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CREDO

Daniel C. Peterson

Abstract: *The Restoration began with the stunning divine declaration to the Prophet Joseph Smith that the Christian sects of his day were “all wrong,” that “all their creeds were an abomination in [God’s] sight.” It’s a powerful condemnation, but what, exactly, does it mean? Later in his life, Joseph reflected that he felt that creeds set limits “and say ‘hitherto shalt thou come & no further’ — which I cannot subscribe to.” Certainly, as I realized during a wonderful musical experience many years ago, there is little if anything in one of the great ecumenical creeds with which a believing Latter-day Saint must, or even should, disagree.*

Many years ago, while I was studying at the American University in Cairo, my wife and I joined the Ma’adi Community Choir. It took its name from the Ma’adi Community Church, a largely expatriate Protestant church that was located in a southern suburb of the Egyptian capital and that was pastored at the time by our American downstairs neighbor, the late Rev. David Johnson.¹

During our time with the choir, which rehearsed in the church itself, we prepared and performed two especially ambitious pieces, Antonio Vivaldi’s “Gloria in D Major” (RV 589) and Franz Schubert’s Mass in G — strictly, his Mass No. 2 in G Major, D. 167. Both are wonderfully beautiful and very powerful, and those long-ago performances with that choir remain among our most memorable musical experiences. In this little essay, though, I would especially like to focus on the Schubert Mass, and particularly on the section of it that is called the “Credo.”²

1. On whom, see “David Lowell Johnson,” *LNP* (Lancaster, PA), September 13, 2013, https://lancasteronline.com/obituaries/david-lowell-johnson/article_2e77cdf-34e4-5c6d-a37e-15791afbc56.html.

2. I strongly encourage the reader of this essay to listen to Schubert’s music. A serviceable performance of Franz Schubert’s Mass in G is by the Israel NK Orchestra

Incredibly to me, Schubert composed his Mass in G in less than a week, during the first part of March 1815. The portion of the work called the *Credo* — Latin for *I believe* — is a musical setting of an ancient Latin translation of the so-called Niceno-Constantinopolitan Creed. (The Creed was first composed in Greek.)³ The name of the Creed comes from the fact that it is a modified version of the original AD 325 Nicene Creed that was adopted by the Second Ecumenical Council, which was held in Constantinople in AD 381. Interestingly, the Niceno-Constantinopolitan Creed is the only formal statement of Christian faith that is accepted as both ecumenical and authoritative by the Orthodox churches, the Church of the East, many Protestant communions (including the Anglicans), and the Catholic Church (with one modification that I'll describe shortly).

What I want to argue here is that Latter-day Saints, too, would be able — perhaps with some clarifications, and almost certainly with some surprise — to affirm the “Credo.” And that fact says something vitally important about the question, which still worries some of our friends and exercises some of our critics, about whether Latter-day Saints are really Christians. To lay out my position, I will individually cite and comment on every passage of the text:⁴

Credo in unum Deum, Patrem omnipotentem, factorem cæli et terræ, visibilium omnium et invisibilium.

I believe in one God, the Father Almighty, maker of heaven and earth, of all things visible and invisible.

Obviously, no Latter-day Saint would have any difficulty at all in affirming this opening sentence. The first phrase of our first Article of Faith, after all, is “We believe in God, the Eternal Father.” And that first

and Swedish Vocal Ensemble. See Christian Lindberg, “Schubert Mass no 2 in G Major D 167,” YouTube video, 22:43, October 22, 2018, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=hBeFxH8mMII>. The Credo begins at about 6:30. Another version that I can recommend is that of the Tel-Aviv Soloists Ensemble and Moran Singers Ensemble, conducted by Barak Tal, in which the Credo commences at 7:03. See Soloists1, “Schubert Mass No. 2 in G Major D.167,” YouTube video, 24:26, March 7, 2012, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=E_UavnuPkow. Many of the performers in these two performances are presumably far less committed to the truth of the Credo than are faithful Latter-day Saints.

3. For the Latin and English translation, see “Nicene-Constantinopolitan Creed (AD 325, 381),” *Heidelblog* (website), <https://heidelblog.net/nicene/>.

4. The translation of the Credo I use in this essay is one from my own notes, on which I have relied over the years.

Article of Faith goes on, of course, to declare our belief “in His Son, Jesus Christ, and in the Holy Ghost,” as does the Credo:

Credo in unum Dominum Jesum Christum, Filium Dei unigenitum, [et] ex Patre natum ante omnia sæcula. Deum de Deo, Lumen de Lumine: Deum verum de Deo vero; [Genitum, non factum;] consubstantialem Patri, per quem omnia facta sunt.

I believe in one Lord Jesus Christ, the only begotten Son of God; born of the Father before all ages. God of God, Light of Light, true God of true God; [begotten, not made]; consubstantial with the Father, by Whom all things were made.

Here, the “Credo” picks up ideas expressed in John 1:1–11. The only problem that a Latter-day Saint might have with the foregoing is the idea that the Son is *consubstantialem Patri*, “consubstantial with the Father.” In the original Greek of the Nicene Creed, this is expressed by the famous and sometimes controversial term *homoousios*. But what, exactly, does that word mean? Some scholars have suggested that it simply means that the Son is of the same *nature* as the Father, that he is the same kind of being. And with that we Latter-day Saints can certainly agree.

Although Schubert omits the three-word phrase *Genitum, non factum* (“begotten, not made”) that occurs in the original text of the Creed, that phrase surely conveys what Latter-day Saints understand: The second person of the Godhead is a Son, not a creature or an artifact. His relationship is that of a child to the Father, not of a lightbulb to Thomas Edison. He is, as it were, genetically related to the Father. Accordingly, because he is “God of God, Light of Light, true God of true God,” he is essentially all that the Father is. It is in that sense that the saying of Jesus recorded at John 14:9 is probably best to be understood: “He that hath seen me hath seen the Father.”

At this point, Schubert’s music becomes sublimely lyrical with the happy, saving thought that is at the absolute core of Christianity:

Qui propter nos homines et [propter] nostram salutem descendit de cælis, Et incarnatus est de Spiritu Sancto ex Maria Virgine, et homo factus est.

Who, for us humans and for our salvation, came down from heaven and became incarnate by the Holy Ghost of the Virgin Mary, and was made human.

Here, yet again, the “Credo” simply rephrases thoughts from the first chapter of the gospel of John, at the fourteenth verse. They are thoughts with which every believer in the Restored Gospel will enthusiastically agree: “And the Word became flesh and dwelt among us.”

A Latter-day Saint might, of course, wonder what is meant by the statement that the Son “became incarnate by the Holy Ghost.” Although, according to Luke 1:35, the angel Gabriel told Mary during the Annunciation that “the Holy Ghost shall come upon thee,” the gospel writer doesn’t explain exactly what that means. Moreover, he had already identified the child that she would bear as “the Son of the Highest” (1:32), presumably referring to God the Father. Moreover, and strikingly, the scriptures nowhere describe Jesus as the Son of the Holy Ghost. Instead, he is always described as the Son of God. And this is all we really know; we are told essentially nothing about how it happened. Thus, for example, at 1 Nephi 11:13–21, Nephi saw “a virgin, most beautiful and fair above all other virgins.” Thereafter, she was “carried away in the Spirit” (note, again, the undeniable but also unspecified role of the Spirit in the account) and then Nephi “looked and beheld the virgin again, bearing a child in her arms.” Here, as everywhere else, a curtain seems to have been draped discreetly over the mechanism of Christ’s conception.

But Schubert’s music now turns grim, perhaps even angry, with the terrible next thought:

Crucifixus etiam pro nobis; sub Pontio Pilato passus et sepultus est.

He was also crucified for us, suffered under Pontius Pilate,
and was buried.

A terrible end. Seemingly so, at least. Next, though, the choir erupts in exultant joy:

Et resurrexit tertia die, secundum Scripturas. Et ascendit in cælum, sedet ad dexteram Patris.

And the third day He arose again, according to the Scriptures.
And ascended into heaven, and sits at the right hand of the
Father.

Thus far, there seems nothing in the Credo that Latter-day Saints could not themselves affirm, not only with a clear conscience but with joy and devotion. As Joseph Smith put it,

The fundamental principles of our religion are the testimony
of the Apostles and Prophets, concerning Jesus Christ, that He

died, was buried, and rose again the third day, and ascended into heaven; and all other things which pertain to our religion are only appendages to it.⁵

The Credo closes its section on the second person of the Godhead with its confident expectation for the future, clearly shared, as the title of our Church itself indicates, by members of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, who pray that the kingdom of God may go forth, that the kingdom of heaven may come.⁶

Et iterum venturus est cum gloria judicare vivos et mortuos, cujus regni non erit finis.

And He is to come again, with glory, to judge both the living and the dead; Of whose kingdom there shall be no end.

The Credo then turns to the third member of the Godhead:

[Credo] in Spiritum Sanctum, Dominum et vivificantem, qui ex Patre Filioque procedit. Qui cum Patre et Filio simul adoratur [et] conglorificatur; qui locutus est per prophetas.

[I believe] in the Holy Ghost, the Lord and Giver of life, Who proceedeth from the Father and the Son; Who, together with the Father and the Son, is adored and glorified; Who spoke by the prophets.

Here, the Latin or Western Christian church has added a word that separates it from the Greek Orthodox and from many other churches of the East: *Filioque*, meaning “and the Son.” (No equivalent word occurs here in the earliest — that is, the Greek — text of the Creed.) For reasons that I won’t go into here, Latin theologians in the West insisted that the Holy Spirit or Holy Ghost “proceeds” — in a sense, that the Holy Ghost is somehow generated by — both the Father and the Son. But the Greek East could not go along with that idea, insisting that the Holy Ghost “proceeds” not from the Son but from the Father alone. And I think, although we don’t even use such language as “procession” anyway, that Latter-day Saints would probably sympathize with the Greeks on this matter if we were to take any stand at all. The Holy Ghost does not seem in any way, so far as has been revealed to us, to be a child of the Son of God.

5. Joseph Smith, *Teachings of the Prophet Joseph Smith*, ed. Joseph Fielding Smith (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 1976), 121.

6. See Doctrine and Covenants 65:6.

The Credo next turns to the matter of the Christian church, to what theologians often call the question of “ecclesiology”:

*[Et unam sanctam catholicam et apostolicam ecclesiam,]
Confiteor unum Baptisma in remissionem peccatorum.*

[I believe in one holy Catholic and Apostolic Church.] I
confess one baptism for the remission of sins.

For reasons that I do not know, Schubert, who was himself Roman Catholic, left out the phrasing about the “one holy Catholic and Apostolic Church.” But Latter-day Saints would actually have no problem with such language, so long as it is understood that the word *catholic* originally meant “universal.” There was, at the time that the Niceno-Constantinopolitan Creed was composed, no distinct Roman Catholic or Western Latin “denomination” of Christianity. Latter-day Saints believe the Restored Church to be “built upon the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Jesus Christ himself being the chief corner stone” (Ephesians 2:20), and that its message is global and universal.

And then, in the end, the Credo closes with a statement of the Christian hope for an embodied life to come, beyond the grave:

*[Et expecto resurrectionem] mortuorum, et vitam venturi
sæculi. Amen.*

[And I expect the resurrection] of the dead, and the life of the
world to come. Amen.

That expectation is central to the faith of the Latter-day Saints and to their hope.

As we were rehearsing and performing Schubert’s Mass in G those many years ago in Egypt, the question often occurred to me: How can a person who can and does affirm every portion of the Credo possibly be considered a non-Christian? There was some specific irony to that question at that particular time because, as our little group of Latter-day Saints had begun to grow rather steadily in Cairo back then, we had approached the leadership of the Ma’adi Community Church to inquire whether we might be able to meet for our worship services in their space. The church building often served as a center for the expatriate community even beyond those who were involved in its specifically religious and ecclesiastical functions and, since the Cairo Branch by that point met on Fridays, we promised that we would in no way interfere with their Sunday services. Rev. Johnson, I think, was not opposed to our proposal, but the lay leadership of the church — heavily southern

Evangelical, as I recall — rejected it on the grounds that we were not Christians.

We soon found our own place to meet, so no lasting problems caused. But does it make even the most minimal sense to deny the Christianity of people who can affirm Schubert’s “Credo” with full confidence? I submit that it does not. And so, to those who still claim that The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints and Latter-day Saints themselves must be counted outside the bounds of Christendom, I say that they have no solid grounds for such a judgment.⁷

The Interpreter Foundation exists, functions, and, indeed, flourishes because those involved with it believe deeply in the propositions affirmed in the Credo, as those have been explained, reaffirmed, and expanded by the Restoration. 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. In connection with this particular volume of the Foundation’s signature journal, I thank the authors who have contributed their time and energy, along with those directly responsible for its managing and its production, Allen Wyatt, Jeff Lindsay, and Godfrey Ellis. As all of the other officers of The Interpreter Foundation are, they are volunteers. I’m deeply grateful for their devoted service.

