an All-Seeing Eye: Joseph Smith’s First Vision as Seer Initiation and Ritual Apotheosis” (unpublished manuscript, July 19, 2010), Microsoft Word file.
- 33 For a detailed description of temple themes in the heavenly ascent of Moses 1 and the *Apocalypse of Abraham*, see Jeffrey M. Bradshaw, David J. Larsen, and Stephen T. Whitlock, “Moses 1 and the *Apocalypse of Abraham*: Twin Sons of Different Mothers?” *Interpreter: A Journal of Latter-day Saint Faith and Scholarship* 38 (2020): 179–290, <https://journal.interpreterfoundation.org/moses-1-and-the-apocalypse-of-abraham-twin-sons-of-different-mothers/>.
- 34 Alvin R. Dyer, *The Meaning of Truth*, rev. ed. (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 1970), 12n14, <https://archive.org/details/meaningoftruth00dyer>.
- 35 For example, see Bradshaw, *Freemasonry and Temple Ordinances*, 41; Bradshaw, Larsen, and Whitlock, “Apocalypse of Abraham”; Jeffrey M. Bradshaw, *Enoch and the Gathering of Zion: The Witness of Ancient Texts for Modern Scripture* (Orem, Springville, and Salt Lake City: The Interpreter Foundation, Book of Mormon Central, and Eborn Books, 2021), 242n245, <https://interpreterfoundation.org/books/enoch-and-the-gathering-of-zion/>; M. Catherine Thomas, “The Brother of Jared at the Veil,” in *Temples of the Ancient World: Ritual and Symbolism*, ed. Donald W. Parry (Salt Lake City and Provo, UT: Deseret Book and FARMS, 1994), 388–98.
- 36 Bruno, Swick, and Literski, *Method Infinite*, 146.
- 37 Ibid., 91.
- 38 That is, the five books of Moses, as discovered in the ritual in a “small chest, or box ... pronounced ... to be the *ark of the covenant*.” David Bernard, *Light on Masonry: A Collection of All the Most Important Documents on the Speculative Free Masonry* (Utica, NY: William Williams, 1829), <https://archive.org/details/LightOnMasonry/>, 137.
- 39 Bruno, Swick, and Literski, *Method Infinite*, 91.
- 40 Ibid., 12–14.
- 41 Brooke, *Refiner’s Fire*. For the authors’ affirmation of Brooke’s conclusions, see Bruno, Swick, and Literski, *Method Infinite*, 120.

- 42 John Brooke claimed that “Joseph Smith bore contradictory feelings about Freemasonry: he condemned the spurious tradition, while embracing the pure tradition.” Brooke, *Refiner’s Fire*, 169. “In other words,” as Hamblin, Peterson, and Mitton point out, “any positive links Brooke imagines between Masons and early Mormonism arise because Joseph was copying the ‘pure tradition,’ while his alleged anti-Masonry represents Joseph’s rejection of the ‘spurious tradition.’ Such a theory has the great advantage of being utterly unfalsifiable — everything can be influenced by Masonry, any piece of evidence can be accommodated.” Hamblin, Peterson, and Mitton, “Fiery Furnace,” 53.

Echoing non-Latter-day Saint scholar Stephen H. Webb’s statement that “Brooke’s book should be read with a fair amount of skepticism” (Stephen H. Webb, *Jesus Christ, Eternal God: Heavenly Flesh and the Metaphysics of Matter* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012), 260), other Latter-day Saint and non-Latter-day Saint scholars have come to similar conclusions. See, e.g., Hamblin, Peterson, and Mitton, “Review of *Refiner’s Fire*”; Hamblin, Peterson, and Mitton, “Fiery Furnace”; Philip L. Barlow, “Decoding Mormonism,” *Christian Century* 113, no. 2 (January 1996): 52–55; Richard Bushman, “The Mysteries of Mormonism,” *Journal of the Early Republic* 15, no. 3 (Autumn 1995): 501–508; Jan Shipp, *Sojourner in the Promised Land: Forty Years among the Mormons* (Urbana, IL: University of Illinois Press, 2000), 204–17. None of this is to say that the Book of Mormon does not describe counterfeit priesthood groups (see, e.g., Stephen O. Smoot, “Gadiantonism as a Counterfeit Temple Priesthood,” *Ploni Almoni: A Latter-day Saint Blog*, July 25, 2017, <https://www.plonialmonimormon.com/2017/07/gadiantonism-as-counterfeit-temple.html>), but only that evidence of a direct Masonic connection to these passages remains conjectural.

- 43 Forsberg, *Equal Rites*, 109–10.
- 44 Bruno, Swick, and Literski, *Method Infinite*, 148.
- 45 2 Nephi 3; D&C 2, 13; Joseph Smith — History 1:36–41, etc.
- 46 Bruno, Swick, and Literski, *Method Infinite*, 91.
- 47 Isaiah 29; Ezekiel 37; 2 Nephi 27; Joseph Smith — History 1:63–65.
- 48 The legend of the “Delta” or “triangle of gold” that was found “in the ruins of the ancient temple of Enoch” is also briefly described

in the degree of the Knights of the Ninth Arch, a degree not known to be available in Nauvoo at the time of Joseph Smith (Bernard, *Light on Masonry*, 205).

- 49 Hamblin, Peterson, and Mitton, “Fiery Furnace,” 53. Compare Hamblin, Peterson, and Mitton, “Review of *Refiner’s Fire*,” 178.
- 50 Oliver, *Antiquities of Free-Masonry*, 90–91.
- 51 For a summary of these traditions with sources, see Jeffrey M. Bradshaw, *In God’s Image and Likeness 1: Creation, Fall, and the Story of Adam and Eve* (Salt Lake City: Eborn Books, 2014), 492, <https://archive.org/details/140123IGIL12014ReadingS>.
- 52 Thomas Smith Webb, *The Freemason’s Monitor: Or, Illustrations of Masonry: In Two Parts*, new and improved ed. (Salem, MA: Cushing and Appleton, 1808), 2:285, [https://books.google.com/books/about/The\\_Freemason\\_s\\_Monitor.html?id=Bi8iAAAAAMAAJ](https://books.google.com/books/about/The_Freemason_s_Monitor.html?id=Bi8iAAAAAMAAJ); Oliver, *Antiquities of Free-Masonry*, 88–90. Oliver says that the triangular plate of Enoch was placed upon “a cubical pedestal of white marble.”
- 53 Webb, *Freemason’s Monitor*, 2:284–85. Oliver gives a detailed description of the structure, saying that Enoch:  
  
built a temple in the bowels of the earth, the entrance to which was through nine several porches, each supported by a pair of pillars, and curiously concealed from human observation. The perpendicular depth of this temple was eighty-one feet from the surface. Enoch, Jared, and Methusaleh were the three architects who constructed this subterranean edifice; but the two latter were not acquainted with the secret motives which influenced Enoch in causing this cavern to be dug. The arches were formed in the bowels of a mountain, which was afterwards denominated Calvary in the land of Canaan; and the temple was dedicated to the living God.  
  
Oliver, *Antiquities of Free-Masonry*, 89.
- 54 Webb, *Freemason’s Monitor*, 2:286.
- 55 Lavina Fielding Anderson, ed., *Lucy’s Book: A Critical Edition of Lucy Mack Smith’s Family Memoir* (Salt Lake City: Signature Books, 2001), 378–79, 389.



- 56 In Webster's 1844 dictionary, the definitions of "key" include the sense of "an instrument for shutting or opening a lock" and also "that which serves to explain any thing difficult to be understood." Cynthia Hallen, ed., *Renovated Online Edition of Noah Webster's 1844 American Dictionary of the English Language*, s. v. "key," <https://edl.byu.edu/webster/term/2115049>. The dictionary also notes that the term "cipher is used for a key to unravel [secret] characters," meant to be "understood only by the persons who invent, or agree to use them." Ibid., s. v. "cipher," <https://edl.byu.edu/webster/term/2386553>, emphasis added.
- 57 "Antimasonic Religion," *The Geauga Gazette* 3 (March 15, 1831), <http://www.sidneyrigdon.com/dbroadhu/oh/chrd1831.htm>. Reprinted in "Antimasonic Religion," *The Ohio Star* 2, no. 12 (March 24, 1831), <http://www.sidneyrigdon.com/dbroadhu/OH/misohio.htm#032431>. As an additional example, according to William Van Camp, "Joe [Smith] was a firm believer in anti-Masonry." *Rochester Union Advertiser* 30 (May 27, 1857): 2, as cited in Dan Vogel, ed., *Early Mormon Documents* (Salt Lake City: Signature Books, 1996), 1:22n9. In an 1830 letter, the Prophet warned his brother Hyrum to "beware of the Freemasons ... Therefore beware of the Freemasons." Joseph Smith, Jr., "Letter to the Church in Colesville, 2 December 1830," Documents, Joseph Smith Papers, Church History Library, The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, Salt Lake City, 206–207, <https://www.josephsmithpapers.org/paper-summary/letter-to-the-church-in-colesville-2-december-1830/11>. However, the context hints that Joseph Smith intended here to refer to a particular group of Freemasons, some of whom were named in the letter, rather than to Freemasonry in general.
- 58 Bruno, Swick, and Literski, *Method Infinite*, 120.
- 59 David Whitmer gave the following description of the translation process:
- One character at a time would appear, and under it was the interpretation in English. Brother Joseph would read off the English to Oliver Cowdery, who was his principal scribe, and when it was written down and repeated to Brother Joseph to see if it was correct, then it would disappear, and another character with the interpretation would appear.



David Whitmer, *An Address to All Believers in Christ by a Witness to the Divine Authenticity of the Book of Mormon* (Richmond, MO, 1887), 12, <https://ia601406.us.archive.org/8/items/addresstoallbeli00whit/addresstoallbeli00whit.pdf>.