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7. For a more sustained examination of many of the reasons that are commonly advanced for denying the Christianity of Latter-day Saints, see Daniel C. Peterson and Stephen D. Ricks, *Offenders for a Word: How Anti-Mormons Play Word Games to Attack the Latter-day Saints*, FARMS Reprint Edition (Provo, UT: FARMS, 1998).

THE DANCE OF READER AND TEXT: SALOMÉ, THE DAUGHTER OF JARED, AND THE REGAL DANCE OF DEATH

Alan Goff

Abstract: *Modern readers too often and easily misread modern assumptions into ancient texts. One such notion is that when the reader encounters repeated stories in the Bible, the Book of Mormon, Herodotus, or numerous other texts, the obvious explanation that requires no supporting argument is that one text is plagiarizing or copying from the other. Ancient readers and writers viewed such repetitions differently. In this article, I examine the narratives of a young woman or girl dancing for a king with the promise from the ruler that whatever the dancer wants, she can request and receive; the request often entails a beheading. Some readers argue that a story in Ether 8 and 9, which has such a dance followed by a decapitation, is plagiarized from the gospels of Mark and Matthew: the narrative of the incarceration and death of John the Baptist. The reader of such repeated stories must study with a mindset more sympathetic to the conceptual world of antiquity in which such stories claim to be written. Biblical and Book of Mormon writers viewed such repetitions as the way God works in history, for Nephi asserts that “the course of the Lord is one eternal round” (1 Nephi 10:19), a claim he makes barely after summarizing his father’s vision of the tree of life, a dream he will repeat, expand upon, and make his own in 1 Nephi chapters 11–15 (and just because it is developed as derivative from his father’s dream in some way, no reader suggests it be taken as a plagiaristic borrowing). Nephi’s worldview is part of the shared mental system illustrated by his eponymous ancestor — Joseph, who gave his name to the two tribes of Joseph: Ephraim and Manasseh, the latter through which Lehi traced his descent (Alma 10:3) — for youthful Joseph boasts two dreams of his ascendancy over his family members, interprets the two dreams of his fellow inmates, and articulates the meaning of Pharaoh’s two dreams, followed by his statement of meaning regarding such*

repetitions: “And for that the dream was doubled unto Pharaoh twice; it is because the thing is established by God, and God will shortly bring it to pass” (Genesis 41:32).

O body swayed to music, O brightening glance,
How can we know the dancer from the dance?
W. B. Yeats “Among the Schoolchildren”

Vast changes have transformed all disciplines in the more than 75 years since Fawn Brodie published her biography of Joseph Smith in 1945. Historians then confidently asserted the attainment of disciplinary objectivity, of the ability to discard all ideological commitment and reveal the past “as it actually happened” free of all literary embellishment and preconceptions, and of the ability to do history scientifically. The other discipline most relevant to my discussion is biblical criticism; biblical critics (closely linked to the historical discipline) also asserted that their field had become scientific over the previous century and freed their approach from the ideological pollution of religious and theological allegiances, permitting the disciplinary expert the same level of objectivity as their closely aligned historical cousins. The commitments to notions of objectivity and positivism that buttressed these theoretical positions have been devastatingly critiqued since the 1970s, although they are still uncritically held by most disciplinary practitioners in not just history and biblical criticism but all intellectual fields in the sciences, social sciences, and humanities.

Brodie’s biography of Joseph Smith, *No Man Knows My History*, articulated a particular reading of the Book of Mormon that is still influential and often cited to support a specific-but-dated conception of Book of Mormon narrative. Here is the passage persistently quoted to denigrate the scripture as a cheap plagiarism of biblical narrative: “Many stories [Joseph Smith] borrowed from the Bible. The daughter of Jared, like Salome, danced before a king and a decapitation followed. Aminadi, like Daniel, deciphered handwriting on a wall, and Alma was converted after the exact fashion of St. Paul. The daughters of the Lamanites were abducted like the dancing daughters of Shiloh; and Ammon, the American counterpart of David, for want of a Goliath slew six sheep-rustlers with his sling.”¹ These 72 words established a reading agenda that, although not unusual in 1940s academic contexts where

1. Fawn M. Brodie, *No Man Knows My History: The Life of Joseph Smith*, 2nd ed. (New York: Knopf, 1982), 62–63.

religious phenomena were studied, has been superseded by more recent developments in scholarship of biblical and Book of Mormon narrative along with historical theory.

In this article, I respond to the first of those themes that Brodie asserts Joseph Smith stole from the Bible. This piece is part of a much larger project. I have researched and written about each of these five Book of Mormon passages Brodie asserts Smith pilfered from the Bible, no credit given, as the best evidence that Joseph Smith was a conscious religious charlatan and the Book of Mormon produced by a talented storyteller but ignorant farmer as a novelistic invention. I have already published the first of those five compositions listed below. This is the second of five:

- “Alma’s Prophetic Commissioning Type Scene”² demonstrates that when Brodie argues Smith plagiarized the story of Paul’s conversion on the road to Damascus in what is often called “Alma’s conversion story,” such an interpretation vastly underreads both stories of prophetic calling. The New and Old Testaments contain stories of prophetic commissioning that follow this model of a prophet being called to cry repentance and salvation: Moses, Jeremiah, Isaiah, and many others. Reading the Alma and Saul/Paul type scenes as standing in a long line of predecessor narratives fundamentally alters their meaning. If the Alma narrative is stolen from Paul’s story, then the exact same charge should be (and has been) made against the story of Paul’s conversion to Christianity (and St. Augustine’s, and so on): that it isn’t historical because the contours of the story are too much like previous narratives. Such a view completely misunderstands the role of repetition in biblical narrative and the continuing legacy of such conversion/commissioning stories in the history of converts to the biblical tradition.
- In the present article, I appeal to research on folklore and oral history to enumerate the decapitation narratives in the Bible, Greek and Roman history, and other classical sources. Brodie’s tracing of influence from the Book of Mormon story of a young woman dancing to obtain

2. Alan Goff, “Alma’s Prophetic Commissioning Type Scene,” *Interpreter: A Journal of Latter-day Saint Faith and Scholarship* 51 (2022): 115–64, <https://journal.interpreterfoundation.org/almas-prophetic-commissioning-type-scene/>.

a beheading solely to the story of Salomé and John the Baptist ignores the frequency of the theme in antiquity and the superficiality of asserting the fictional status of such common motifs in ancient narrative. It also questions Brodie's construal of the motif's meaning.

- In "Deciphering God's Graffiti: Reading Strategies Weighed and Measured,"³ I discuss the story of Amulek preaching at Ammonihah; he begins by declaring his genealogy, which includes Aminadi "who interpreted the writing which was upon the wall of the temple, which was written by the finger of God" (Alma 10:2). Instinctively, Brodie asserts that this story was stolen from the biblical book of Daniel. I show how ancient Hebraic narrative would not be Hebraic if one of its principal features weren't included: repeated stories that allude to and recapitulate earlier and later narratives reiterating the same themes by demonstrating that what happens to ancestors is repeated in the lives of their descendants and sometimes in their progenitors. Amulek (like Daniel, Joseph, and Esther) is an Israelite placed in a foreign court while maintaining worship of the God of Abraham, so his narrative is connected to those biblical examples that it takes for granted and especially alludes to the story of Joseph in Egypt, whom Amulek also specifically mentions as his forebear.
- In "The Plagiarism of the Daughters of the Lamanites,"⁴ I take up another narrative that Brodie asserts Smith lifted from the Bible. In Judges 21, the Israelites encourage the surviving remnant of the tribe of Benjamin to kidnap and marry the daughters of Shiloh. Mosiah 20 has the priests of King Noah abduct the daughters of the Lamanites for a similar purpose. I demonstrate that in antiquity these abduction-for-marriage narratives were ubiquitous (and continue in contemporary societies in certain parts of the world). Considering the Hebrew Bible's penchant for repeating narrative motifs — such as kidnappings (for

3. Alan Goff, "Deciphering God's Graffiti: Reading Strategies Weighed and Measured," *Interpreter: A Journal of Latter-day Saint Faith and Scholarship* (forthcoming).

4. Alan Goff, "The Plagiarism of the Daughters of the Lamanites," *Interpreter: A Journal of Latter-day Saint Faith and Scholarship* (forthcoming).

example, as the Romans' abduction of the daughters of the Sabines in order to provide wives and an alliance in hostile new territory) — provides a better explanation of the repetitions than concepts such as plagiarism crudely used and ideologically advanced.

- Brodie also asserts that the Book of Mormon story of Ammon defending sheep at the waters of Sebus with a sword and sling is a knockoff of the biblical David-and-Goliath narrative. In the article "Drawing from Deep Wells in the Deserts of Modernity: Hebraic Narrative Conventions and Modern Reading Deficiencies,"⁵ I demonstrate the complex web of allusion to other biblical narratives in the David story, and then I extend that principle and reading to the story of Ammon at the waters of Sebus. With such a reading taking into account the pervasive habit of using allusion and intertextuality in Hebraic narrative, I point out that a superficial reading as that provided by Brodie can't be sustained. Such attention to this habit of allusion and metalepsis in biblical narrative was advanced in studies of the Hebrew Bible and the New Testament only since the 1980s, so decades after Brodie articulated her theory of reading the Bible and Book of Mormon. Her obsolete readings are severely deficient when placed alongside interpretations that take into account much more complex textual relationships than mere plagiarism.

Brodie's interpretations of Book of Mormon narrative and her readings of specific passages have achieved influence out of proportion to their quality, principally because outside its circle of believers, the scripture has attained no notable alternative scholarly or academic theories and approaches. Brodie's framework has merely been repeated by a descendancy of skeptical readers in a way that Brodie herself should have disdained in order to maintain consistency (they have merely "borrowed" from her rather than from the Bible). I here propose my notion of repetition in Hebraic narrative as such a replacement.

5. Alan Goff, "Drawing from Deep Wells in the Deserts of Modernity: Hebraic Narrative Conventions and Modern Reading Deficiencies," *Interpreter: A Journal of Latter-day Saint Faith and Scholarship* (forthcoming).

Fawn Brodie's Reading of Biblical and Book of Mormon Narrative Involving Dancing, Kings, and Decollation

That the Book of Mormon contains biblical repetitions is indisputable, but what do those twice- and thrice-told tales mean? The significance is at least partially supplied by the reader. Emerson asserted that good readers make good texts.⁶ I disagree, at least in part, but I think more agreeable would be to assert that bad readers can produce bad readings even of good texts, and no guarantee exists that good readers can do much with bad texts. When bad readers engage a text, one would take great risks making judgments about the text under examination from the resulting reading, but to produce a good reading of strong, well-considered, and well-constructed texts, a good reader is a necessary, though not sufficient, element.

Here, again, is the first of Brodie's five claims in what has become the cornerstone of Book of Mormon criticisms: "Many stories [Joseph Smith] borrowed from the Bible. The daughter of Jared, like Salome, danced before a king and a decapitation followed."⁷ Brodie claims Smith stole from the gospels the story of Salomé dancing for the Baptist's head. I determined in the 1980s to research Brodie's plagiarism claims to see how well they withstand scrutiny, and although they are oft cited (and rarely critiqued), they don't measure up. Another Book of Mormon revisionist has asserted the following:

Because the temper of our times is such that no movement nor institution nor book can forever remain impervious to the searchlight of scholarly inspection, our times demand that all the rudiments of religious faith be subjected to the scrutiny of reason and empirical research.

As the *Book of Mormon* is examined without any intention solely to amass data to support preconceived notions about

6. Emerson's wording directly: "'Tis the good reader that makes the good book; a good head cannot read amiss, in every book he finds passages which seem confidences or asides hidden from all else and unmistakably meant for his ear." We talk about texts today rather than books or authors after the death of the author, even one as quotable as Emerson. Ralph Waldo Emerson, *Success* (1870, repr., Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1912), 30, <https://books.google.com/books?hl=en&lr=&id=WvZmtSPauxEC&oi=fnd&pg=PA30>.

7. Brodie, *No Man*, 62–63.

it, certain problems concerning traditional understandings of the book stand out.⁸

This very plagiarism assertion is a preconceived notion. In the 1990s, I determined to find discussions of the death of the Baptist, searching years in research libraries such as BYU's, NYU's, SUNY Albany's, and many smaller ones in the Hudson River Valley. Later, after moving to Arizona, I was in the ASU library stacks and glanced down to see Roger Aus's book *Water into Wine and the Beheading of John the Baptist*. I had even checked out that book years earlier while doing dissertation research about Jesus's miracle at Cana without noticing its relevance to the beheading of John (the relevant clue was right there in Aus's title, such was my own incapacity at the time as a reader). From that discovery, I quickly found other relevant sources making this article possible. Sometimes pondering and years of consideration are required before research comes together, before I could respond to Brodie's 14 words: "the daughter of Jared, like Salome, danced before a king and a decapitation followed." Here is Ham's pilfered version of Brodie's charge: "Other apparent biblical allusions in the **Book of Mormon** include ... the daughter of Jared, like Salome, dancing for the king in return for a decapitation."⁹

The relevant Book of Mormon and Bible passages follow:

Now the daughter of Jared being exceedingly expert, and seeing the sorrows of her father, thought to devise a plan whereby she could redeem the kingdom unto her father.