However, Stephen Ricks points out difficulties in Whitmer's description:

This statement is somewhat problematical from a linguistic point of view. It suggests a simple one-for-one equivalency of words in the original language of the Book of Mormon and in English. This is scarcely likely in two closely related modern languages, much less in an ancient and modern language from two different language families. An examination of any page of an interlinear text (a text with a source language, such as Greek, Latin, or Hebrew, with a translation into a target language such as English below the line) will reveal a multitude of divergences from a word-for-word translation: some words are left untranslated, some are translated with more than one word, and often the order of words in the source language does not parallel (sometimes not even closely) the word order of the target language. A word-for-word rendering, as David Whitmer's statement seems to imply, would have resulted in a syntactic and semantic puree.

Stephen D. Ricks. "Notes and Communications: Translation of the Book of Mormon: Interpreting the Evidence," *Journal of Book of Mormon Studies* 2, no. 2 (1993): 203, <https://scholarsarchive.byu.edu/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=1057&context=jbms>.

- 60 Brant A. Gardner, *The Gift and Power: Translating the Book of Mormon* (Salt Lake City: Greg Kofford Books, 2011), 247, 156. With respect to the Book of Mormon, scholars differ in their understanding about the degree to which the vocabulary and phrasing of Joseph Smith's translation was tightly controlled. However, there is a consensus among most believing scholars that at least some features of the plate text of the Book of Mormon survived translation. See Gardner, *Gift and Power*, 150–52, 197–204. For instance, Gardner considers, among other types of examples, the proper names of the Book of Mormon as specific instances of literal translation. He also finds examples of structural elements (e.g., chiasms and other literary features) in the Book

of Mormon that are neither random nor “part of the common repertoire available to a writer in upstate New York in the 1830s. They represent features of the plate text that have survived the translation process.” Gardner, *Gift and Power*, 204. For summary discussions of Gardner’s detailed analyses provided throughout the book, see Gardner, *Gift and Power*, especially 227–47, 279–83.

- 61 Though the English translation of the Book of Mormon seems to have involved an important visual component, it was not a merely mechanical process of “reading” in the ordinary sense. Brant Gardner has discussed possible explanations for how pre-linguistic inspiration and the mental/physiological processes of using a seer stone might have come together during translation (Gardner, *Gift and Power*, 318–19). Although Gardner’s proposal cannot tell us anything about the process of inspiration itself, it suggests how revelation about the contents of the Nephite record could have been mediated by mental processes that were involved in the choice of specific English words in translation.

Apart from cognitive considerations, one’s fitness to translate by the gift of divine seership is inescapably a religious and moral matter. Whatever help one’s native gifts, cultural milieu, personal experience, educational opportunities, or even divinely prepared “technology” might provide to a translator devoid of scholarly method and critical apparatus, it would be insufficient compensation for the essential prerequisites that enable the Holy Ghost to be a “constant companion” (D&C 121:46) to the translator. As Greg Smith observed, the necessary virtue to access God’s power

is not something that can be granted simply by more [mental or technologically-assisted] processing speed — as if I would be kinder and wiser if I could access a thousand articles in an hour instead of ten. ...We do not become like God through achieving technological mastery, or through any other exercise of power over nature. The challenge is not finding individuals who can master and carry out a scientific or technical program. Instead, the difficulty lies in finding or developing those who will not abuse power when they have it (see D&C 121:39).

- Gregory L. Smith, personal communication to author, July 12, 2016.
- 62 See, e.g., D&C 9:7–9.
- 63 Note that Joseph Smith declined to relate the specifics of the translation process himself even in response to direct questioning in private company from believing friends. For example, in response to a request in 1831 by his brother Hyrum to explain the translation process more fully, “Joseph Smith said that it was not intended to tell the world all the particulars of the coming forth of the Book of Mormon; and ... it was not expedient for him to relate these things.” Minutes, 25–26 October 1831, Documents, Joseph Smith Papers, Church History Library, The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, Salt Lake City, <https://www.josephsmithpapers.org/paper-summary/minutes-25-26-october-1831/4>.
- 64 Within the Book of Mormon, “translate” and “translation” are mentioned in Mosiah 8:11, 12 (twice), 13; Alma 9:21; and Ether 5:1. By way of contrast, we find the following terms used to describe the process of rendering a text in an unknown language into a familiar tongue: “interpret” (Omni 1:20; Mosiah 8:6, 11; Mosiah 21:28; and Ether 3:22), “interpretation” (Introduction (twice); Mormon 9:34; and Ether 2:3, 4:5, 15:8), “interpreters” (Mosiah 8:13, 19; Mosiah 28:20; Alma 37:21, 24; and Ether 4:5). In addition, there is a reference to the “interpretation” of the symbolism of the tree of life (1 Nephi 11:11) and to the gift of “interpretation” of tongues (Mormon 9:7).
- 65 Kathleen Flake, “Translating Time: The Nature and Function of Joseph Smith’s Narrative Canon,” *Journal of Religion* 87, no. 4 (October 2007): 507–508, emphasis added. Cf. Grant Underwood, “Revelation, Text, and Revision: Insight from the Book of Commandments and Revelations,” *BYU Studies Quarterly* 48, no. 3 (2009): 76–81, 83–84.
- 66 See, for example the following:
- *Secret combinations* (see Index, Latter-day Saint Edition of the Book of Mormon, Doctrine and Covenants, and Pearl of Great Price, 2013). Well-researched arguments against the idea of Masonic influences in the Book of Mormon based on the term “secret combinations” can be found in, for example, Nathan B. Oman, “Secret

Combinations: A Legal Analysis,” *FARMS Review* 16, no. 1 (2004): 49–73; Gregory L. Smith, “Cracking the Book of Mormon’s ‘Secret Combinations,’” *Interpreter: A Journal of Mormon Scripture* 13 (2014): 63–109, <https://journal.interpreterfoundation.org/cracking-the-book-of-mormons-secret-combinations/>. For a more recent summary of research on the topic, see Daniel C. Peterson. “A Great Leap Backward: Where Matters Stand Now Regarding the Book of Mormon’s ‘Secret Combinations,’” 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 (Orem, UT: The Interpreter Foundation, 2020), 99–114.

- “Flaxen cord” (2 Nephi 26:22) and “lamb-skin” aprons (3 Nephi 4:7). See, for example, Matthew B. Brown, “Girded about with a Lambskin,” *Journal of Book of Mormon Studies* 6, no. 2 (1997): 124–51; Paul Mouritsen, “Secret Combinations and Flaxen Cords: Anti-Masonic Rhetoric and the Book of Mormon,” *Journal of Book of Mormon Studies* 12, no. 1 (2003): 64–77; Gregory L. Smith, “Gossamer Thin: 2 Nephi’s ‘Flaxen Cord’ and the Anti-Masonic Thesis,” *Interpreter: A Journal of Latter-day Saint Faith and Scholarship* 30 (2018): 331–70, <https://journal.interpreterfoundation.org/gossamer-thin-2-nephis-flaxen-cord-and-the-anti-masonic-thesis/>.

- 67 See Jeffrey M. Bradshaw and David J. Larsen, *In God’s Image and Likeness 2: Enoch, Noah, and the Tower of Babel* (Salt Lake City: The Interpreter Foundation and Eborn Books, 2014), 213, 218, 236, 240–41, 245, <https://archive.org/details/131203ImageAndLikeness2ReadingS>.
- 68 See Bradshaw, *Freemasonry and Temple Ordinances*, 190–210.
- 69 See, e.g., Kevin L. Barney, “On the Etymology of Deseret,” *BCC Papers* 1, no. 2 (November 2006), <https://archive.bookofmormoncentral.org/content/etymology-deseret>; “How Can Honest Labor and Self-Reliance Bring Lasting Happiness?” KnowWhys, Book of Mormon Central, September 19, 2017, [https://archive.bookofmormoncentral.org/sites/default/files/archive-files/pdf/book-mormon-central-staff/2017-09-21/knowhy\\_365.pdf](https://archive.bookofmormoncentral.org/sites/default/files/archive-files/pdf/book-mormon-central-staff/2017-09-21/knowhy_365.pdf); “Where Does the Word ‘Deseret’ Come From? (Ether 2:3),”

- KnoWhys, <https://archive.bookofmormoncentral.org/content/knowhy-236-where-does-word-“deseret”-come-ether-23>.
- 70 For more on the triple title referring to the offices of “prophet, priest, and king” anciently and in modern scripture and temple-related contexts, see Bradshaw, *Freemasonry and Temple Ordinances*, 269–82.
  - 71 See, in addition to the examples of studies in the notes listed immediately above, the many additional articles and archive entries at <https://bookofmormoncentral.org>, <https://fairlatterdaysaints.org>, <https://byustudies.byu.edu>, and <https://interpreterfoundation.org> that bear on these and many other subjects.
  - 72 Bruno, Swick, and Literski, *Method Infinite*, 132.
  - 73 See, e.g., Bradshaw, *Image and Likeness 1*, 95–96.
  - 74 See, e.g., *ibid.*, 94–95n1f; Jeffrey M. Bradshaw, “Frequently Asked Questions about Science and Genesis,” in *Science and Mormonism 1: Cosmos, Earth, and Man*, ed. David H. Bailey et al. (Orem, UT, and Salt Lake City: The Interpreter Foundation and Eborn Books, 2016), 202, <https://archive.org/details/CosmosEarthAndManscienceAndMormonism1>.
  - 75 See, for example, sources cited in Bradshaw, *Image and Likeness 1*, 94–96; Jeffrey M. Bradshaw, *The First Days and the Last Days: A Verse-By-Verse Commentary on the Book of Moses and JS — Matthew in Light of the Temple* (Orem, UT, and Salt Lake City: The Interpreter Foundation and Eborn Books, 2021), 47. On the creation as organization, see in particular the work of non-Latter-day Saint scholar John Walton, *The Lost World of Genesis One: Ancient Cosmology and the Origins Debate* (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 2009), 72–73, 75; John H. Walton, *Genesis 1 as Ancient Cosmology* (Winona Lake, IN: Eisenbrauns, 2011), 116–17, 178–84.
  - 76 Bruno, Swick, and Literski, *Method Infinite*, 133n43.
  - 77 David Calabro, “‘This Thing is a Similitude’: A Typological Approach to Moses 5:4–15 and Ancient Apocryphal Literature,” in *Tracing Ancient Threads in the Book of Moses: Inspired Origins, Temple Contexts, and Literary Qualities*, ed. Jeffrey M. Bradshaw, David Rolph Seely, John W. Welch, and Scott A. Gordon, (Orem, UT, and Salt Lake City: Interpreter Foundation and Eborn