Now the daughter of Jared was exceedingly fair. And it came to pass that she did talk with her father, and said unto him: Whereby hath my father so much sorrow? Hath he not read the record which our fathers brought across the great deep? Behold, is there not an account concerning them of old, that they by their secret plans did obtain kingdoms and great glory?

And now, therefore, let my father send for Akish, the son of Kimnor; and **behold, I am fair, and I will dance before him, and I will please him, that he will desire me to wife; wherefore if he shall desire of thee that ye shall give unto**

8. Wayne Ham, "Problems in Interpreting the Book of Mormon as History," *Courage: A Journal of History, Thought and Action* 1, no.1 (Sept. 1970): 16.

9. Ham, "Problems," 22n8.

him me to wife, then shall ye say: I will give her if ye will bring unto me the head of my father, the king.

And now Omer was a friend to Akish; wherefore, when Jared had sent for Akish, **the daughter of Jared danced before him that she pleased him**, insomuch that he desired her to wife. And it came to pass that he said unto Jared: Give her unto me to wife.

And Jared said unto him: **I will give her unto you, if ye will bring unto me the head of my father, the king.**

And it came to pass that Akish gathered in unto the house of Jared all his kinsfolk, and said unto them: Will ye swear unto me that ye will be faithful unto me in the thing which I shall desire of you?

And it came to pass that they all sware unto him, by the God of heaven, and also by the heavens, and also by the earth, and by their heads, that whoso should vary from the assistance which Akish desired should lose his head; and whoso should divulge whatsoever thing Akish made known unto them, the same should lose his life. ...

And the Lord warned Omer in a dream that he should depart out of the land; wherefore Omer departed out of the land with his family. ...

And it came to pass that Jared was anointed king over the people, by the hand of wickedness; and he gave unto Akish his daughter to wife.

And it came to pass that Akish sought the life of his father-in-law; and he applied unto those whom he had sworn by the oath of the ancients, and **they obtained the head of his father-in-law, as he sat upon his throne, giving audience to his people.**

For so great had been the spreading of this wicked and secret society that it had corrupted the hearts of all the people; **therefore Jared was murdered upon his throne, and Akish reigned in his stead.** (Ether 8: 8–14, 9:3–6)

Note here that the Jaredite story is not a narrative of private revenge motivated by personal hatred and offense but one of ambition and intrigue driven by political aspiration and succession to kingship. It is

one chain link in a sequence of shackling subnarratives in the Jaredite record with kings being overthrown or imprisoned to satisfy ambition and greed. The story of the Baptist's death is, on the other hand, one of personal animus and retribution:

For Herod himself had sent forth and laid hold upon John, and bound him in prison for Herodias' sake, his brother Philip's wife: for he had married her.

For John had said unto Herod, It is not lawful for thee to have thy brother's wife.

Therefore Herodias had a quarrel against him, and would have killed him; but she could not:

For Herod feared John, knowing that he was a just man and an holy, and observed him; and when he heard him, he did many things, and heard him gladly.

And when a convenient day was come, that **Herod on his birthday made a supper to his lords**, high captains, and chief estates of Galilee;

And when the daughter of the said Herodias came in, and danced, and pleased Herod and them that sat with him, the king said unto the damsel, Ask of me whatsoever thou wilt, and I will give it thee.

And he sware unto her, **Whatsoever thou shalt ask of me, I will give it thee, unto the half of my kingdom.**

And she went forth, and said unto her mother, **What shall I ask? And she said, The head of John the Baptist.**

And she came in straightway with haste unto the king, and asked, saying, I will that thou **give me by and by in a charger the head of John the Baptist.**

And the king was exceeding sorry; yet for his oath's sake, and for their sakes which sat with him, he would not reject her.

And immediately **the king sent an executioner, and commanded his head to be brought: and he went and beheaded him in the prison,**

And brought **his head in a charger, and gave it to the damsel:** and the damsel gave it to her mother. (Mark 6:17–28 [Matthew 14 is the parallel text])

Here, Herod Antipas makes the princely promise after Salomé dances. Prompted by Herodias, Salomé demands John's life. Reluctantly, Antipas relents and executes him.

Repetition of History and Narrative in Biblical Textuality

Unstated in Brodie/Ham is the premise that a motif present in both the Bible and the Book of Mormon means Joseph Smith stole it. This approach unnecessarily narrows the interpretive possibilities, assuming that history is linear and that repetitions or circularities indicate fictional narrative shaping.

One of the most powerful arguments for historiography being regarded as a discourse which is quite different from mere "literature" is that historical texts are prone to be treated in a quite different way from "literary" ones. They seem to be automatically subject to either refutation or verification. Nobody, it is maintained, would bother to challenge the truthfulness of a work of fiction.

There is nothing *inherent* in historical texts to evoke such reactions. A text's genre is constituted to some extent by our knowledge (or presumed knowledge) of the climate that produces it and of the audience it is designed for: a history book or a factual journal is subject to refutation because we happen to know in the first place that it is purported to be true.¹⁰

Heinrich Schliemann rediscovered the ruins of ancient Troy because he assumed some historical content in Homer's epics. A reader wouldn't go to the effort and expense Schliemann did to look in English digs for archaeological evidence of Connecticut resident Hank Morgan's unsuccessful attempt to prevent King Arthur's death. A main difference between historical and literary texts is how their readers read them, and to read is to enter the hermeneutical circle — one would hope not in a viciously circular way. Treat repetitions like fictions, and they look like fictions. Invest in a theory of history that sees events being repeated in later generations and eras, and the reader is likely to find evidence for such historical connections. If the reader precludes by presupposition the eruption of the divine in history, that reader will likely attribute narratives

10. Andrew Laird, "Fiction, Bewitchment and Story Worlds: The Implications of Claims to Truth in Apuleius," *Lies and Fiction in the Ancient World*, ed. Christopher Gill and T. P. Wiseman (Exeter: University of Exeter Press, 1993), 160.

about such events to the imagination of the writer. Presuppositions proscribe and authorize particular interpretations.

The Bible uses elements that appear to the modern mind to be fictional, including “recurrent motifs and phrases, and analogies of incident, and to define the meaning of the events through allusion, metaphor, and symbol.” To conclude fictionality just because the text incorporates these features is mistaken: “The writer does all this not to fabricate history but in order to understand it.”¹¹ Elizabeth Fenton, a professor of literature rather than of history and not a member of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints,¹² reads the Book of Mormon with more nuance compared to other outsider perspectives. Such subtlety permits her to recognize that repetition is itself meaningful, not an occasion to dismiss the book. The Book of Mormon’s “engagement with biblical texts ... complicates the very notion of an ur-text and offers a model of sacred history that depends upon iteration and proliferation.”¹³ Adam Gopnik is decidedly more representative of the interpretive reading quality the Book of Mormon is commonly subject to.¹⁴ He repeats the conventional attitude toward the book in academic, media, and other sectarian circles and then echoes Mark Twain: “Scholarly opinion on Smith now tends to divide between those who think that he knew he was making it up and those who think that he sincerely believed in his own visions — though the truth is that, as Melville’s ‘Confidence Man’ reminds us, the line between the seer and scamster wasn’t clearly marked in early nineteenth-century America.” For a reader who faults the scripture for being repetitious, Gopnik then oddly repeats Twain’s pronouncement from *Roughing It* that the Nephite record is “a prosy detail of imaginary history, with the Old Testament for a model; followed by a tedious

11. Robert Alter, *The David Story: A Translation with Commentary of 1 and 2 Samuel* (New York: W. W. Norton, 1999), xvii–xviii.

12. Fawn Brodie, by the way, received her master’s degree in English, rather than history, although she was later a professor of history at UCLA, and her biographical writings exhibit a strong literary quality. One would think that with that literary background, she would have been more sensitive to the literary texture in Book of Mormon narrative.

13. Elizabeth Fenton, “Open Canons: Sacred History and American History in *The Book of Mormon*,” *J19: The Journal of Nineteenth-Century Americanists* 1, no. 2 (Fall 2013): 343.

14. Adam Gopnik, “I, Nephi: Mormonism and Its Meanings,” *The New Yorker* (August 13, 2012), <https://www.newyorker.com/magazine/2012/08/13/i-nephi>. Gopnik’s occasion is to comment on Mitt Romney’s belief system as he was the Republican Party’s nominee in the year’s U.S. presidential election.

plagiarism of the New Testament.” Brodie stands in the mainstream of critics who read the text badly because she gets the first connection right that the scripture Smith brought forth demonstrates constant reliance on the Bible while she adopts the mistaken modern prejudice against repetition that biblical textuality constantly exhibits.

That the Book of Mormon repeats biblical episodes and narrative contours is the principal criticism of the book in the long historical arc from Alexander Campbell to Mark Twain, to Fawn Brodie, to Adam Gopnick. That biblical feature, so the argument goes, is the central evidence that the record couldn’t have been composed by antique Hebraic historians but must be a novelistic composition produced by a crude, frontier, antebellum farmer, little schooled in the Bible or any formal education. Yet the text doesn’t merely copy the Bible. It cites it in such a way that something entirely new emerges, complicating notions of derivation and source, even challenging the preeminence of the Bible as it reopens the canon to engage a greater abundance of prophetic texts in conversation with each other and sometimes in competition, as Fenton notes.

Gopnick’s, Twain’s, and Brodie’s criticisms of the Book of Mormon are quite durable. When he wrote in *Roughing It* (published in 1872, narrating his journeys through the West between 1861 and 1867) about his two-day visit in 1861 to Salt Lake City when traveling to his brother’s appointment as secretary of the nascent Nevada Territory, Samuel Clemens had to write his brother to refresh his memory of Salt Lake City and Brigham Young, with whom they had an audience. Twain told his brother that the author remembered virtually nothing of the visit, yet he was able to craft sufficient zingers about the residents and their leader to provide a few good laughs by drawing upon common stereotypes of the Latter-day Saints held during the Gilded Age. His comments on the Book of Mormon demonstrate a passing acquaintance with the scripture, and his clever criticisms were mainly that the book was boring and a flagrant repetition of the Bible, basically the same as Brodie’s and Gopnick’s denigrations except sprinkled with shrewd humor.

Folklore, History, and Genre

Folklore has a similar status to literary (and in this instance, by *literary* I mean “fictional”) motifs for historians. The dancing girl requesting a decapitation is unquestionably a folkloristic (oral history) theme. Schildgen notes the strong similarities between the biblical Esther and Salomé stories: “The Esther story, like the John the Baptist episode,

deploys a number of folklore motifs: a corrupt and ineffectual king, opulent court life, manipulative or treacherous villains, innocent male and female victims, and an impossible situation.” Further, she notes from Stith Thompson’s folklore motif index several of such themes present in both stories: “the rash oath, or blind promise . . . in which a wish is granted before the grantor knows what the request or its consequences might be.”¹⁵ Betsworth states that Salomé is an “anti-type of another biblical girl, Esther” and notes the parallels between the two narratives.¹⁶ Baert writes that the motifs of “‘beheading’ and ‘dancing’” present in the John/Salomé narrative have had “an incalculable impact on both exegesis and art history” because these elements are so “freighted with anthropological gender archetypes,”¹⁷ and not just after Caravaggio, Titian, and Wilde, but even in antiquity; the storylines are archetypal and that exemplary status accounts for their occurrence and reoccurrence in many different cultures and places. Similar to literary motifs and historical writing, no firm line separates historical and oral historical themes.

Conventional Motifs in History and Folkloristic History

Under the term “stock situations,” Bacon refers to “conventional, repeated situations readily recognized by readers or audiences as ‘usual’ or ‘trite,’ though they may be given fresh treatment. They are to situations what flat characters are to characterization. The rise of the poor boy from log cabin to White House is a stock situation in American lore.”¹⁸ When nominated to head the presidential ticket at the Democratic National Convention in 1992, Bill Clinton’s Hollywood friends produced a film, *The Man from Hope*.¹⁹ It played on this stock theme: the improbable rise of a boy from a poor, broken family in Hope, Arkansas, to occupy the White House. To conclude that because this story was conventionally framed (and really, can a small town called Hope actually be historical rather than a symbolic projection upon a nostalgic past? Isn’t it too much

15. Brenda Deen Schildgen, “A Blind Promise: Mark’s Retrieval of Esther,” *Poetics Today* 15, no. 1 (Spring 1994): 122.

16. Sharon Betsworth, *The Reign of God Is Such as These: A Socio-Literary Analysis in the Gospel of Mark* (New York: T & T Clark, 2010), 124–25.