- Books, 2021), 1:469–504, <https://interpreterfoundation.org/conferences/2020-book-of-moses-conference/papers/calabro/>.
- 78 See, e.g., Bradshaw, *Enoch*, 51–53.
- 79 Bruno, Swick, and Literski, *Method Infinite*, 136.
- 80 Ibid., 134.
- 81 Hugh W. Nibley, *Ancient Documents and the Pearl of Great Price* (Provo, UT: FARMS, 1994), 12.
- 82 D. Michael Quinn, *Early Mormonism and the Magic World View* (Salt Lake City: Signature Books, 1987), 209.
- 83 Bruno, Swick, and Literski, *Method Infinite*, 133–34.
- 84 See, e.g., Hugh W. Nibley, *Teachings of the Pearl of Great Price* (Provo, UT: FARMS, 2004), 242; Matthew L. Bowen, “Getting Cain and Gain,” *Interpreter: A Journal of Mormon Scripture* 15 (2015): 115–41, <https://journal.interpreterfoundation.org/getting-cain-and-gain/>.
- 85 Stephen O. Smoot, *The Pearl of Great Price: A Study Edition for Latter-day Saints* (Springville, UT: Book of Mormon Central, 2022), 27n5, 26–31, <https://biblecentral.info/library/book/pearl-of-great-price-study-edition/>.
- 86 Jeffrey M. Bradshaw, Matthew L. Bowen, and Ryan Dahle, “Where Did the Names ‘Mahaway’ and ‘Mahujah’ Come From?: A Response to Colby Townsend’s ‘Returning to the Sources,’ Part 2 of 2,” *Interpreter: A Journal of Latter-day Saint Faith and Scholarship* 40 (2020): 238n140, <https://journal.interpreterfoundation.org/where-did-the-names-mahaway-and-mahujah-come-from-a-response-to-colby-townsend-s-returning-to-the-sources-part-2-of-2/>. Matt Bowen notes the intriguing paronomastic connection with MHY/MHH (“wipe out,” “annihilate” — i.e., “blot out”). ... [This is especially interesting] since this name occurs in the degenerate line of Cain before the Flood (cf. the use of this verb in Genesis 6:7 and 7:4). I’m even more intrigued by a possible connection between this root and the name-title “Mahan” in “Master Mahan,” which could easily be MHN (with N as an appellative), which might suggest the idea of “destroyer” or “annihilator.”
- 87 Bruno, Swick, and Literski, *Method Infinite*, 136.

- 88 Ibid., 138.
- 89 Bradshaw, *Freemasonry and Temple Ordinances*, 211–13, citing Oliver, *Antiquities of Free-Masonry*, 88–92.
- 90 See Bradshaw, *Enoch*; Jeffrey M. Bradshaw, “Moses 6–7 and the Book of Giants: Remarkable Witnesses of Enoch’s Ministry,” in *Tracing Ancient Threads in the Book of Moses: Inspired Origins, Temple Contexts, and Literary Qualities*, ed. Jeffrey M. Bradshaw, David Rolph Seely, John W. Welch, and Scott A. Gordon (Orem, UT, and Salt Lake City: Interpreter Foundation and Eborn Books, 2021), 2:1041–256, <http://templethemes.net/publications/210911-Bradshaw-jmb-s.pdf>. For a summary of the findings, see Bradshaw, *Freemasonry and Temple Ordinances*, 211–15.
- 91 Bruno, Swick, and Literski, *Method Infinite*, 139.
- 92 Ibid.
- 93 Although “keys” is used in the Doctrine and Covenants in some cases that could be understood as referring to means of translation, decipherment, or special access (e.g., D&C 6:28; 27:5; 35:18, 25; 64:5; 84:19; 124:95; 128:11, 14; 129:9; 130:11), the book does not specifically cite or discuss any of these.
- 94 D&C 68:17; 107:15; 124:128.
- 95 *An American Dictionary of the English Language*, s.v. “key,” <https://webstersdictionary1828.com/Dictionary/key>.
- 96 Bruno, Swick, and Literski, *Method Infinite*, 141.
- 97 Ibid., 142.
- 98 Ibid.
- 99 Ibid., 143. See Oliver, *Antiquities of Free-Masonry*, 88–89.
- 100 Oliver, *Antiquities of Free-Masonry*, 88.
- 101 Discourse, between circa 26 June and circa 4 August 1839–A, as Reported by Willard Richards, 65, Discourses, Joseph Smith Papers, Church History Library, The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, Salt Lake City, <https://www.josephsmithpapers.org/paper-summary/discourse-between-circa-26-june-and-circa-4-august-1839-a-as-reported-by-willard-richards/3>.
- 102 Oliver, *Antiquities of Free-Masonry*, 89.
- 103 Discourse Reported by Willard Richards, 65.



- 104 See, e.g., Bradshaw, *Image and Likeness 1*, 458. For more on the background of this event and the revelations surrounding it, see 622–26.
- 105 Joseph Smith Jr., *Teachings of the Prophet Joseph Smith* (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 1969), 351–52, <https://scriptures.byu.edu/tpjs/STPJS.pdf>. Compare Andrew F. Ehat and Lyndon W. Cook, eds., *The Words of Joseph Smith: The Contemporary Accounts of the Nauvoo Discourses of the Prophet Joseph* (Provo, UT: Brigham Young University Religious Studies Center, 1980), 341, 345, 351, 359, 361, <https://rsc.byu.edu/book/words-joseph-smith>. See also J. Smith Jr., *Teachings*, 158.
- 106 See, e.g., D&C 131:7, 130:22.
- 107 Ron Hellings, “Joseph Smith and Modern Cosmology,” in *Science and Mormonism 1: Cosmos, Earth, and Man*, ed. David H. Bailey et al. (Orem, UT, and Salt Lake City: The Interpreter Foundation and Eborn Books, 2016), 274.
- 108 Ibid., 289–90. Importantly, Hellings describes a few caveats to this correspondence.
- 109 E.g., Romans 12:10, 1 Thessalonians 4:9; Hebrews 13:1; 1 Peter 1:22, 3:8; 1 John 2:10, 3:10–21.
- 110 Don Bradley, “‘The Grand Fundamental Principles of Mormonism’: Joseph Smith’s Unfinished Reformation,” *Sunstone* (April 2006): 32–41, <https://sunstone.org/wp-content/uploads/sbi/articles/141-32-41.pdf>.
- 111 Bruno, Swick, and Literski, *Method Infinite*, 145.
- 112 Ibid., 148.
- 113 For up-to-date, highly readable summaries of current evidence relating to how the Book of Abraham was translated, see Stephen O. Smoot et al., *A Guide to the Book of Abraham: Insights and Current Research* (Provo, UT: BYU Studies, forthcoming); Kerry Muhlestein, *Let’s Talk about the Book of Abraham* (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 2022); John Gee, *An Introduction to the Book of Abraham* (Provo, UT: Religious Studies Center, Brigham Young University, 2017), 13–22.
- 114 Gee, *Introduction*, 84–86.
- 115 John A. Tvedtnes, “The Use of Mnemonic Devices in Oral Traditions, as Exemplified by the Book of Abraham and the Hor



- Sensen Papyrus,” *Newsletter and Proceedings of the S.E.H.A.* 120 (April 1970): 2–10, <http://ancientamerica.org/library/media/HTML/hay1gflq/THE%20USE%20OF%20MNEMONIC%20DEVICES%20IN%20ORAL%20TRADITIONS.htm?n=0>.
- 116 Terryl Givens and Brian M. Hauglid, *The Pearl of Greatest Price: Mormonism’s Most Controversial Scripture* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2019), 188–94. As Stephen O. Smoot has pointed out, Givens’ account of the catalyst theory should not be understood as a “post-modernist [approach] to understanding Joseph Smith’s conception of translation which attempt[s] to totally decouple the Prophet’s texts from ‘an underlying ancient source’” (Smoot, “Framing the Book of Abraham,” 290). I agree with Smoot that “Givens [is] consistently thought-provoking, informed, and insightful, and recommend him as an admirable exponent of the catalyst theory for the production of the Book of Abraham” and also recommend John S. Thompson’s “thoughtful engagement with Givens’ articulation of the catalyst theory” (Smoot, “Framing the Book of Abraham,” 323n102). See John S. Thompson, “‘We May Not Understand Our Words’: The Book of Abraham and the Concept of Translation in *The Pearl of Greatest Price*,” *Interpreter: A Journal of Latter-day Saint Faith and Scripture* 41 (2020): 1–48, <https://journal.interpreterfoundation.org/we-may-not-understand-our-words-the-book-of-abraham-and-the-concept-of-translation-in-the-pearl-of-greatest-price/>.
- 117 Bruno, Swick, and Literski, *Method Infinite*, 149.
- 118 For an accessible summary of evidence supporting the Book of Abraham as a record that draws on threads from the ancient world, see the forthcoming Smoot et al., *Guide to the Book of Abraham*.
- 119 Bruno, Swick, and Literski, *Method Infinite*, 170.
- 120 Ibid., 149.
- 121 Ibid., 121.
- 122 Avram R. Shannon, “The Bible Before and After: Interpretation and Translation in Antiquity and the Book of Moses,” in *Tracing Ancient Threads in the Book of Moses: Inspired Origins, Temple Contexts, and Literary Qualities*, ed. Jeffrey M. Bradshaw, David Rolph Seely, John W. Welch, and Scott A. Gordon, 1:257–92. (Orem, UT, and Salt Lake City: Interpreter Foundation and Eborn Books, 2021).

- 123 Bruno, Swick, and Literski, *Method Infinite*, 150.
- 124 Ibid., emphasis added.
- 125 Ibid., 152.
- 126 See discussions in Bradshaw, *Image and Likeness* 1, 543; Jonathan A. Stapley, “Tripartite Existentialism,” *By Common Consent* (blog), April 15, 2009, <https://bycommonconsent.com/2009/04/15/tripartite-existentialism/>.
- 127 *American Dictionary of the English Language*, s. v. “intelligence,” <https://webstersdictionary1828.com/Dictionary/intelligence>. See also the discussion in Brigham Henry Roberts, *The Truth, the Way, the Life: An Elementary Treatise on Theology*, ed. John W. Welch (Provo, UT: BYU Studies, 1994), 77–84.
- 128 Stephen O. Smoot, “Council, Chaos, and Creation in the Book of Abraham,” *Journal of Book of Mormon Studies* 22, no. 2 (2013): 28–39.
- 129 David E. Bokovoy, “‘Ye Really Are Gods’: A Response to Michael Heiser Concerning the LDS Use of Psalm 82 and the Gospel of John,” *Review of Books on the Book of Mormon* 19, no. 1 (2007): 267–313, <https://scholarsarchive.byu.edu/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=1702&context=msr>.
- 130 Givens and Hauglid, *Pearl of Greatest Price*, 125–28.
- 131 Smoot et al., *Guide to the Book of Abraham*; Bradshaw, *Image and Likeness* 1, 93–94, 111–12, 220–23, 244, 302–303, 514–18.
- 132 See the citation of Psalm 82:1 in Bruno, Swick, and Literski, *Method Infinite*, 153. See also Bradshaw, *Image and Likeness* 1, 93–94, 111–12.
- 133 Bruno, Swick, and Literski, *Method Infinite*, 154.
- 134 John Gee, “Eyewitness, Hearsay, and Physical Evidence of the Joseph Smith Papyri,” in *The Disciple as Witness: Essays on Latter-day Saint History and Doctrine in Honor of Richard Lloyd Anderson*, ed. Stephen D. Ricks, Donald W. Parry, and Andrew H. Hedges, 1:175–217 (Provo, UT: FARMS, 2000), <https://archive.bookofmormoncentral.org/content/eyewitness-hearsay-and-physical-evidence-joseph-smith-papyri>. See also Gee, *Introduction*, 14.

- 135 Bruno, Swick, and Literski, *Method Infinite*, 160n41. See Klaus Baer, “The Breathing Permit of Hôr: A Translation of the Apparent Source of the Book of Abraham,” *Dialogue: A Journal of Mormon Thought* 3, no. 3 (Autumn 1968): 109–34, <https://www.jstor.org/stable/pdf/45224026.pdf>.
- 136 Michael D. Rhodes, *The Hor Book of Breathings: A Translation and Commentary* (Provo, UT: FARMS and Brigham Young University, 2002); Michael D. Rhodes, *Books of the Dead Belonging to Tshemmin and Neferirnub: A Translation and Commentary* (Provo, UT: Neal A. Maxwell Institute, Brigham Young University, 2010); Robert K. Ritner, *The Joseph Smith Egyptian Papyri: A Complete Edition* (Salt Lake City: Signature Books, 2013).
- 137 Bruno, Swick, and Literski, *Method Infinite*, 154, emphasis added.
- 138 George Oliver, *Signs and Symbols Illustrated and Explained in a Course of Twelve Lectures on Freemasonry* (London: Sherwood, Gilbert, and Piper, 1837), 118, <https://archive.org/details/george-oliver-signs-and-symbols-illustrated-and-explained-freemasonry/>. Cited in part in Bruno, Swick, and Literski, *Method Infinite*, 155–56.
- 139 Bruno, Swick, and Literski, *Method Infinite*, 156.
- 140 See John A. Tvedtnes, Brian M. Hauglid, and John Gee, eds., *Traditions about the Early Life of Abraham* (Provo, UT: FARMS, 2001). Index entries to relevant stories of Abraham and sacrifice can be found on pages 539–43.
- 141 David Calabro, “Gestures of Praise: Lifting and Spreading the Hands in Biblical Prayer,” in *Ascending the Mountain of the Lord: Temple, Praise, and Worship in the Old Testament*, ed. David Rolph Seely, Jeffrey R. Chadwick, and Matthew J. Grey, (Provo, UT, and Salt Lake City: Religious Studies Center, Brigham Young University and Deseret Book, 2013), 105–21, <https://rsc.byu.edu/ascending-mountain-lord/context-old-testament-temple-worship-early-ancient-egyptian-rites>.
- 142 Bruno, Swick, and Literski, *Method Infinite*, 156.
- 143 Concerning Abraham, Oliver writes that “his knowledge of astronomy enabled him to take a correct survey of the celestial system” and that he was “said by Josephus to have taught the Egyptians astronomy and arithmetic, of which sciences they were utterly ignorant before his time.” Oliver, *Antiquities of Free-*

- Masonry*, 155, 81. Compare Flavius Josephus, “The Antiquities of the Jews,” in *The Genuine Works of Flavius Josephus, the Jewish Historian* [ . . . ], trans. William Whiston (London: W. Bowyer, 1737; repr., Grand Rapids, MI: Kregel Publications, 1980), 33.
- 144 See Lincoln H. Blumell, “Palmyra and Jerusalem: Joseph Smith’s Scriptural Texts and the Writings of Flavius Josephus,” in *Approaching Antiquity: Joseph Smith and the Ancient World*, ed. Lincoln H. Blumell, Matthew J. Grey, and Andrew H. Hedges (Provo, UT, and Salt Lake City: Religious Studies Center, Brigham Young University, and Deseret Book, 2015), 356–406, [https://rsc.byu.edu/sites/default/files/pub\\_content/pdf/Blumell.Palmyra%26Jerusalem.pdf](https://rsc.byu.edu/sites/default/files/pub_content/pdf/Blumell.Palmyra%26Jerusalem.pdf); Dan Vogel, *Book of Abraham Apologetics: A Review and Critique* (Salt Lake City: Signature Books, 2021), 121.
- 145 Bruno, Swick, and Literski, *Method Infinite*, 161.
- 146 Ibid., 156.
- 147 See Tamás Mekis, *The Hypocephalus: An Ancient Egyptian Funerary Amulet* (Oxford: Archaeopress, 2020), 50–51, especially 51n316, <https://dokumen.pub/qdownload/the-hypocephalus-an-ancient-egyptian-funerary-amulet-9781789693331.html>.
- 148 Smoot et al., *Guide to the Book of Abraham* note:  
 Figure 7 in Facsimile 2 was either originally drawn or copied somewhat crudely (without access to the original hypocephalus it is impossible to tell), and so it is not entirely clear if the seated figure is ithyphallic or if he has one arm at his side with the other arm clearly raised in the air. Although Egyptologists have tended to interpret Figure 7 in Facsimile 2 as ithyphallic — and that seems to be how it is depicted — it should be kept in mind, as noted above, that Min is not always depicted as such in hypocephali, so he need not necessarily be viewed as ithyphallic in Facsimile 2.
- 149 Michael D. Rhodes, “The Joseph Smith Hypocephalus . . . Seventeen Years Later,” preliminary report (Provo, UT: Foundation for Ancient Research and Mormon Studies, 1994), 11, [https://archive.interpreterfoundation.org/farms/pdf/preliminary\\_reports/Rhodes-Michael-D-The-Joseph-Smith-Hypocephalus-Seventeen-Years-Later.pdf](https://archive.interpreterfoundation.org/farms/pdf/preliminary_reports/Rhodes-Michael-D-The-Joseph-Smith-Hypocephalus-Seventeen-Years-Later.pdf). For a more complete description of the figure, see Smoot et al., *Guide to the Book of Abraham*.

- 150 Rhodes, “Joseph Smith Hypocephalus,” 12. Also, “The Greek writer Plutarch explained that the Wedjat-eye of Osiris represented pro/noia ‘divine providence’ (literally ‘foreknowledge’), the divine wisdom by which God oversees and cares for all of his creations. It is not unreasonable to see in this ‘the grand key words of the priesthood’ (‘The glory of God is intelligence,’ Doctrine and Covenants 93:36).” Ibid., 9.
- 151 Bruno, Swick, and Literski, *Method Infinite*, 158.
- 152 See, e.g., Arturo de Hoyos, *The Scottish Rite Ritual Monitor and Guide*, corrected ed. (Washington, DC: The Supreme Council, 33rd Degree, Southern Jurisdiction, 2008), 711–17.
- 153 The first Scottish Rite lodges in Illinois did not appear until the 1850s, after the Saints had already left Nauvoo, though the book states that an early version of the degree was given in the United States by 1801 (Bruno, Swick, and Literski, *Method Infinite*, 158n36). However, *The Scottish Rite Ritual Monitor and Guide* states that the 31st degree was not introduced until after 1804. De Hoyos, *Scottish Rite Ritual Monitor*, 80.
- 154 See Quinten Z. Barney, “The Neglected Facsimile: An Examination and Comparative Study of Facsimile No. 3 of the Book of Abraham,” (masters thesis, Brigham Young University, 2019), and the summary in Smoot et al., *Guide to the Book of Abraham*.
- 155 Bruno, Swick, and Literski, *Method Infinite*, 159.
- 156 Ibid., 161. See also 157n45.
- 157 Bruno, Swick, and Literski, *Method Infinite*, 160.
- 158 The authors regrettably fail to cite any scholars besides Dan Vogel on this disputed subject (Vogel, *Book of Abraham Apologetics*, xvii, 93, 243–50). For a valuable critique of the shortcomings of Vogel’s work, see Smoot, “Framing the Book of Abraham.”
- 159 See Smoot, “Framing the Book of Abraham,” 274.
- 160 Bruno, Swick, and Literski, *Method Infinite*, 173.
- 161 Ibid., 174.
- 162 Ibid., 179.
- 163 For more on this topic, see Bradshaw, *Image and Likeness 1*, 561–63.