17. Barbara Baert, “The Dancing Daughter and the Head of John the Baptist (Mark 6:14–29) Revisited: An Interdisciplinary Approach,” *Louvain Studies* 38 (2014): 6.

18. Wallace A. Bacon, *The Art of Interpretation* (New York: Holt, Rinehart, and Winston, 1966), 385.

19. Clintonlibrary42, “The Man from Hope (1992) [Reuploaded],” YouTube Video, 17:04, August 28, 2018, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=MrujaQDIN28>.

to believe that something good could come from Nazareth? To which I answer, “Come and see”), Clinton is nonhistorical, fictional, would be mistaken. Central to folklore is repetition: of symbols, words, and themes.²⁰ Repetitious motifs define folklore. “To identify or label a verbal account as folklore says nothing one way or the other as to the historicity of that account. Some folklore is historically accurate: some is not. Each instance has to be examined on an individual basis.”²¹

Biblical critics have explored biblical oral tradition. Much of that research sought historical kernels behind the stories. When biblical critics find a folklore theme, they too often dismiss the narrative through commitment to a nineteenth-century positivistic notion of history.²² Oral narrative requires the reader to think differently, to pose different questions of ancient stories in an epoch of virtually universal literacy. Decades of research into the connections between folklore and the biblical text have led to a widespread consensus that “the Bible has oral antecedents, but there is little agreement on the extent to which oral composition and transmission have actually left their mark on the text or the degree to which one might be able to establish this lineage.”²³ Oral history and related folkloristic storytelling are propagated person to person around hearthstones and firesides, generationally from elders to youngsters, and only occasionally survive the transition from oral to literate culture:

The issue of the *historical* Jesus is of no import to the tellers and hearers of stories. The modern stance which separates “authentic” from “inauthentic” words or searches for the “real” Jesus behind texts is alien to oral mentality. Stories and sayings are authenticated not by virtue of their historical reliability, but on the authority of the speaker and by the reception of hearers. This must not suggest that orality has lost all rapport with actuality. But it means from the perspective of language that if Jesus is to be continued in the hearts and

20. Susan Niditch, *Folklore and the Hebrew Bible* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1993), 9–10.

21. Alan Dundes, *Holy Writ as Oral Lit: The Bible as Folklore* (Lanham, MD: Rowman and Littlefield, 1999), 10–11.

22. Niditch, *Folklore*, 24–25.

23. Robert C. Culley, “Oral Tradition and Biblical Studies,” *Oral Tradition* 1, no. 1 (1986): 56.

minds of people, then he must be filtered through the oral medium.²⁴

And that medium is concerned with narrative reality rather than historical reality. We moderns can't help but make such distinctions because we live after Western cultures developed historical consciousness, but we ought to recognize potential distortions to ancient texts that make them mean something vastly different than they meant in earlier times and cultures. At the least, we ought to recognize how our modern habits of thought impact the resulting meaning drawn out of the texts.

History Is as Much a Literary Genre as Folklore Is

In folklore studies, a controversial issue is the relationship between oral tradition and history with, predictably, some dismissing folklore as a source of reliable historical information.²⁵ Oral tradition and historical reliability are complexly related. The standard position is that oral accounts can maintain historical reliability for a maximum of 150 years before being committed to writing. Over longer periods the accounts must be considered fictional.²⁶ The researcher should be cautious about the facile claim that one can tell the historical reliability of a story just from its form; a story that has folkloristic or literary qualities cannot, on the basis of that genre alone, tell us whether it is historically trustworthy.²⁷

The Bible is partly based on oral tradition,²⁸ so exploring its orality is helpful in understanding it. But to say that the gospels have folkloristic elements says nothing about their historicity. This is to enter "what Richard Dorson calls "The battle over the historicity of oral tradition.""²⁹ Some folklore is clearly ahistorical, but other oral traditions assert historicity. "There is a large realm of mental experience which is quite 'true' but to which the crude dichotomy between fiction and history does not apply."³⁰ This is particularly so with material produced before the modern false dichotomy of history/fiction emerged to dominate

24. Werner Kelber, *The Oral and Written Gospel: The Hermeneutics of Speaking and Writing in the Synoptic Tradition, Mark, Paul, and Q* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1983), 71.

25. Richard M. Dorson, *Folklore: Selected Essays* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1972), 199–202.

26. Patricia G. Kirkpatrick, *The Old Testament and Folklore Study* (Sheffield: JSOT, 1988), 102–104.

27. *Ibid.*, 106–107.

28. Derek Brewer, "The Gospels and the Laws of Folktale," *Folklore* 90 (1979): 37.

29. *Ibid.*, 39.

30. *Ibid.*, 39–40.

evaluations of narrative: “Before the 17th century in our modern Western culture, there was much less consciousness of a fixed division between fact and fiction. History, imaginative perception and fiction merged into each other quite easily,”³¹ and this is particularly true of folklore.

Greek and Roman Intertexts Comparable to the Salomé Narrative

This Salomé theme emerges out of folklore in many cultures.³² (Note that although I use the name *Salomé* to refer to this character, she is not named in the gospel of Mark or Matthew; we get her name from Josephus’s account of the Herod Antipas household, and Josephus and the gospels tell quite different versions of the death-of-John-the-Baptist vignette.) Zagona notes its pre-Christian roots, seeing similarities to older Latin stories of decollation: “While the New Testament is generally regarded as the initial source of the Herodias-Salome legend, there is reason to believe that the somewhat grisly aspects of them actually had their origins before the Christian era. One theory is that they originated in Rome during the second century before Christ.”³³ Zagona refers to Roman stories about Flamininus in Cicero and Plutarch.

Plutarch discusses Lucius Flamininus, a vulgar Roman consul who died in 170 B.C., making the theme chronologically prior to New Testament narratives. This story has many elements of the Salomé/John story:

He kept as a companion a boy whom he used to carry about with him, not only when he had troops under his charge, but even when the care of a province was committed to him. One day at a drinking-bout, when the youngster was wantoning with Lucius, “I love you, sir, so dearly,” said he, “that preferring your satisfaction to my own, I came away without seeing the

31. Ibid., 40.

32. Hugh Nibley has discussed the Salomé incident in *Lehi in the Desert; The World of the Jaredites; There Were Jaredites, The Collected Works of Hugh Nibley: Vol. 5*, ed. John Welch, Darrell L. Matthews, and Stephen R. Callister (Salt Lake: Desert Book, 1988), 210–13; he even mentions its folkloristic background. Here he says that “the whole point of this story is that it is highly unoriginal. It is supposed to be” (212). He refers to this Jaredite story as a succession narrative with “the ritual of the dancing princess (represented by the *salme* priestess of the Babylonians, hence the name of *Salome*) who wins the heart of a stranger and induces him to marry her, behead the old king, and mount the throne” (213).

33. Helen Grace Zagona, *The Legend of Salome and the Principle of Art for Art’s Sake* (Geneva: Librairie E. Droz, 1960), 14–15.

gladiators, though I have never seen a man killed in my life.” Lucius, delighted with what the boy said, answered, “Let not that trouble you; I can satisfy that longing,” and with that orders a condemned man to be fetched out of the prison, and the executioner to be sent for, and commands him to strike off the man’s head, before they rose from the table, Valerius Antias only so far varies the story as to make it a woman for whom he did it.³⁴

Bach notes the similarities between the Flamininus story and the Salomé story. “Plutarch’s summary story may be of particular interest to readers tracing the Salomé legend because of the appearance of similar tropes in both versions,” including drunkenness, desire, vulgar pleasures, violation of moral standards, a murder in the feasting hall, and a pleased lover:

[T]he two versions reflect similar tropes: both men were killed to satisfy a need of the ruler to please a young figure of desire. The order of death is not related to any actual crime by the victim. While the biblical text does not indicate that Salomé and Herod had any sort of sexual involvement, he accedes to her wish because she has pleased him and he wishes to please her. In the classical story the consul Flamininus wants to please his lover. Pleasure in both cases overrules justice. Similarly each sexual story overwrites the political one.³⁵

Roman texts aren’t the only potential literary sources for this theme.

Herodotus relates a story (9:108–113) broadly similar to the Esther and Salomé narratives; perhaps Matthew and Mark plagiarized from Herodotus. Xerxes, king of Persia, desires a “young girl” (Araÿnte) but can’t have her, so he marries her to his son. Amestris, Xerxes’ wife, weaves him a beautiful garment he wears for a liaison with Araÿnte. Pleased, he grants her a princely promise — anything she wants. She asks for the mantle. Xerxes foresees trouble, so he offers cities, gold, armies. She declines all other prizes. Amestris hears that Araÿnte has the mantle. As in the Salomé story, Xerxes throws a banquet and grants wishes. Amestris requests (on the king’s birthday, he cannot refuse requests) that Araÿnte’s mother be turned over to her (assuming the mother to be

34. Plutarch, *The Lives of the Noble Grecians and Romans*, trans. John Dryden (New York: Modern Library, n.d.), 462. This story is in the “Life of Flamininus.”

35. Alice Bach, *Women, Seduction, and Betrayal in Biblical Narrative* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1997), 214–15.

the source of the humiliation); she commands that her rival's mother's breasts and tongue be amputated.³⁶ Xerxes is the Persian name of this ruler, but he is likely Ahasuerus in the Hebrew Bible, particularly in the Esther story.

The most improbable aspects of John's decapitation story, Derrett asserts, are paralleled in Herodotus and Athenaeus (the latter the author of the *Deipnosophistae*, a combination gastronomical and philosophical treatise): a princess's provocative dance, a promise of half the kingdom, a deadly wish promised and eventually granted. These features validate the folkloristic aspect of the narrative.³⁷

The stories about Esther and Salomé are similar to Herodotus's Xerxes. In Herodotus, that story is a common type scene with the theme of the vengeful queen. This motif is important for understanding the *Histories*.³⁸ Flory articulates the motif parallel to Mark's Salomé story: "The constituent elements of this motif are the woman's cleverness, the personal or family motive for her revenge, the intricacy of her planning — often over a period of time — and the horrible and usually bloody nature of the revenge itself, which outstrips in ferocity the degree of insult that provoked it."³⁹ The story of Amestris's revenge from book nine is particularly closely linked with one of the first stories in the work, Gyges and the queen's nakedness.⁴⁰ These "companion stories" about Xerxes and Gyges and their queens are "consciously contrasted stories that, together, function as a program for the whole work,"⁴¹ demonstrating the role of chance and the human susceptibility to irrationality. Conventional type scenes in ancient historical works were how those historical texts were viewed as working out history. Keep in mind that Robert Alter originally borrowed the phrase and concept of *type scene* that I have been using from Greek literature, from Homeric scholarship.

Any simplistic explanation that similarity equals dependence must deal with the ubiquity of the theme in many ancient cultures. The reader

36. Herodotus, *The Histories*, trans. A. D. Godley (Cambridge: Harvard University Press—Loeb edition, 1925), 4:285–93.

37. J. Duncan M. Derrett, "Herod's Oath and the Baptist's Head," *Biblische Zeitschrift* 9 (1965): 49 [339]. This article was later republished in J. Duncan M. Derrett, *Law in the New Testament* (Eugene, OR: Sipf and Stock, 2005), 339–62.

38. Stewart Flory, *The Archaic Smile of Herodotus* (Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 1987), 42.

39. Flory, *Archaic*, 42.

40. *Ibid.*

41. *Ibid.*, 47.

would soon be engulfed in a twisted tangle of historical precedence, borrowing, and narrative theft that, subtracting the pejorative meanings of *plagiarism*, we would praise as allusion and intertextuality in the antique preference for traditional stories that repeat foundational and recurring heritage events.

The Salomé/Esther Intertext

Any adequate account of the John and Salomé story in Mark must deal with its relationship to Esther. The Bible collects stories in which women use wine and food as seductive tools toward their ultimate goal of decapitating or eliminating men: Judith, Esther, Jael, Delilah, Salomé.⁴² These stories warn men of the dangerous mixture of appetites: sex, food, wine, and women. “Expecting platters of pleasure and celebration, the male reader sees his own death as the main course.”⁴³ These stories share a Mediterranean theme portraying women as dangerous.

Judith and Esther are so similar that biblical critics often raise questions about their historicity. These stories are paradigmatic with “models of courage for moral entertainment.”⁴⁴ Bach gathers the biblical stories in which a woman has a man decapitated or does the deed herself. “Food and drink are two of the temptations that lead to sexual desire and death in each of these stories.”⁴⁵ Herod Antipas’s feast that leads to a beheading is paralleled by Ahasuerus’s constant feasting. The story of Esther is invoked by the gospel writers only in Mark’s narrative about Herod Antipas, Herodias, and John the Baptizer (that is, Esther isn’t alluded to in Matthew’s version of the story).⁴⁶ By quoting from the book of Esther and shadowing some of its themes, Mark places John in the context of ancient Hebraic history and ritual (think of Purim and celebrating a deliverance from a pogrom, and the Jewish framing of various attempts at genocide since as repetitions of Haman’s plan) as not just a Christian forerunner but also a successor to Israel’s prophetic tradition.