- 164 Elwin C. Robison, *The First Mormon Temple: Design, Construction, and Historic Context of the Kirtland Temple* (Provo, UT: Brigham Young University Press, 1997), 8, 24n3.
- 165 Gerrit J. Dirkmaat et al., eds., *Documents, Volume 3: February 1833–March 1834, The Joseph Smith Papers* (Salt Lake City: The Church Historian’s Press, 2014), 131–46; Joseph Smith Jr., *History of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints* (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 1902), 1:359–62, <https://archive.org/details/HistoryOfTheChurchhcvolumes1-7original1902editionpdf/mode/2up>.
- 166 Matthew B. Brown, *Exploring the Connection Between Mormons and Masons* (American Fork, UT: Covenant Communications, 2009), 143. See, e.g., Robison, *First Mormon Temple*, 60, 63, 64, 71, 75, 76, 77.
- 167 Bruno, Swick, and Literski, *Method Infinite*, 180–81.
- 168 The book incorrectly describes the US Capitol cornerstone as being in the “southwest corner” (Bruno, Swick, and Literski, *Method Infinite*, 181).
- 169 S. Brent Morris, *The Northeast Corner*, (Cockeysville, MD: Maryland Masonic Research Society, 1993), 23, <http://md-mrs.com/library/Northeast%20Corner.pdf>.
- 170 See, e.g., David Bernard’s 1829 exposé where he records the answer of the Entered Apprentice that “The first stone, in every masonic edifice, is, or ought to be, placed at the northeast corner; that being the place where an Entered Apprentice Mason receives his first instructions to build his future masonic edifice upon.” Bernard, *Light on Masonry*, 38; Arturo de Hoyos, *Light on Masonry: The History and Rituals of America’s Most Important Masonic Exposé* (Washington, DC: Scottish Rite Research Society, 2008), 258. This almost invariable Masonic tradition to place the cornerstone in the northeast is noted by the authors (Bruno, Swick, and Literski, *Method Infinite*, 180).
- 171 Bruno, Swick, and Literski, *Method Infinite*, 181.
- 172 Brown, *Exploring the Connection*, 141.
- 173 Orson Pratt, “The Latter-Day Work — Obeying the Commandments,” *Journal of Discourses* 13: 354–63 (Liverpool and London: Horace S. Eldredge and Latter-day Saints’

- Book Depot, 1853–1886), [https://en.wikisource.org/wiki/Journal\\_of\\_Discourses/Volume\\_13/The\\_Latter-day\\_Work\\_etc](https://en.wikisource.org/wiki/Journal_of_Discourses/Volume_13/The_Latter-day_Work_etc).
- 174 Bruno, Swick, and Literski, *Method Infinite*, 182.
- 175 Ibid., 183.
- 176 Ibid., 182.
- 177 Ibid.
- 178 Wikipedia, s.v. “Acronym,” last modified December 9, 2022, 2:31, <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Acronym>.
- 179 See, e.g., Edgar Allan Poe, “How to Write a Blackwood Article,” in *Prose Tales of Edgar Allan Poe* (New York City: Thomas Y. Crowell, 1845), 1:271, <https://archive.org/details/CAugusteDupin/Complete%20Tales%20-%20Selected%20Poems%20%26%20Essays/page/n1/mode/2up>.
- 180 Brown, *Exploring the Connection*, 143–44.
- 181 See, for example, D&C 88:128ff.
- 182 Bruno, Swick, and Literski, *Method Infinite*, 185–86.
- 183 For a survey of this subject, see, for example, Stephen D. Ricks, “Prayer with Uplifted Hands,” in *The Temple: Past, Present, and Future, Proceedings of the Fifth Interpreter Matthew B. Brown Memorial Conference, “The Temple on Mount Zion,” 7 November 2020*, ed. Stephen D. Ricks and Jeffrey M. Bradshaw (Orem, UT, and Salt Lake City: The Interpreter Foundation and Eborn Books, 2021), 197–214.
- 184 Solomon Caesar Malan, ed., *The Book of Adam and Eve: Also Called The Conflict of Adam and Eve with Satan: A Book of the Early Eastern Church, Translated from the Ethiopic, with Notes from the Kufale, Talmud, Midrashim, and Other Eastern Works* (London: Williams and Norgate, 1882) Reprint, (San Diego, CA: The Book Tree, 2005), 1:59. See also Moses 7:41; Hugh W. Nibley, “The Early Christian Prayer Circle,” in *Mormonism and Early Christianity*, ed. Todd M. Compton and Stephen D. Ricks (Salt Lake City and Provo, UT: Deseret Book and FARMS, 1987), 56–60; John A. Tvedtnes, “Temple Prayer in Ancient Times,” in *The Temple in Time and Eternity*, ed. Donald W. Parry and Stephen D. Ricks (Provo, UT: The Foundation for Ancient Research and Mormon Studies, 1999), 81–88; Marcus von Wellnitz, “The Catholic Liturgy and the Mormon Temple,” *BYU Studies* 21, no. 1 (1979): 31.



- 185 Hugh W. Nibley, “Temples Everywhere,” *Insights: The Newsletter of the Foundation for Ancient Research and Mormon Studies (FARMS) at Brigham Young University* 25, no. 1 (2005): 10–16, <https://scholarsarchive.byu.edu/insights/vol25/iss1/3/>.

- 186 Commenting on the *orans* gesture, Emminghaus writes:

From the point of view of religious history, the lifting of the hands... is an expressive gesture of prayer to the “gods above”... General anthropology has... shown us that among all peoples, the offering and showing of the open palms, which therefore cannot hold weapons or anything dangerous, is a sign of peaceful intent... Thus open hands uplifted are a universal gesture of peace, confidence, and petition; in contrast, a clenched fist means threat and challenge to battle. In the Old Testament, lifting the hands to God (Exodus 9:29, 33; Psalm 28:2, 63:5, 88:10), or toward the Temple (1 Kings 8:38) was a universal custom. This Jewish gesture of prayer was apparently adopted by Christians for private as well as communal prayer. Tertullian refers to it... The Jews, because of their feelings of guilt, do not dare to lift their hands to Christ. “But we not only lift them, but even extend them, imitating the Lord’s passion, as we also confess Christ in prayer.” The oldest depiction of the crucifixion of Christ (still very muted, because otherwise so scandalous to Romans), on the wooden portals of Santa Sabina on the Aventine in Rome (6th c.) shows the crucified Lord with slightly bent arms and open, nailed hands, but without an express depiction of the cross — almost as if he were standing in front of the framework of a house. This is precisely the form of the *orans* posture as Tertullian pictures it: In the Christians who are praying in this way, the Father also sees the dying son on the cross. Naturally, this interpretation of the *orans* posture is secondary and allegorizing, but it is still interesting and revealing.

Johannes H. Emminghaus, *The Eucharist: Essence, Form, Celebration*, trans. Linda M. Maloney, rev. ed. (Collegeville, MN: Liturgical Press, 1997), 133. See Richard H. Wilkinson, *Reading Egyptian Art: A Hieroglyphic Guide to Ancient Egyptian Painting and Sculpture* (London: Thames and Hudson, 2006), 28–29, for a discussion of the lifting of hands in Egyptian worship.



- 187 Bruno, Swick, and Literski, *Method Infinite*, 188, citing Webb, *Freemason's Monitor*, 1:178–79.
- 188 Bruno, Swick, and Literski, *Method Infinite*, 190.
- 189 Ibid., 86.
- 190 Ibid., 193.
- 191 Ibid. See *The Book of the Scarlet Line: Heroines of Jericho* (Richmond, VA: Macoy Publishing and Masonic Supply, 1976), 101. Compare J. B. Green, *Green's Manual of the Court of the Heroines of Jericho*, third ed. (Jacksonville, FL: J. B. Green, 1919), 104, [https://www.google.com/books/edition/Green\\_s\\_Manual\\_of\\_the\\_Court\\_of\\_Heroines/Qj44AQAAMAAJ?hl=en](https://www.google.com/books/edition/Green_s_Manual_of_the_Court_of_Heroines/Qj44AQAAMAAJ?hl=en); Moses Dickson, *Landmarks and Ceremonies of Courts of Heroines of Jericho* (Cairo, IL: E. A. Burnett, 1884), 44, 48, <https://archive.org/details/landmarksceremon00dick>.
- 192 See, e.g., Leviticus 23:39–43.
- 193 See, e.g., Psalm 118, including verse 25 where short prayers of Hosanna are described. For more on this and related subjects, see John H. Eaton, *The Psalms: A Historical and Spiritual Commentary with an Introduction and New Translation* (London: T&T Clark, 2003), 403–406; Jeffrey M. Bradshaw, *Temple Themes in the Book of Moses*, 2014 update ed. (Salt Lake City: Eborn Books, 2014), 71–76, <https://archive.org/download/150904TempleThemesInTheBookOfMoses2014UpdatedEditionSReading>.
- 194 Bruno, Swick, and Literski, *Method Infinite*, 194–95.
- 195 Ibid., 327–28.
- 196 Ibid., 325–27.
- 197 Regarding the relevant use of the compass in Entered Apprentice degree, see William Morgan, *Illustrations of Masonry by One of the Fraternity Who Has Devoted Thirty Years to the Subject* (Batavia, NY: Printed for the Author, 1826), 19; William Morgan, *Morgan's Freemasonry Exposed and Explained: Showing the Origin, History and Nature of Masonry, Its Effects on the Government, and the Christian Religion and Containing a Key to All the Degrees of Freemasonry, Giving a Clear and Correct View of the Manner of Conferring the Different Degrees, as Practiced in All Lodges throughout the Globe, Together with the Means to be Used by Such as Are Not Masons to Gain Admission Therein, with the Verdict of*