Rather than merely appropriating Hebraic traditions for the new Christian sect and abandoning their cultural matrix, the author recalls and restores them in an effort to remain connected to them and to understand the present in terms

42. Bach, *Women*, 4.

43. *Ibid.*, 9.

44. *Ibid.*, 200.

45. *Ibid.*, 213.

46. Schildgen, “Blind,” 115–16.

of the past. Rather than attempting to transcend the past, to see the present as a fulfillment of the past, or to replace the past with the present, he invokes the Hebrew past for its moral superiority and not, as is often assumed, because it exemplifies a tradition which the Christian faith subverts. In other words, instead of promoting a rupture with Hebrew tradition, Mark's writing actually pursues a morally informed retrieval of that tradition.⁴⁷

That is what happens when the New Testament or Book of Mormon invokes the Hebrew Bible, or even when parts of the Tanakh invoke other parts of the sacred text: they are updating the tradition and making it relevant for the writers' day, paying homage to the heritage while adapting to contemporary circumstances in the belief that God's way is one eternal round that repeats the events of the past with a difference. Instead of promoting a sharp rupture with Hebraic traditions, Mark scissors and sews together a textuality of continuity. "In selecting specific texts, he was establishing continuity with the past by showing deference to its most revered textual resources,"⁴⁸ engaging in what Michael Fishbane notes is a primary textual feature of the Hebrew Bible: inner-biblical exegesis. Mark's use of Ahasuerus's words, which Antipas repeats,⁴⁹ "makes his [Mark's] version of John's death a commentary on the Book of Esther; the retrieval also draws attention to the literary parallels between the two stories."⁵⁰ Both "kings" promise half the kingdom at

47. Ibid., 116. Although composed of the same writings, the Old Testament, the Tanakh, and the Hebrew Bible are different names because those texts are fitted into different canons and traditions. The word *Tanakh* is an initialism of the Hebrew words for the Torah, the Prophets, and the Writings. The phrase *Hebrew Bible* is a scholarly invention to avoid the use of preferential terms for the scripture in the Christian and Jewish traditions. The concept of the *Old Testament* frames the Hebraic writing as an appendage to the New Testament. A passage from the Tanakh can have substantially different meaning than the same excerpt in the Old Testament because of the background assumptions that cohabit with each term.

48. Ibid., 117.

49. "And when the daughter of the said Herodias came in, and danced, and pleased Herod and them that sat with him, the king said unto the damsel, Ask of me whatsoever thou wilt, and I will give it thee. And he sware unto her, Whatsoever thou shalt ask of me, I will give it thee, *unto the half of my kingdom*" (Mark 6:22–23); "Then said the king unto her, What wilt thou, queen Esther? and what is thy request? it shall be *even given thee to the half of the kingdom*" (Esther 5:3 — see also 5:6; 7:2).

50. Ibid. Just preceding the story of dancing and beheading among the Jaredites, the phrase used by Moroni to describe a rebellion by Jared against Omer is another

a banquet; the gathering at which “kings” make a blank-check promise isn’t for common people (such as Andrew Jackson’s seven-ton cheese-block social in the White House),⁵¹ but for courtiers, aristocrats, military officers, and elites.⁵²

Repetitions of Grandstanding Kings and the “Blind” Promise

The allusive connections between the stories of a “king” making a blind promise combined with a dance and beheading bind the narratives together to reveal connections we would not see without some explicit sign such as the princely promise. Such a version of textuality assumed not just a relationship between Old and New Testament stories but also a theory of time that challenges our modern linear temporality, which portrays movement only one direction — toward the future. The biblical notion of time repeats important events and covenants by sending the reader back in time to forecast a future with present and past intertwined. “In a historically minded culture like Judaism, time is certainly linear, but it moves back and forth in historical linearity, not only forward into the future.”⁵³ Not only is our perception of Mark changed by recognizing his invocation of Esther, but our understanding of the Esther story is transformed also: we gain understanding and wisdom by traveling the distance and time on the dusty historical and literary roads and byways between Macherus, Shushan, and Heth.

The Esther narrative is itself full of allusions. Berg, in good historical-critical fashion, says these thematic connections indicate that Esther isn’t historical.⁵⁴ Some say the Mark story of John’s death isn’t historical because it isn’t original. The influence of Esther is obvious because Antipas is portrayed as a king, but his arrangement with Rome as tetrarch was considerably less than kingly. So Antipas’s promise of “half my kingdom” couldn’t be historical, says Taylor, but likely was derived

signpost to the allusive connection between this cluster of stories, for “when [Jared] had gained the *half of the kingdom* he gave battle unto his father, and he did carry away his father into captivity” (Ether 8:3, see also verse 2) before Omer is restored to the throne and Jared’s life spared to attempt insurrection again and murder.

51. See the West Wing excerpted version of Josiah Bartlett’s big-block-of-cheese day at kireon1, “SGTE,SGTJ Leo’s Cheese Speech,” YouTube video, 2:42, May 25, 2013, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Vm9HZq53rqU>.

52. F. Scott Spencer, *Dancing Girls, Loose Ladies, and Women of the Cloth: The Women in Jesus’ Life* (New York: Continuum, 2004), 53.

53. Schildgen, “Blind,” 118–19.

54. Sandra Beth Berg, *The Book of Esther: Motifs, Themes, and Structure* (Missoula, MT: Scholars, 1979), 123.

from Esther 5:6 and 7:2. Other Jewish stories probably contributed to Herodias's shrewish portrayal.⁵⁵ Listed below are relevant passages from the book of Esther:

Now it came to pass in the days of Ahasuerus, (this is Ahasuerus which reigned, from India even unto Ethiopia, over an hundred and seven and twenty provinces:)

That in those days, when the king Ahasuerus sat on the throne of his kingdom, which was in Shushan the palace,

In the third year of his reign, **he made a feast unto all his princes and his servants**; the power of Persia and Media, the nobles and princes of the provinces, being before him: ...

On the seventh day, when the heart of the king was merry with wine, he commanded Mehuman, Biztha, Harbona, Bigtha, and Abagtha, Zethar, and Carcas, the seven chamberlains that served in the presence of Ahasuerus the king,

To bring Vashti the queen before the king with the crown royal, to shew the people and the princes her beauty: for she was fair to look on.

But the queen Vashti refused to come at the king's commandment by his chamberlains: therefore was the king very wroth, and his anger burned in him. ...

And Memucan answered before the king and the princes, Vashti the queen hath not done wrong to the king only, but also to all the princes, and to all the people that are in all the provinces of the king Ahasuerus.

For this deed of the queen shall come abroad unto all women, so that they shall despise their husbands in their eyes, when it shall be reported, The king Ahasuerus commanded Vashti the queen to be brought in before him, but she came not.

Likewise shall the ladies of Persia and Media say this day unto all the king's princes, which have heard of the deed of the queen. Thus shall there arise too much contempt and wrath.

55. Joan E. Taylor, *The Immerser: John the Baptist within Second Temple Judaism* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1997), 246–47; Derrett too notes the similarities between stories, “Herod’s,” 55 [343].

If it please the king, let there go a royal commandment from him, and let it be written among the laws of the Persians and the Medes, that it be not altered, That Vashti come no more before king Ahasuerus; and let the king give her royal estate unto another that is better than she. (Esther 1:1–3, 10–12, 16–19)

“Little Girls” Dancing before Kings and Other Lecherous Fools

Roger Aus demonstrates the connections between Salomé and Esther, mediated by rabbinic commentaries on Esther.

Almost all commentators agree that Salomé’s behavior here is hardly imaginable for a Herodian “princess.” Whatever view one may have of this family’s morals, no female member of the aristocracy would ever have performed a solo dance before a large group of half-drunk men.... This motif must be sought elsewhere [other than in Jewish writings], in pagan customs.⁵⁶

Greek and Roman sources often used such dancing girls to denote prostitutes or courtesans, but the practice was not Jewish. This is reflected in 2 Targum to Esther 2:8 where the Persian girls hope to succeed Queen Vashti by dancing to demonstrate their comeliness; the targum has Esther refusing to dance.⁵⁷ This dancing theme in the Baptist narrative is dependent on the Esther midrashim or earlier iterations of the tradition.⁵⁸ This story relies on knowledge of Persian practices; Aus

56. Roger Aus, *Water into Wine and the Beheading of John the Baptist: Early Jewish-Christian Interpretation of Esther 1 in John 2:1–11 and Mark 6:17–29* (Atlanta: Scholars, 1988), 50–51.

57. Ibid., 51. As Aus notes (2), the Esther Scroll dates to the fourth century BCE, although that version wasn’t completed in its definitive form until the second century. The aggadic elaborations had been included in the Septuagint translation by the second century. Even if the final editing of the targums and midrashim on Esther occurred centuries later, and even though they also show much definitively later development of earlier haggadic traditions, nevertheless they *also* contain materials which go back to the earlier Tannaim (25–25), but even that content can’t be dated with more precision. The Second Targum is an Aramaic midrash on the Esther story that collected rabbinic elaborations on Esther’s biblical account variously dated from the fourth to the tenth century in the form now available.

58. Dating specific aggadic stories was possible only once the oral traditions were committed to writing in the Middle Ages, but “it is clear that a very considerable part of the material preserved in the Talmudic-Midrashic sources is much older than it appears at first sight to be.” If one asserts a directional influence

refers to Herodotus 5.18 where feast guests say to their host, “It is our Persian custom after the giving of any great banquet to bring in also the concubines and wedded wives to sit by the men.”⁵⁹ So also one Esther midrash says the following about Persian and Mede dancing:

Rabbi Jose said: It was the universal custom of the kings of Media when they were eating and drinking to cause their women to come before them stark naked, playing and dancing, in order to see the beauty of their figures. When the wine entered the heart of Ahasuerus, he wished to act in this manner with Vashti the queen. She was the daughter of a king, and was not willing to do this. He decreed concerning her, and she was slain.⁶⁰

between the rabbinic Esther elaborations of the scriptural story and the New Testament stories of the Baptist and Herod Antipas, then that direction is from Esther midrashim to the gospels. “Much of the finest aggadah, including much that bears the names of later teachers, originated during the period of the Second Commonwealth. Some of the most creative spirits among the Pharisees remain forever nameless.” Bernard J. Bamberger, “The Dating of Aggadic Materials,” *Journal of Biblical Literature* 68, no. 2 (June 1949): 123. The Second Commonwealth period, also called the Second Temple period, dates from the return of the Jews from Mesopotamian exile sponsored by the Persian empire with the impetus to rebuild the Solomonic temple (which return started in 538 BCE) to the Roman destruction of the temple (70 CE). Although many of these traditional stories were first written after the New Testament writings, the rabbinic accounts were handed down orally for generations. “We find, then, that many statements ascribed to rabbis who lived from the second to the fourth centuries [CE] are actually much older.” Ibid., 120.

59. Aus, *Water*, 52.

60. Ibid. The Gemara (consolidated from oral tradition into written form between AD 200 and 500) in rabbinic tradition has Ahasuerus initiating a contest over whether Median or Persian women were more beautiful. His courtiers follow the king’s cues that neither is most beautiful but Chaldean women are (Vashti was Chaldean). The drunken men ask to see her, as long as the Queen comes before them naked. She, daughter of a king, views such a demand as reprehensible. The Babylonian rabbinic materials later consolidated into the Babylonian Talmud are decidedly more negative about Vashti’s character than were the materials gathered into the Jerusalem Talmud. Dating oral tradition is difficult and imprecise, but these oral expansions of scripture emerged after the return from Babylonian/Persian exile in 538 BC among the precursors of the Pharisees in the Tannaitic Period, which was triggered by the destruction of the Jerusalem temple (AD 70). The Pharisees, upon the loss of the temple and its institutions, were succeeded by the schools of traditionists who converted from memory-only based transmission of tradition to literary-plus-memory generational transfer. The *tannaim* were the rabbis who collected these midrashim and legal interpretations from earlier

Another midrashic explanation notes that Vashti was beheaded.⁶¹ After displacing Vashti, Ahasuerus holds a contest inviting the virgins into his bed. Esther wins the competition and becomes the new queen. Vashti's midrashic refusal to dance bridges the New and Old Testament canonical stories.

The Salomé story and the Esther narratives establish a relationship between Ahasuerus and Herod Antipas: "A parodic reading would connect the two kings, one a pagan Babylonian and one a Jewish puppet of the Roman regime, through their lavish celebrations. Vashti, a pagan queen, refuses to perform in spite of her husband's command; the daughter of Herodias, an adulterous improper Jewish queen, dances even before being offered the prize."⁶² The gospels portray Herod Antipas, although only a tetrarch (which could be translated as "the governor of one fourth" of a province), as a king to link with the Esther story. "Assuming Mark's typological casting of Herod as a king, scholars aver that Mark portrays Herod in the visage of a Septuagint 'king' type like Ahab or Ahasuerus."⁶³

material into what became the Jerusalem Talmud and the Babylonian Talmud: the Mishnah, the Tosefta, and halakhic interpretations. Originally these traditions were oral and emerged from the various rabbinic schools where they were memorized word-for-word for diffusion to the larger school in the Common Era.

61. Ibid. The *Midrash Panim Aherim*, version B, para. 1 account has Vashti decapitated for refusing the king's demand. This midrash, in the oldest extant manuscript, was written in the Middle Ages, the 12th or 13th century, but circulated orally for centuries before being committed to writing. Dating oral traditions before they were written is difficult and imprecise. Two main positions have emerged about the possibility of dating these rabbinic midrashim: both hold that "rabbinic oral tradition extends far back into the Second Temple period." Martin S. Jaffee, "How Much 'Orality' in Oral Torah? New Perspectives on the Composition and Transmission of Early Rabbinic Tradition," *Shofar* 10, no. 2 (Winter 1992): 53–54. The longer-standing scholarly position asserts that such rabbinic tradition can be provided a reliable provenance to that Second Commonwealth period and "represents a coherent, self-consciously preserved body of knowledge which can be reconstructed to a significant degree from extant rabbinic texts." Jaffee, "How," 54. The other strain of thought "argues that while early rabbinic society must certainly have had oral traditions, it is no longer possible to reconstruct these on the basis of surviving literature." The older, more established, view "has remained nearly unchallenged within even historical informed Jewish theological circles." Jaffee, "How," 62.

62. Bach, *Women*, 233.

63. Abraham Smith, "Tyranny Exposed: Mark's Typological Characterization of Herod Antipas (Mark 6:14–29)," *Biblical Interpretation* 14, no. 3 (2006): 267.

Food, Sex, Seduction, and Manslaughter

Esther becomes queen without revealing her Hebrew identity. Haman, jealous of Esther's uncle Mordecai and furious that Mordecai refuses to bend the knee to him, plots a Jewish pogrom, and Esther foils his plan by throwing a feast, inviting Ahasuerus and Haman: "The site Esther chooses for her seduction is not the bedroom but the banquet hall. It is food, wine, and spectacle that Esther uses rather than her body to get the king to order Haman's death."⁶⁴ After Esther petitions to save the Jews and reveals herself to be one (and therefore under threat from Haman's proposed pogrom), an agitated Ahasuerus leaves; when he reenters the room, he believes the pleading and clutching Haman is raping Esther. Haman loses his life. Esther's petition to spare the Jews is granted, Haman is hanged instead of Mordecai, and Purim becomes a Jewish celebration in perpetuity.

Speaking of Herod Antipas's promise, Bach notes the similarity to the book of Esther and the elements of promise, food, desire, and death:

A ruler's similarly foolish promise is found in the book of Esther, where besotted king Ahasuerus, at a banquet, promises the young Queen Esther, also termed *korasion* in the LXX, the apple of his eye, that she may have anything she desires up to half his kingdom. Both stories involve women manipulating men through wining, dining, and gazing at delicious feminine beauty. Each of the all-powerful kings ends up ordering a man killed although he may not truly want to execute the man. Each ruler violates legal authority with impunity because each has had his mind "poisoned" by desiring a very tasty female dish.⁶⁵

Like Antipas, Ahasuerus makes the princely offer: "As kings besotted by female beauty are wont to do, Ahasuerus offers Esther half his kingdom. Like Salomé, who receives the same offer, there is a literary gasp at this point, in which the reader understands at the same time as the female character that she has won, she will get her wish."⁶⁶

The king plays the important role of one conditioned by license and pleasure to fulfill his own desires: "The monarch in the book of Esther, however, is a buffoon, the typological motif of the stupid king, a dangerous, hedonistic fool, capable of being led astray by evil men and

64. Bach, *Women*, 191.

65. *Ibid.*, 231.

66. *Ibid.*, 198.

not reliably able to choose between good and bad advice.”⁶⁷ Ahasuerus is the “caricature of a typical Oriental potentate,” of which Radday lists a number: Cyrus the Great, Darius II, Artaxerxes II, Ptolemy II, Alexander Balas, John Hurcan, and Herod. “Jews have indeed had much experience of similar unpredictable rulers, from antiquity to modern times.”⁶⁸ Such erratic and foolish rulers aren’t relegated to the ancient Near East; in contemporary times we no longer have multi-potent kings in political systems with separation of powers, but Russia, the United Kingdom, and the United States (to cite just a few examples) have endured recent similar impulsive, capricious, and vain rulers. Such cyclical historical experiences aren’t confined to antiquity or faraway realms but are universal archetypes and historical figures because they emerge in every age and political system.

Connecting Narratives Using Key Words

The parallels between Ahasuerus and Herod Antipas are striking. Mark 6:20 shows “King” Herod Antipas perplexed at John’s message. Antipas is baffled because Jewish tradition has King Ahasuerus being puzzled, a word-play on the eunuch’s name: Mehuman.⁶⁹ Only after Ahasuerus’s confusion does the king have Vashti decapitated (in the midrashic, not the biblical, accounts) and likewise after his “puzzlement”⁷⁰ does “king” Herod Antipas have the Baptist decollated.⁷¹

Salomé is a “little girl” in the Mark account because that is what an Esther midrash requires. Aus says Mark portrays her as around twelve at the time.⁷² Mark uses the Greek *korasion*, “little girl” (6:22 and 6:28) to refer to Salomé and other young female characters in the stories surrounding the Salomé narrative.⁷³ Aus notes Salomé’s dependence on Herodias, taking it as a sign of the daughter’s immaturity. “Such

67. Susan Niditch, *Underdogs and Tricksters: A Prelude to Biblical Folklore* (San Francisco: Harper and Row, 1987), 151.

68. Yehuda T. Radday, “Esther with Humour,” *On Humour and the Comic in the Hebrew Bible*, ed. Yehuda T. Radday and Athalya Brenner (Sheffield, UK: Almond, 1990), 295–96; see also Bach, *Women*, 187.

69. Aus, *Water*, 43.

70. Some translations follow the KJV by stating that Herod “did many things” (Mark 6:20) with the Baptist, while other translations render the phrase instead along lines that Antipas “was greatly puzzled” by John.

71. Aus, *Water*, 44.

72. Ibid., 49.

73. Kara J. Lyons-Pardue, “‘Little Daughters’ and Big Scriptural Allusions: Reading Three of Mark’s Stories Featuring Women with Care,” in *Listening Again to*

behavior to the modern mind would at the most warrant the term *kore*, ‘girl,’ but not *korasion*, ‘little girl.’”⁷⁴ This rare term is used in Greek Esther versions. As Ahasuerus hunts for a new wife, the *korasia* hope to be selected, and dancing before the king might be part of the young girls’ dress rehearsal. “The term ‘little girl’ in the Baptist narrative, though strange to the modern mind, is thus appropriate to its context.”⁷⁵

In the Masoretic Hebrew text, the Esther narrative doesn’t say how Vashti died (or even if). The Septuagint Greek-language story is expanded to include her execution (perhaps the Masoretic and Septuagintal texts are working from different manuscript traditions). Other rabbinic sources fill the gap with the beheading, including one in which the king’s eunuch says, “My lord the king, say but a word and I will bring in her head on a platter.”⁷⁶

Other parallels emerge. Aus notes the similarities between Mark’s story and Herodotus’s story of Xerxes (9.108–113) (although not definitive, the king the Bible calls “Ahasuerus” and the king Herodotus calls “Xerxes” appear to be the same person). Aus posits the Esther writer borrowed material so that the elements “filled in” by Jewish tradition corresponded to Herodotus. Therefore, the Herodotus, Esther, and Mark stories of banquets and beheadings are complexly interrelated to each other, but all preceded by Herodotus.⁷⁷

There was no birthday banquet of a “King” Herod Antipas, no dancing of a “little girl” Salome before drunken men, no head dripping of blood brought in on a platter. Instead, the narrative from Judaic haggada on King Ahasuerus’ birthday banquet, at which his innocent queen, Vashti, lost her head, provides the background for the questions of why and how Herod Antipas beheaded John. It does so in a typically Palestinian-Judaic way. It fills in what is not explicitly stated in the text. The question of historicity should not be asked here. The narrative “truth” in the setting of the gospel lies on a different level: John’s death prefigures Jesus’, and the Baptist’s tomb, however, Jesus’ activity continues or begins on

the Text: New Testament Studies in Honor of George Lyons, ed. Richard P. Thompson (Claremont, CA: Claremont, 2020), 46.

74. Aus, *Water*, 49.

75. *Ibid.*, 50.

76. *Ibid.*, 63.

77. *Ibid.*, 71.

a new level for those who confess him as the Son of God, the Lord of their lives.⁷⁸

Aus notes ten broad similarities between the Esther midrashim and John's death in Mark 6:17–29. "Cumulatively, however, they simply provide too many exact word and motif similarities for the latter to be dismissed as mere 'reminiscences' of the former."⁷⁹ In other words, what too often to the modern mind appears to be clumsy narrative piracy should instead be read as sophisticated intertextuality.

If the Book of Mormon plagiarizes from the Baptist story, then the Baptist story does the same from Esther rabbinic commentaries (or from the predecessors to those commentaries, in written or oral form). The following results if you let this simplistic reading theory go unchallenged: "It is difficult to decide if the account of John's death in the Gospels is the original source for Salome's story or if the biblical version is already a remake of a much older legend — that of a god like Adonis or Attis sacrificed to a Great Goddess, the incarnation of mother earth. There are many suggestions that the latter hypothesis is correct."⁸⁰ The generalizable result of getting the Ether story's texture wrong is that vast swaths of the New Testament and Hebrew Bible are also nonhistorical and fictional.

The Antiquity of the Salomé Motif Refracted through Parallelomania and Parallelism

The connections between European folklore and the Salomé story are taken by Kuryluk to be extremely complex: "The antiquity, depth, complexity, and diverse aspects of the Herodias, Salome, and John stories were only gradually discovered in the course of the nineteenth century by scholars of folklore, religion, and anthropology. Their studies disclose the pre-Christian roots of the biblical story."⁸¹ These folkloric motifs have a deeper and more complex genealogy than simplistic notions about plagiarism permit.

Brodie and Ham don't care that their textual theory also jeopardizes belief in the Bible's historicity. Similarly, acting the village atheist on the Internet, Steven Carr makes the following point, citing the very passage from which Brodie began:

78. Ibid., 73–74.

79. Ibid., 67.

80. Ewa Kuryluk, *Salome and Judas in the Cave of Sex: The Grotesque: Origins, Iconography, Techniques* (Evanston, IL: Northwestern University Press, 1987), 192.

81. Kuryluk, *Salome*, 201.

Christians routinely dismiss many stories in the Book of Mormon and the Qur'an as being obviously stolen from previous stories. They are right to do so, but this article discusses whether the same rules apply to the miracles of Jesus. Were these stories also stolen from previous stories? I set out to show that Christians must concede that the evidence that the miracle stories of Jesus were taken from the Old Testament is just as convincing as the evidence that stories in the Book of Mormon and the Qur'an were simply lifted from the Old Testament.⁸²

The evidence is “just as” convincing for the Bible and Book of Mormon, but in each case, it amounts to little. Carr follows by claiming, “What could be more obvious and clear-cut?” But this interpretation is neither obvious nor clear-cut. Carr asserts again: “Just as Joseph Smith did in the Book of Mormon, the early Christians drew upon the one source that they held to be infallible — the Old Testament. They felt quite justified in taking stories from the Old Testament and applying them to Jesus.” The Jewish tradition (from which Christianity didn't finalize a separation until after the gospels and Pauline epistles were written) has never treated the biblical text as infallible in the way moderns think of infallibility, so Carr vastly misunderstands the textual theory applicable in this argument.⁸³ Brodie's claims aren't superior to Carr's. It is entirely reasonable to apply the principle consistently to the two scriptures. The principle itself is problematic and uncritical, a problem never confronted by readers of both scriptural texts who don't think through the possibility that ancient writers and readers thought very differently about how stories might be true or historical than we moderns do (ancient readers aren't fixated on the historical questions moderns are). If a reader gets the foundational textual questions crooked and askew (let alone answers to those question), then the floors, ceilings, walls, joists, and roof will be impossible to true up, level, and plumb throughout the rest of the house.