- the Jury in Relation to the Abduction and Murder of the Author, The Whole Intended as a Guide to the Craft and a Light to the Unenlightened* (New York: Fitzgerald Publishing, 1882), 7–8, <https://archive.org/details/morgansfreemason00morg/>. Regarding the use of the square in the later Fellowcraft degree, see Morgan, *Illustrations of Masonry*, 47; Morgan, *Freemasonry Exposed*, 30. For a detailed discussion and comparison with Latter-day Saint usage of these symbols in sacred temple clothing, see Bradshaw, *Freemasonry and Temple Ordinances*, 119–26.
- 198 Hebrews 10:19–20. For more details, see Bradshaw, *Freemasonry and Temple Ordinances*, 121–22.
- 199 Bradshaw, *Freemasonry and Temple Ordinances*, 119–26.
- 200 Jacob Strong, “Of Mormons and Masons,” *Tria Prima* (blog), October 26, 2021, <https://triaprima.co/2021/10/26/of-mormons-and-masons-freemason-lds/>.
- 201 See John A. Tvedtnes, “Priestly Clothing in Bible Times,” in *Temples of the Ancient World: Ritual and Symbolism*, ed. Donald W. Parry (Salt Lake City and Provo, UT: Deseret Book and FARMS, 1994), 662–95.
- 202 See Bruno, Swick, and Literski, *Method Infinite*, 330–31.
- 203 Indeed, Jeremy L. Cross observed: “Those who elevate masonry to a level with revealed religion, and those who rank it below the standard of pure morality, are equally unacquainted with its true object.” Jeremy L. Cross, *The True Masonic Chart, or Hieroglyphic Monitor; Containing All the Emblems Explained*, fourth ed. (New Haven: T.G. Woodward, 1826), 6, <https://archive.org/details/CrossJLTheTrueMasonicChartOrHieroglyphicMonitor1826NewHavenConn/>.
- 204 It must be observed that the degrees conferred by various Masonic organizations like the York Rite (or American Rite) are not, strictly speaking, part of basic Masonry, the Blue Lodge. They require prior Masonic affiliation in order to qualify for membership and build on the base the Blue Lodge establishes, with further instruction on moral principles. Joseph Smith was not initiated into Royal Arch Masonry, though some of his close associates were.
- 205 Salem Town, *A System of Speculative Masonry, In Its Origin, Patronage, Dissemination, Principles, Duties, and Ultimate Designs, Laid Open for the Examination of the Serious and Candid: Being*

*a Course of Lectures, Exhibited before the Grand Chapter of the State of New York, at Their Annual Meetings, Held in Temple Chapter Room, in the City of Albany* (Salem, NY: Dodd and Stevenson, 1818), 81, <http://books.google.com/books?id=kSoiAAAAMAAJ>.

- 206 For example, see Hebrews 6:18–20; Revelation 1:6, 3:21, 5:10.
- 207 See, for example, Hugh W. Nibley, *The Message of the Joseph Smith Papyri: An Egyptian Endowment*, second ed. (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 1975); Jeffrey M. Bradshaw and Ronan James Head, “The Investiture Panel at Mari and Rituals of Divine Kingship in the Ancient Near East,” *Studies in the Bible and Antiquity* 4 (2012): 1–42, <https://scholarsarchive.byu.edu/sba/vol4/iss1/1/>.
- 208 This confluence of ultimate purpose is consistent with a traditional prayer of lodge opening which concludes with the petition: “when the trials of our probationary state are over, [may we] be admitted into the temple not made with hands, eternal in the heavens.” De Hoyos, *Light on Masonry*, 236.
- 209 For example, Albert G. Mackey, *The Symbolism of Freemasonry: Illustrating and Explaining Its Science and Philosophy, Its Legends, Myths, and Symbols* (New York: Clark and Maynard, 1882), 166–73.
- 210 For example, Michael S. Neuberger, *Whence We Came: Vol. 2 — Dionysian Artificers* (Trenton, NJ: New Jersey Grand Lodge, 2017), <https://www.newjerseygrandlodge.org/whence-we-came-vol-2-dionysian-artificers/>.
- 211 Walter Leslie Wilmshurst, *The Meaning of Masonry*, fifth ed. (London: P. Lund, Humphries & Co.; W. Rider & Son, 1922), <https://www.sacred-texts.com/mas/mom/index.htm>.
- 212 Bruno, Swick, and Literski, *Method Infinite*, 331.
- 213 Ibid.
- 214 Genesis 32. See Jeffrey M. Bradshaw and Matthew L. Bowen, “Jacob’s Temple Journey to Haran and Back,” in *Proceedings of the Sixth Interpreter Foundation Matthew B. Brown Memorial Conference, 4–5 November 2022*, ed. Stephen D. Ricks and Jeffrey M. Bradshaw, (Orem, UT, and Salt Lake City: The Interpreter Foundation and Eborn Books, forthcoming).
- 215 See Bradshaw, *Freemasonry and Temple Ordinances*, 196.
- 216 1 Kings 17:21–22; 2 Kings 4:34–35. The account of Elijah reads as follows:

And he stretched himself upon the child three times, and cried unto the Lord, and said, O Lord my God, I pray thee, let this child's soul come into him again. And the Lord heard the voice of Elijah; and the soul of the child came into him again, and he revived. (1 Kings 17:21–22)

- 217 “The Edinburgh Register House Manuscript (1696),” The Old Charges (website), Guy Chassagnard, <http://theoldcharges.com/chapter-21.html>.
- 218 Bruno, Swick, and Literski, *Method Infinite*, 346. For more on the history and significance of the “Mason Word,” see de Hoyos, *Scottish Rite Ritual Monitor*, 86–100.
- 219 See Avery Allyn, *A Ritual of Freemasonry, Illustrated by Numerous Engravings, to Which is Added a Key to the Phi Beta Kappa, the Orange, and Odd Fellows Societies, With Notes and Remarks* (Philadelphia: John Clarke, 1831), 80, [https://books.google.com/books/about/A\\_Ritual\\_of\\_Freemasonry\\_To\\_which\\_is\\_adde.html?id=0ENfAAAACAAJ](https://books.google.com/books/about/A_Ritual_of_Freemasonry_To_which_is_adde.html?id=0ENfAAAACAAJ).
- 220 Morgan, *Illustrations of Masonry*, 76; Morgan, *Freemasonry Exposed*, 54.
- 221 For a discussion of the conversation at the veil mentioned in D&C 124:39 and described in more detail in the biblical story of Jacob and other ancient sources, see Bradshaw, *Freemasonry and Temple Ordinances*, 201–10.
- 222 Bruno, Swick, and Literski, *Method Infinite*, 343.
- 223 George D. Smith, ed., *An Intimate Chronicle: The Journals of William Clayton* (Salt Lake City: Signature Books, 1995), 205.
- 224 Nick Literski asks, “Can you honestly tell me that you have never felt a sense of bonding between you and the veil worker (as a fellow human), when you participated in that embrace at the veil? He explicitly represents ‘the Lord’ (whichever ‘lord’ that refers to), but there is still a very human element there.” Nicholas S. Literski, email message to author, July 23, 2022.
- 225 See Bradshaw, *Freemasonry and Temple Ordinances*, 190–210.
- 226 See Bruno, Swick, and Literski, *Method Infinite*, 332–35.
- 227 Linda King Newell and Valeen Tippetts Avery, *Mormon Enigma: Emma Hale Smith, Prophet’s Wife, “Elect Lady,” Polygamy’s Foe*, second ed. (Urbana, IL: University of Illinois Press, 1994), 105.

- See Bruno, Swick, and Literski, *Method Infinite*, 335n60. The secondhand quote seems to be from questions 214, 786, and 966.
- 228 Bruno, Swick, and Literski, *Method Infinite*, 335.
- 229 See question 254 put to Bathsheba Smith. “Smith, Bathsheba, Temple Lot Case testimony, respondent’s testimony, part 3,” Mormon Polygamy Documents (website), 302, <https://mormonpolygamymdocuments.org/wp-content/uploads/2022/08/Bathsheba-Smith-testimony.pdf>.
- 230 Bruno, Swick, and Literski, *Method Infinite*, 335.
- 231 See question 253, “Smith Temple Lot testimony,” 302.
- 232 See “Smith Temple Lot testimony,” 303.
- 233 David H. Dodd and Jeffrey M. Bradshaw, “Leading Questions and Memory: Pragmatic Constraints,” *Journal of Verbal Learning and Verbal Behavior* 19 (1980): 695–704, <https://www.jeffreymbradshaw.net/publications/Dodd-sdarticle.pdf>; <https://www.semanticscholar.org/paper/Leading-questions-and-memory%3A-Pragmatic-constraints-Dodd-Bradshaw/626f1bd9bb9307a392b255d03d97766c4fbbec27>.
- 234 Bruno, Swick, and Literski, *Method Infinite*, 335–38.
- 235 Bradshaw, *Freemasonry and Temple Ordinances*, 248–62.
- 236 Bruno, Swick, and Literski, *Method Infinite*, 320.
- 237 Ibid.
- 238 See, for example, Albert G. Mackey, who describes the elements of “the new system” as “innovations, which sprung up in 1842 at the Baltimore Convention,” and replaced “the old and genuine one, which was originally taught in England by Preston, and in this country by Webb.” However, Mackey is surely mistaken on dating the “innovation” to 1842, since William Morgan published something similar to the “new system” in his 1826 exposé. Albert G. Mackey, *A New and Revised Edition of an Encyclopedia of Freemasonry and Its Kindred Sciences Comprising the Whole Range of Arts, Sciences, and Literature as Connected with the Institution*, new and rev. ed., (Chicago: The Masonic History Company, 1921), s. v. “Points of Fellowship, Five,” <https://www.electricscotland.com/History/freemasonry/anencyclopedia02.pdf>. Morgan, *Freemasonry Exposed*, 54.

However, the course of evolution of the ritual gesture is not a simple one. For example, in the 1696 Edinburgh Register House Manuscript, a version closer to Morgan's than Prescott's or Webb's can be found.

- 239 Bruno, Swick, and Literski, *Method Infinite*, 320.
- 240 For example, Mackey, *Symbolism of Freemasonry*, 166–73; Neuberger, *Whence We Came*, to name a couple.
- 241 Wilmshurst, *Meaning of Masonry*.
- 242 For a discussion of how many common pitfalls in comparative research can be avoided, see Bradshaw, Larsen, and Whitlock, “Apocalypse of Abraham,” 185–88. I have employed this approach to a greater or lesser degree of thoroughness in these additional comparative studies: Bradshaw, *Enoch*, 163–73; Bradshaw, *Freemasonry and Temple Ordinances*, 184–96.
- 243 Bradshaw, *Freemasonry and Temple Ordinances*.
- 244 Cf. John W. Welch, “Criteria for Identifying and Evaluating the Presence of Chiasmus,” *Journal of Book of Mormon Studies* 4, no. 2 (1995): 6–7, <https://scholarsarchive.byu.edu/jbms/vol4/iss2/1/>. See also Nicholas J. Frederick's criterion of “proximity” as discussed in Laura Harris Hales and Nicholas J. Frederick, “Intertextuality in the Book of Mormon with Nick Frederick,” August 22, 2018, in *LDS Perspectives Podcast*, MP3 audio, 39:34, <https://ldsperspectives.com/2018/08/22/intertextuality-book-mormon/>.
- 245 John Eugene Seaich, “Was Freemasonry derived from Mormonism?” *SHIELDS: Scholarly and Historical Information Exchange for Latter-day Saints* (blog), <http://www.shields-research.org/General/Masonry.html>, emphasis in original.
- 246 George L. Mitton, personal communication to author, October 30, 2022.
- 247 Matthew Brown made this partial list of elements in the rites of Freemasonry that are unrelated to temple ordinances:

Elements of this type which can be found in Masonic publications from the time of Joseph Smith include: officers who are present during ceremonies (master, wardens, deacons, treasurer, secretary), three candles/lights, circumambulation, emphasis on cardinal directions, call from labor to refreshment, the Great Architect of the

Universe, opening and closing prayer, business proceedings, balloting for candidates, blindfold, cable-tow/rope, space is called a lodge, the holy lodge of St. John at Jerusalem, candidate declares trust in God, sharp object being pressed against candidate's body, reading of a Psalm, ritualized walking steps, touching of the Bible to take an oath, mention of the parts, points, and secret arts of Freemasonry, clapping of hands/"the shock," stamping the floor, pillars Jachin and Boaz, Solomon's temple, different ways of wearing an apron, working tools of a mason (twenty-four-inch gauge, gavel, trowel), jewels, check-words, divested of all metals, candidate asked to give a metallic memorial, ritualized method of standing, motion given for closing the lodge, asking if the assembly is satisfied with proceedings, entire lecture of each degree in Q&A format, placement of legs and feet in a symbolic shape, clothing configuration that signifies distress/destitution, the teaching that the left side is the weakest part of the body, ... the apron represents innocence, cornerstone placement in the northeast, mention of a charter that enables work to be performed, wisdom-beauty-strength, Jacob's ladder, faith-hope-charity, ornaments/checkered pavement-indented tessels-blazing star, Bethlehem, trestle board, rough ashlar, perfect ashlar, churches and chapels, Moses and the Red Sea, King Solomon as an ancient Grand Master, St. John the Evangelist and St. John the Baptist, politics, the value of two cents and one cent, swearing to support the constitution of the Grand Lodge, the valley of Jehosaphat, Succoth and Zaradatha, changing configuration of mason tools, kissing the scriptures, lettering or syllabbling words, symbol-filled floor carpet, mention of speculative activity, maps of the heavens and the earth, mythological material on the pillars of Solomon's Temple serving as archives, the winding staircase in Solomon's Temple, five orders of architecture, the five human senses, seven sabbatical years, seven years of famine, seven years in building Solomon's Temple, seven golden candlesticks in Solomon's Temple, seven planets, seven wonders of the world, seven liberal arts and sciences, Jephtha and the Ephraimites, army-war-battle, the river Jordan, the letter "G" denoting Deity, the destruction of



Solomon's Temple, emphasis on geometry (and claiming geometry and Masonry were originally synonymous), Grand Master Hiram Abiff, corn and the waterford, charge to conceal another initiate's secrets, no help for the widow's son, humanity-friendship-brotherly love, so mote it be, white gloves, three ruffians, physical assault with weapons, enactment of a murder, coast of Joppa, Ethiopia, buried in the rough sands of the sea at low watermark, kingly court/judgment scene, execution of murderers, discovery of a grave, substitute word, faint letter "G" on the chest, raising of a dead body from a grave, the "traditional accounts"/Old Charges, the drawing of architectural plans and designs, a sprig of acacia/the immortal soul, a cavern in the cleft of a rock, a coffin, being buried for two weeks, monument of a weeping virgin and broken column, an urn with ashes, a depiction of Time, no rain for seven years in the daytime while the temple was being built, thousands of pillars and columns made of Parian marble to support the temple of Solomon, the king of Tyre, a pot of incense, the beehive, a book of constitutions, Tiler's sword, heart, anchor, all-seeing eye, Noah's ark, 47th problem of Euclid, hourglass, scythe, Pythagoras, Eureka, Greek language, sacrifice of a hecatomb, three stairs/three stages of life/Entered Apprentice-Fellowcraft-Master Mason, a spade, a death-head, and due-guards.

Brown, *Exploring the Connection*, 21–23.

- 248 See "Marriage Superstitions, and the Miseries of a Bride Elect, Part 1," *The St. James' Magazine* 28) April-September 1871, 549, <https://books.google.com/books?id=nwRAAAAYAAJ>; Charlotte Sophia Burne, ed., *Shropshire Folk-Lore: A Sheaf of Gleanings, Part III* (London: Trübner and Company, 1886), 646, <https://archive.org/details/shropshirefolkl01jackgoog>. Though the first known published sources of the phrase are Victorian, the tradition may be older.
- 249 Notes from a personal conversation on November 14, 2014. Joe also used this phrase, with minor variation, in various online postings.
- 250 One simple example of this idea is when President Dieter F. Uchtdorf made seer stones more intelligible to modern Saints by comparing them to cell phones. "President Utchtdorf Shares



What He Believes About Seer Stones,” *LDS Living* (blog), June 21, 2016, <https://www.ldsiving.com/president-uchtdorf-shares-what-he-believes-about-seer-stones/s/82469>. Of course, while this analogy works well as a teaching prop, a limitation to this specific comparison, like just about any analogy, is that sacred instruments are not like machines. Hugh Nibley observed:

a machine that does things for you and tells you where to go. It’s not a magic wand, ring, book, robe, or anything like that that operates itself no matter who has it. If you get the ring of Solomon, then you have the power of Solomon. No, it doesn’t work that way. The Liahona only works like the Urim and Thummim, like seer stones and things like that, for people who qualify and know how to do it.

Hugh W. Nibley, “Teachings of the Book of Mormon, Semester 3: Transcripts of Lectures Presented to an Honors Book of Mormon Class at Brigham Young University, 1988–1990” *Maxwell Institute Publications* (2004): 19, <https://scholarsarchive.byu.edu/mi/72/>.

For more on differences between sacred instruments and technology, see Jeffrey M. Bradshaw, “Foreword,” in *Name as Key-Word: Collected Essays on Onomastic Wordplay and the Temple in Mormon Scripture*, ed. Matthew L. Bowen, (Orem, UT, and Salt Lake City: The Interpreter Foundation and Eborn Books, 2018), xxvii–xxviii17, <http://www.templethemes.net/publications/180603-Bradshaw-Foreword%20to%20Bowen-Pages%20from%20180524-Bowen%20Book%2020180524-2.pdf>; Gregory L. Smith, “What is Mormon Transhumanism? And is it Mormon?,” *Interpreter: A Journal of Latter-day Saint Faith and Scholarship* 29 (2018): 185–86, <https://journal.interpreterfoundation.org/what-is-mormon-transhumanism-and-is-it-mormon/>.

- 251 See, e.g., Mark A. Tabbert, *American Freemasons: Three Centuries of Building Communities* (Lexington, MA, and New York: National Heritage Museum and New York University Press, 2005), 22.
- 252 See, e.g., Russell M. Nelson, “Becoming Exemplary Latter-day Saints,” *Ensign* 48, no. 11 (November 2018): 114, <https://media.ldscdn.org/pdf/magazines/ensign-november-2018/2018-11-0000-ensign-eng.pdf>; Joseph Smith Jr., Journal 1835–1836, Journals, The Joseph Smith Papers, The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, <https://www.josephsmithpapers.org/paper-summary/journal-1835-1836/35>; The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day

Saints, *Teachings of the Presidents of the Church: Joseph Smith* (Salt Lake City: The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, 2007), 419, 91.