82. Steven Carr, “Miracles and the Book of Mormon,” Jan. 27, 2001, <https://web.archive.org/web/20190316063038/http://www.bowness.demon.co.uk/mirc1.htm>.

83. Carr imposes Catholic and modern concepts on ancient texts, thereby thoroughly misunderstanding them. See Joshua Berman, *Ani Maamin: Biblical Criticism, Historical Truth, and the Thirteen Principles of Faith* (New Milford, CT: Maggid, 2020). See also Joshua A. Berman, *Inconsistency in the Torah: Ancient Literary Conventions and the Limits of Source Criticism* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2017).

From an evangelical apologetic perspective, Glenn Miller responds to Carr with the necessary point that “what *seems* ‘obvious and clear-cut’ *still needs to be* demonstrated with evidence and argument.”⁸⁴ Engaging in what biblical scholars often deride as “parallelomania,” “that extravagance among scholars which first overdoes the supposed similarities in passages then proceeds to describe source and derivation as if implying literary connection flowing in an inevitable or predetermined direction”⁸⁵ is simplistic. That stories are similar isn’t enough to conclude that one story borrows from another. Some channel of transmission must be demonstrated, but more importantly the narratives must have a complex of common elements: “As a safeguard, this demand for complexity or pattern seems so reasonable that few would want to challenge it.”⁸⁶ We need better informed and more catholic critics of the Book of Mormon.

Tigay cites a couple of literary critics on this matter. Let me refer to a fuller quotation from Wellek and Warren than the Tigay source cites:

84. Glen Miller, “Good Question . . . did the gospel authors simply rip-off stories from the OT and ascribe them to Jesus?,” Christian Think Tank, May 3, 1999, <https://www.christian-thinktank.com/qotripoff.html>. This material from Fawn Brodie shows up many times in anti-Mormon books and web pages. For example, like Ham’s plagiary, one website plagiarizes Brodie without attribution (and irony): the “daughter of Jared danced before the king (Ether 8) like the daughter of Herodias (Matthew 14) (decapitation followed in both cases).” See “Questions related to the Book of Mormon and other items on Mormonism and Joseph Smith,” About The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints (website), <https://www.lds-mormon.com/bookofmormonquestions.shtml/#BOM8>. The other parts of Brodie’s paragraph also show up in this vicinity under the heading “Why do so many stories seem like exaggerated borrowings from the Bible?” Failure of originality often accompanies failure to acknowledge borrowings (while the critics at the same time are accusing the Book of Mormon of plagiarism and a destitution of novelty). I am not sure who originally stole Fawn Brodie’s paragraph to reproduce without bibliographic information on the Internet. You can also find the same material at “Difficult Questions for Mormons,” The Interactive Bible, <http://www.bible.ca/mor-questions.htm>. There is some paradox in Brodie’s charges of plagiarism being so often plagiarized on the Internet.

85. The words are S. Sandmel’s from “Parallelomania,” *Journal of Biblical Literature* 81 (1962): 1–13. I am quoting them from Jeffrey H. Tigay, “On Evaluating Claims of Literary Borrowing,” *The Tablet and the Scroll: Near Eastern Studies in Honor of William W. Hallo*, ed. Mark E. Cohen, Daniel C. Snell, and David B. Weisberg (Bethesda, MD: CDL, 1993), 250, <https://web.archive.org/web/20080314201818/http://ccat.sas.upenn.edu/jwst/borrow.htm>.

86. Tigay, “On Evaluating,” 251.

Parallels must be real parallels, not vague similarities assumed to turn, by mere multiplication, into proof. Forty noughts still make nought. Furthermore, parallels must be exclusive parallels; that is, there must be reasonable certainty that they cannot be explained by a common source, a certainty attainable only if the investigator has a wide knowledge of literature or if the parallel is a highly intricate pattern rather than an isolated “motif” or word.⁸⁷

Abuses of parallels are rampant and common among modern readers. The discovery of thematic parallels is merely the first step beyond which artless readers rarely go.

But most questions of literary relationships are, obviously, far more complex and require for their solution critical analysis, for which the bringing together of parallels is merely a minor instrument. The defects of many studies of this kind lie precisely in their ignoring this truth: in their attempts to isolate one single trait, they break the work of art into little pieces of mosaic. The relationships between two or more works of literature can be discussed profitably only when we see them in their proper place within the scheme of literary development. Relationships between works of art present a critical problem of comparing two wholes, two configurations not to be broken into isolated components except for preliminary study.⁸⁸

The Book of Mormon is, in other words, too complex for such inadequate explanations asserting plagiarism upon a surface reading of the text because such assertions fragment both the predecessor and successor texts without attempting to reassemble the wholes individually or in combination.

In this effort to pry apart the two types of Book of Mormon critics, let me cite first Fawn Brodie again and then, in a parallel column, an evangelical Christian under her heading of “Borrowings from the Bible”:

87. Rene Wellek and Austin Warren. *Theory of Literature*, 3rd ed. (New York: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1956), 258.

88. Ibid.

Fawn Brodie	Ruth Tucker
Many stories he borrowed from the Bible. The daughter of Jared, like Salome, danced before a king and a decapitation followed. Aminadi, like Daniel, deciphered handwriting on a wall, and Alma was converted after the exact fashion of St. Paul. The daughters of the Lamanites were abducted like the dancing daughters of Shiloh; and Ammon, the American counterpart of David, for want of a Goliath slew six sheep-rustlers with his sling. ⁸⁹	Many of the stories in the <i>Book of Mormon</i> were, as Fawn Brodie and many others have shown, borrowed from the Bible. The daughter of Jared, like Salome, danced before a king and a decapitation followed. Aminadi, like Daniel, deciphered handwriting on a wall, and Alma was converted after the exact fashion of St. Paul. The daughters of the Lamanites were abducted like the dancing daughters of Shiloh; and Ammon, the American counterpart of David, for want of a Goliath slew six sheep rustlers with his sling. ⁹⁰

Tucker includes no quotation marks, yet she is obviously citing Brodie nearly word for word. I doubt any deception is intended here; the plagiarist does, after all, cite her source while taking credit for Brodie's wording. Yet so many critics who accuse Joseph Smith of plagiarizing from the Bible end up plagiarizing from the Brodie bible, without even understanding the modern notion of plagiarism — let alone the relevant rhetorical concepts such as allusion and metalepsis.

Dancing Women and Lost Heads

Book of Mormon narrative deserves better readings. These readers I have surveyed fail Wellek and Warren's test that those asserting literary dependence must be widely read. The second criterion is that the two texts share a complex literary pattern rather than isolated features.

As a point of accuracy, note that Brodie fails to summarize correctly. First, the character doesn't "dance before a king," as Brodie claims; she dances before Akish,⁹¹ an ally of the king and later conspirator against him. Second, at the time of the conspiratorial dance, Jared plans to decollate his father (Omer, the king) but doesn't succeed. Brodie's brief summary implies that the daughter of Jared danced before a King Akish and a beheading of King Omer followed as a result, as quickly as in the

89. Brodie, *No Man*, 62–63.

90. Ruth A. Tucker, *Another Gospel: Cults, Alternative Religions and the New Age Movement* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1989), 55.

91. At the time of the dance, Akish is at most only an aspiring king; at the time of the dance (Ether 8:11), Akish is designated "the son of Kimnor," and only after intervening events such as Akish's organization of a secret criminal society and Omer's dream telling him to flee the land does Jared grant Akish his daughter as wife and Akish is mentioned in regard to kingship (Ether 9:6).

Mark story, where the implication of the story's timeframe is that Salomé's dance, the blind promise, the consultation and request, the execution of John, and his banquet-ready presentation on a platter happen in quick succession, perhaps while the drunken feast still progresses (Ahasuerus's banquet lasts 180 days, after all [Esther 1:4]). Such a summary, though, smooths over details and elides the difference between Mark's story of John and Salomé and the account in Ether of Jared, Akish, and Jared's daughter through ambiguous paraphrase.

Akish later decapitates Jared (his co-conspirator), so the dancing and the beheading are removed from each other. The story provides no timeline, but years may have passed between the dancing and Jared's death. So many narrated events intervene between the dancing and Jared's beheading that the connection must be defended, not just asserted. The dancing occurs in Ether 8:11, and the decollation happens in Ether 9:5, 20 verses later. Intervening events include Akish's administration of a secret oath to an incipient Gadianton-style criminal gang, Moroni's digression on the similarity between Nephite and Jaredite secret societies, Omer's departure into the wilderness, Jared's anointing as king, the marriage of Jared's daughter to Akish, and Akish's secret combination to behead Jared. Of course, narrative time doesn't have to correspond to chronological time. Jared became king, but because "the Lord warned Omer in a dream that he should depart out of the land; wherefore Omer departed out of the land with his family" (Ether 9:3) and his head; the originally intended decapitation target escapes safely and one of the decollation conspirators is the one beheaded. The decollation story in the Book of Mormon isn't rotely repetitive from the narrative of the Baptist's death. Although a common occurrence in antiquity, the Ether decapitation account is both recurrent and original — adapted to its own context while recounting a story ever new yet so familiar in human societies.

Girardian Stories of Ambition, Greed, Murder, and Human Nature

This story line is repeated throughout literary history and is sometimes called a "Girardian story," named after René Girard, a portion of whose work analyzed such narratives.⁹² A Girardian story, like the Herod-

92. Girard was a French literary critic/philosopher/religious commentator (although he spent his entire academic career in the U.S.) whose analysis of myth, the Bible, Shakespeare, Dostoevsky, and many other generative texts of Western culture advocates pacificism in the face of the violence endemic to human culture.

family narrative, overflows with greed, ambition, and desire, as do a vast collection of narratives from antiquity, political journalism, historical accounts, TV shows and movies (an Internet search finds just a few named examples: *Game of Thrones*, *The Manchurian Candidate*, *JFK*, *House of Cards*, *I ... for Icarus*, *The Day of the Jackal*, *Wolf Hall* — the last of which even comes with beheadings), and soap operas, operas, and phantoms of the opera more generally narrating the evil and rotten state of the dramatic stages in the U.S., France, Britain, and Denmark's fictional and historical — and is therefore ripe for a Girardian reading. Girard's one great and consistent theme is based on his view of universal human nature: humans are imitative creatures driven by desire to overcome a mimetic opponent and possess what the slavish double has and covets. These mimetic cycles spiral out of control, resulting in a scapegoating mechanism where individuals and groups single out an innocent victim (individual or group) at which to direct their violent passions. After a spasm of violence resulting in the death and deification of the scapegoat, the tension in that society that winds up the violent spring inside a group or individual is released until the scapegoating mechanism starts a new cycle by cranking that coil mechanism tighter again with each click. For Girard, the example of Jesus who resisted spiraling violent cycles with opponents (and building up to the Christian revelation [and the message of the Old Testament prophets advocating against and revealing such scapegoating that prefigures the message of Jesus]) by denying the guilt of the scapegoats is the only way out of such human tendencies toward violent and intensifying rivalry.

Desire to possess what a mimetic twin has or wants is the triggering device of communal violence that initiates wars, riots, lynchings, corporate takeovers, political campaigns, adultery, and much more.⁹³

93. Mimetic twins are people (or groups) who compete with each other for an object of desire (a mate, money, status, objects of great or little value). Following Augustine, Girard draws upon foundational stories such as Cain and Abel and Romulus and Remus. Cain and Abel compete for divine favor by offering sacrificed animals or harvested crops. Cain kills his brother because the former's offering is rejected by God; God curses Cain to be a wanderer, but he instead immediately following founds the first city. Romulus kills his brother as they start building the wall for the city of Rome and becomes the founder of a great civilization. Augustine argues that all civilizations are built upon such founding violence. As the mimetic twins compete for the prize, they become more and more like each other, willing to ratchet up the means of obtaining what is desired until friendly competition turns into violent confrontation. Just watch two men in sports cars pull up to a street light; they will race off the line so as not to let the other win an award of no value.

Such agonistic events constitute one of the great themes of scripture, literature, film, drama, history, biography, and legend. Outside John the Baptist, the rest of the characters in Mark's story are such imitative copies of each other. "With the exception of the prophet, there are only mimetic doubles and look-alikes in our text: Herod and his brother, Herod and Herodias, and finally the guests. *Herod* and *Herodias* phonetically suggest sameness, and the two names are constantly reiterated in our text,"⁹⁴ with the wife Herodias goading the husband Herod, who has delayed action to defend her honor until she manipulates her daughter into eliciting the blind princely promise and inspires the little girl to demand a decapitation.