253 See Bradshaw, *Freemasonry and Temple Ordinances*, 42–46.

254 For a detailed analysis of a sermon exemplifying how the Prophet mixed extensive biblically based arguments with occasional allusions to Masonic themes, see Jeffrey M. Bradshaw, “Now That We *Have* the Words of Joseph Smith, How Shall We Begin to *Understand* Them? Illustrations of Selected Challenges within the 21 May 1843 Discourse on 2 Peter 1,” *Interpreter: A Journal of Mormon Scripture* 20 (2016): 47–150, <https://journal.interpreterfoundation.org/now-that-we-have-the-words-of-joseph-smith-how-shall-we-begin-to-understand-them/>.

255 See, e.g., Richard C. Galbraith’s introductory essay in Joseph Fielding Smith, ed., *Scriptural Teachings of the Prophet Joseph Smith* (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 1993), 1–3:

Ironically, of all Joseph Smith’s great accomplishments in the work of the Restoration, the one perhaps least appreciated was his immense knowledge of the scriptures. The scriptures were the brick and mortar of all his sermons, writings, and other personal communications; he quoted them, he alluded to them, he adapted them in all his speaking and writing.

The Prophet’s extensive use of the scriptures may not be obvious to the casual reader. In the book *Teachings of the Prophet Joseph Smith*, for example, the Prophet appears to cite fewer than one passage of scripture every other page... But that figure misses the mark. A more careful reading of this book reveals some *twenty* scriptures for every one actually cited. When I discovered that, I began to ask, not “When is the Prophet quoting scripture,” but rather “What might he be quoting that is *not* scripture?”

... [A] computer-aided search of the *Teachings* has identified several thousand distinctive scriptural phrases or passages. These scriptural citations of the Prophet come from almost every book of the Old and New Testament and from most books and sections of the Book of Mormon, Doctrine and Covenants, and Pearl of Great Price.

256 See Bruno, Swick, and Literski, *Method Infinite*, 130–35.

- 257 Introduction to Interpreter Foundation, “Jeffrey M. Bradshaw,” virtual fireside presentation, to be published as an introduction to Bradshaw, “Freemasonry and Latter-day Temple Ordinances.” Used with permission.
- 258 Can we always assume that ancient traditions are true ones? No, of course not. Though this question deserves a longer answer than can be given here, consideration should be given to criteria like the following to suggest which sources of comparison are most pertinent to modern temple ordinances:
- Believing Latter-day Saints can generally rely on modern scripture and knowledge of restored priesthood ordinances as a gold standard for evaluating the worth of ancient sources.
  - They can put more confidence in ancient traditions that are closely related to or consistent with what we find in the Bible, much of ancient Judaism. and much of early Christianity than something found only in other world religions.
  - They can sometimes learn important things from sources that pre-date the Bible — for example in Egypt or the ancient Near East, realizing that Gospel ordinances and truths were revealed from the time of Adam and Eve. Fortunately, although stories and explanations relating to temple practices vary widely, patterns of ritual activities are often similar across wide stretches of time and culture. John Walton, a contemporary Old Testament scholar, has observed that “the ideology of the temple is not noticeably different in Israel than it is in the ancient Near East. The difference is in the God, not in the way the temple functions in relation to the God.” John H. Walton, *Ancient Near Eastern Thought and the Old Testament: Introducing the Conceptual World of the Hebrew Bible* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2006), 129.
- 259 Introduction to Interpreter Foundation, “Jeffrey M. Bradshaw,” virtual fireside presentation, to be published as an introduction to Bradshaw, “Freemasonry and Latter-day Temple Ordinances.” Used with permission.
- 260 Joseph Smith Jr., “Letter to Isaac Galland, 22 March 1839,” in *The Joseph Smith Papers Documents, Volume 6: February 1838–*

- August 1839*, ed. Mark Ashhurst-McGee et al. (Salt Lake City: The Church Historian's Press, 2017), 384–85, orthography modernized.
- 261 “Joseph Smith Diary, by Willard Richards, 9 July 1843,” in Ehat and Cook, *Words*, 229, spelling and style modernized.
- 262 At a special conference held on 9 November 1858, Heber C. Kimball said: “The Masonry of today is received from the apostasy which took place in the days of Solomon and David. They have now and then a thing that is correct, but we have the real thing.” Stanley B. Kimball, *Heber C. Kimball: Mormon Patriarch and Pioneer* (Urbana, IL: University of Illinois Press, 1981), 85, <https://archive.org/details/PresidentHeberC.KimballsJournal>, citing “Manuscript History of Brigham Young,” unpublished, 13 November 1858, Church Archives, 1085.
- 263 Introduction to Interpreter Foundation, “Jeffrey M. Bradshaw,” virtual fireside presentation, to be published as an introduction to Bradshaw, “Freemasonry and Latter-day Temple Ordinances.” Used with permission.
- 264 Frederick, “Intertextuality in the Book of Mormon.”
- 265 See discussions of these three elements in Bradshaw, *Freemasonry and Temple Ordinances*, 133–53, 191–210.
- 266 See the statement of Franklin D. Richards in Stan Larson, ed. *A Ministry of Meetings: The Apostolic Diaries of Rudger Clawson* (Salt Lake City: Signature Books, 1993), 42, emphasis added, <https://archive.org/details/AMinistryOfMeetingsRudgerClawson>. A collection of similar statements by Latter-day Saints and critics can be found in Bradshaw, *Freemasonry and Temple Ordinances*, 34.
- 267 See, e.g., Bradshaw, *Freemasonry and Temple Ordinances*, 133–53, 191–210.
- 268 Benjamin Franklin gave this famous tribute on the subject, which extolled the efficacy of Masonic signs and tokens as universal credentials:
- These signs and tokens are of no small value; they speak a universal language, and act as a password to the attention and support of the initiated in all parts of the world. They cannot be lost so long as memory retains its power. Let the possessor of them be expatriated, shipwrecked, or

imprisoned; let him be stripped of everything he has in the world; still these credentials remain and are available for use as circumstances require.

Cited in Harry LeRoy Haywood, *Symbolical Masonry: An Interpretation of the Three Degrees* (New York: George H. Doran, 1923), 131, <http://books.google.com/books?id=yIV-GQAACAAJ>.

- 269 Hans Memling, *The Last Judgement Triptych, Left Wing, The Blessed at the Gate to Heaven (Paradise) with St. Peter*, c. 1471, oil on wood, 221 x 73 cm, National Museum, Gdańsk, Poland, <https://www.wikiart.org/en/hans-memling/the-last-judgment-triptych-left-wing-the-blessed-at-the-gate-to-heaven-paradise-with-the-st-1470>.

- 270 See Morgan, *Freemasonry Exposed*, 104. Compare Bernard, *Light on Masonry*, 142; de Hoyos, *Light on Masonry*, 362.

- 271 Matthew B. Brown, email message to author, August 9, 2008.

- 272 *Bamberg Apocalypse* Folio 55 recto, c. 1000, Staatsbibliothek, Bamberg, Germany, [https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:BambergApocalypseFolio055rNew\\_Jerusalem.JPG](https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:BambergApocalypseFolio055rNew_Jerusalem.JPG).

- 273 Compare one of John W. Welch's criteria for the strength of a chiasm:

A chiasm is stronger if it operates across a literary unit as a whole and not only upon fragments or sections which overlap or cut across significant organizational lines intrinsic to the text.

Welch, "Identifying Chiasmus," 6.

- 274 Samuel Sandmel, "Parallelomania," *Journal of Biblical Literature* 81, no. 1 (March 1962): 2, <https://www.jstor.org/stable/3264821>. Cf. Jared Ludlow: "The more *details* of a tradition that are shared, the more likely they stem from the same core tradition." Jared W. Ludlow, "Abraham's Visions of the Heavens," in *Astronomy, Papyrus, and Covenant*, ed. John Gee and Brian M. Hauglid (Provo, UT: FARMS, 2005), 58, emphasis added, <https://archive.bookofmormoncentral.org/content/abrahams-vision-heavens>.

- 275 See Frederick's criterion of "sequence" (Hales and Frederick, "Intertextuality").

- 276 See Bradshaw, *Freemasonry and Temple Ordinances*, 293–94. In one instance, the use of the phrase “Holiness to the Lord,” seemed to be a toss-up.
- 277 Richard Lyman Bushman, “Beginnings,” in *The Mormon History Association’s Tanner Lectures: The First Twenty Years*, ed. Dean L. May and Reid L. Nielson (Urbana, IL: University of Illinois Press, 2006), 2, 7.
- 278 In his studies, Richard L. Bushman studiously avoids the word “parallels” in favor of “filaments.” In explaining this difference, he states:

Any object, any idea — the Urim and Thummim, the gold plates, premortal existence — sits in a network of similar objects and ideas that can potentially illuminate and enrich the original. The filaments may not be visible to everyone who contemplates those items, because they don’t have enough knowledge to appreciate them; but to see the total meaning in culture as a whole, you have to trace the affiliations. The connections go off in all directions, probably in numberless directions. One way for us to appreciate our religion is to see it in those multitudinous connections.

Richard Lyman Bushman and Jed L. Woodworth, “Richard Lyman Bushman,” in *Conversations with Mormon Historians*, ed. Alexander L. Baugh and Reid L. Neilson (Provo, UT: Brigham Young University, Religious Studies Center, 2015), 198, <https://rsc.byu.edu/archived/conversations-mormon-historians/richard-lyman-bushman>.
- 279 Ibid., 208.
- 280 Nicholas Literski, email message to author, July 23, 2022. Published with permission in Bradshaw, *Freemasonry and Temple Ordinances*, 33.

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