Similarly, the daughter of Jared — the instigator and inflamer of desire in others in the Ether story — is never named. She, whose desire fuels the covetousness in Jared and Akish as they each vie for a throne, pits doppelganger husband and father against each other in a deadly trajectory toward dismemberment. Akish even recruits his extended family in a violent conspiracy to obtain political power, the group and individual acting as a Girardian mob intent on brutal and sadistic decollation of the king's body and the body politic. The daughter's proposal to her father in the contest for power is itself imitative, borrowed from the record that recounts those "of old, that they by their secret plans did obtain kingdoms and great glory" (Ether 8:9). Mark's Salomé has no innate desires, for she is just a child, but must be filled with desire by her mother. "Contrary to what Freud believes, to what we all believe, there is no preordained object of desire. Children in particular have to be told what to desire. Unlike the sultry temptress of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, the Salome of the gospel is really a child. The Greek word for her is not *kore* [girl] but *korasion*, which means 'a little girl.'"⁹⁵

The story of Jaredite son rebelling against father to obtain the throne in a long chain of Freudian generational conflicts has Jared's conspiracy to obtain Omer's head framed as just one link in the book of Ether, maintaining the streak of sons taking up arms against their father-kings or brother-kings starting in Ether 7:4 and continuing to the end of the Jaredite polity: Corihor→Kib, Shule→Corihor, Noah→Shule, and the sons of Shule→Noah, Cohor→Shule (to list just the regal lineage in Ether 7). Jared and Akish are merely imitating the doings of their immediate ancestors and not merely reaching back to the deeds of Mesopotamian

94. René Girard, "Scandal and the Dance: Salome in the Gospel of Mark," *New Literary History* 15, no. 2 (Winter 1984): 315.

95. *Ibid.*, 313.

legends “concerning them of old, that they by their secret plans did obtain kingdoms and great glory” (Ether 8:9). Not only does Moroni project the future based on this pattern of human conduct by typologizing the extinction of the Nephites based on these conspiratorial power grabs and warning latter-day Gentiles of the same archetypes and antitypes, but he notes that these cycles of violence, sedition, and captivity were specifically predicted at the foundation of Jaredite political society when the people demand their first king: “which brought to pass the saying of the brother of Jared that they would be brought into captivity” (Ether 7:5 where Moroni refers to Ether 6:23 upon the inception of the Jaredite dynasty).

Herodias’s desire for revenge against John is transferred to and heightened in transmission to the little girl, for she is the one who first demands that the Baptist’s head be served on a platter, much as other delectable food has been served at the “king’s” banquet. “Her mother’s desire has become her own. The fact that Salome’s desire is entirely imitative detracts not a whit from its intensity; on the contrary, the imitation is fiercer than the original.”⁹⁶ As with Herodias and Salomé, the daughter of Jared must gift wrap her desire to transfer it to her father by recalling all the great deeds of old. Then she must inspire her father to invite Akish over for entertainment as an appetizer to a projected feast of violence. She even uses Girard’s keyword: “let my father send for Akish, the son of Kimnor; and behold, I am fair, and I will dance before him, and I will please him, that *he will desire me* to wife; wherefore if *he shall desire* of thee that ye shall give unto him me to wife, then shall ye say: I will give her if ye will bring unto me the head of my father, the king” (Ether 8:10). Having lit Akish’s craving, the conflagration will move beyond fire breaks and containment lines as it becomes intense enough to move Akish to decollate his father-in-law Jared rather than Omer (Jared’s own father), who is the original target. Inspired by his daughter’s infectious desire, Jared will eventually lose his own head to the cascading cycles of violence. These Jaredite royal families prefer to keep their murder and mayhem within the family — such are Herodian and Jaredite family values.

“And a Little Child Shall Lead Them” (Isaiah 11:6)

Jared has lost his throne and is inconsolable without that desirable object (Ether 8:7). His daughter sees that sorrow and devises a way to fuel the

96. Ibid., 314.

fire of covetousness in others. Herodias is likewise not above using her own “little girl” to ignite passions and fires of desire to obtain her ends. “To say that the dance pleases not only Herod but all his guests is to say that, by the end of the dance, all are possessed by the desire of Salomé,”⁹⁷ much as that dance in front of Akish corrupts and infects all of Jaredite society. As with the daughter of Jared — her longing for power is transferable to both Jared and Akish, to father and husband and beyond — the daughter’s decollation proposal boomerangs back on Jared while Omer, the original target, escapes. Keep in mind that the original king proposed for beheading, Omer, is also intricately bound to this family of scoundrels, for “Omer was a friend to Akish” (Ether 8:11). What is a little decapitation among friends and family? For the daughter advocates the decapitation of her own grandfather, and Jared executes the conspiracy to behead his own father.

Akish completes the decollation of his own father-in-law and plans the murder and beheading of this own “friend,” a game of thrones that should shock and horrify the modern reader,⁹⁸ but such storylines are quite ordinary in ancient Mesopotamia and spin-off cultures among the Assyrians, Babylonians, and Persians. Such sedition plots were quite common in the Kingdom of Israel and occurred even in the more politically stable Kingdom of Judah after David succeeds Saul (keeping Saul’s sons and grandsons under tight surveillance during his reign and ordering his son Solomon to polish off the descendants of Saul — who are the House of David’s continuing rivals after David dies) and just a generation later laments the death of his own rebellious son Absalom after the latter’s insurrection. While all this scheming is going on, God warns Omer in a dream (Ether 9:3) so he can escape, head and all.

Salomé’s newly imported desire for the death of John shows her to be too young and too innocent to conceive her mother’s revenge request metaphorically, so when Herodias asks for the Baptist’s head, the daughter interprets the request nonfiguratively. “Even in countries where beheading is practiced, to demand someone’s head must be interpreted rhetorically, and Salome takes her mother literally. She does not do so intentionally — she has not yet learned to distinguish words from things. She does not recognize the metonymy.”⁹⁹ And keep in mind

97. *Ibid.*, 319.

98. So rare is it in Western societies that we have to watch highly rated TV series to see such designs carried out.

99. *Ibid.*, 318.

that “decapitation was a common practice in the ancient world,”¹⁰⁰ as Rita Dolce demonstrates in her survey of Mesopotamia and Syria (and surrounding cultures) from the third millennium BC to the seventh century BC in stele, royal inscriptions, and similar artwork.¹⁰¹ Note that when the Book of Mormon begins with a beheading — Nephi decapitating Laban — the actors are placed temporally in antiquity but are also literally located in the Ancient Near East; Old World habits die hard and kill harder. Herodias asks of her daughter John’s head, meaning his life: “The transferrable meaning of the mother’s words is not understood, and the mimetic desire is fulfilled in all its directness.”¹⁰² The direction of communicable desire is opposite in the Jaredite story. The daughter of Jared fills the father’s head with possibilities based on his autochthonous desire (Ether 8:8), and no person in this family seems to blanch at the gruesome trail of events resulting from a simple erotic dance. She then frolics before Akish to cram his with head with sexual desire mated with murderous aspiration (Ether 8:10–11), which contagion infects his kinsfolk followed by Jaredite society as a whole.

Ham, in his desire to assimilate the Jaredite narrative to the Baptist story, makes the same misstatement about the relationship between the Salomé and Jared stories that Brodie asserts. The king, Omer, is the dancer’s grandfather. Her father, Jared, was formerly king and wants to become the once and future king. Jared’s daughter offers to dance before Akish to get him to decapitate Omer (neither conspirator is king when the dance occurs — Omer is). Jared later becomes king, as does Akish, when, as the text laconically notes, “Jared was murdered upon his throne, and Akish reigned in his stead” (Ether 9:6; Ether 9:5 notes that Akish “obtained the head of his father-in-law as he sat upon his throne”), with the probability that Akish learned his lesson about acquiring a kingdom through the pattern established by Jared’s original proposal (Jared’s daughter is Akish’s wife at this stage in the narrative). Understandably, for ideological purposes, Ham and Brodie assimilate the Book of Mormon text to the New Testament narrative, where Salomé does indeed “dance for a [putative] king and a beheading follows” causally, but such inattention to the details of the narratives being conflated ought to be noted. The Jaredite story mentions no banquet, no king’s birthday,

100. Joel M. LeMon, “Beheading in the Ancient World,” *Bible Odyssey*, <https://www.bibleodyssey.org/passages/related-articles/beheading-in-the-ancient-world/>.

101. Rita Dolce, “*Losing One’s Head*” in *the Ancient Near East*: *Interpretation and Meaning of Decapitation* (New York: Routledge, 2018).

102. Baert, “Dancing,” 14.

and no blind promise; of course, the reader wouldn't expect every detail of a folklore or historical theme to be repeated in every iteration of the story. Each instance must not only evoke the motif but also vary the literary inheritance to local historical and cultural circumstances. Some typical components drop out and some new elements are added in each version.

Intertextuality and Allusion as Opposed to Parallelomania

The Ether story is substantially different from the Salomé story; of course, our readings are shaped by living in the 21st century, after the historical fascination with the Salomé theme in Renaissance art, late Victorian literary rebellions (such as the Aesthetic Movement exemplified by Oscar Wilde), art (think of Klimt), and theater (Strauss). The biblical and Book of Mormon narratives share two common main elements: dancing and the beheading. If such narrow filiations can establish dependence, then the range of stories I have discussed from the Bible and Greek/Roman history would similarly have to be derived from one *Ur*-source. Concepts such as influence, allusion, intertextuality, and metalepsis are much more sophisticated ways of thinking through the relationships than are theft and plagiarism, the latter derived from notions of property and crime. Since no complex pattern seems apparent in the Brodie-school readings, any plagiarism attribution is dubious and must be defended rigorously.

Of course, the reader should be explicit about either accepting or rejecting Book of Mormon narrative for what it claims to be and its internal timeline to make sense of assertions about dependence. The separation of the Jaredite record at the Tower of Babel and its allusions to older accounts mentioned by the dancer and brought out from Mesopotamia that Moroni summarizes and cites in the Nephite account means the Jared/Akish story can be seen as chronologically prior to biblical themes of Abrahamic covenants, Mosaic liberation, Judahite and Israelite monarchy, Assyrian and Babylonian conquests followed by Persian subjugation, and return to the promised land — let alone Hellenistic conquest and Roman rule through local henchmen such as “King” Herod (Antipas) (Mark 6:14). Mark’s linking of John’s beheading to the Esther story presumes the chronological priority of Esther. The Jared story and his beheading (if one takes Book of Mormon narrative seriously) has the Jared narrative as chronologically prior to the Baptist story — and the daughter of Jared’s citation of accounts even ancient in her day “concerning them of old” “across the great deep” who usurped power, glory, and wealth through conspiratorial violence (Ether 8:9).

The Jaredite record might properly be called antique but not Hebraic, for it emerges from a cultural divergence prior to distinctions such as Hebraic, Israelite, Judaic, or Lehite. But Moroni, in updating and Christianizing the account for his readers (perhaps as the lone Nephite survivor, just a readership of one) and latter-day audiences, can be called Hebraic with all the temporal and historical theories that such a recognition requires. As Schildgen notes of Mark's use of Hebraic scripture in the story of John and Antipas, "Beneath an apparently simple surface lies a rich juxtaposition of present and past that is saturated with Judaic textual tradition and used to mirror the moral, social, and political context in which Mark placed Jesus. His primary sources were the sacred texts of Judaism, but he also employed Greco-Roman phrases, often pointing ironically to the meaning of these diverse references in their new setting" with allusions to the Pentateuch, the historical works, and prophetic records we now recognize in the Hebrew Bible.¹⁰³ While the reader of the Salomé and daughter of Jared stories isn't required to be as deeply steeped in the heritage of the Hebrew Bible as the evangelists and Nephite writers were, some awareness of the metaleptic and typological character of the successor text is a necessary element of any adequate reading.

Just as Mark ensconces his narrative of the Baptist's death within the ancient tradition Christians inherited from the Jews — especially the Purim connections to the Esther narrative — he connects his narrative more generally to the

moral principles and laws, to the implications of earlier stories for the present, to the issue of liberation from ethnic harassment and violence, and the moral and social responsibilities of the people of God. In the case of the Esther retrieval, Mark recalls the story of a genocidal plot averted through God's intercession on behalf of "Israel," an action occurring outside the realms of chance and causality that is celebrated as "purim."¹⁰⁴

The main signpost nudging the reader to connect the unbalanced "kings" Ahasuerus and Antipas is their reckless fill-in-the-blank promise that "whatsoever thou shalt ask of me, I will give it thee, unto the half of my kingdom" (Mark 6:23). "The Esther story, like the John the Baptist episode, deploys a number of folklore motifs: a corrupt and

103. Schildgen, "Blind," 120.

104. *Ibid.*, 121.

ineffectual king, opulent court life, manipulative or treacherous villains, innocent male and female victims, and an impossible situation.”¹⁰⁵ Asserting no claim to originality, but following from a view that past events repeat themselves and are sometimes fulfilled decades, centuries, or millennia later, the gospels assert the history of the descendants of Abraham and the people of Israel are repeated in the life of Christ and his disciples. “Mark situates these in a context that connects them to the earlier text by restatement and by lexical and situational parallelism, which typologically connects the later event with an earlier or future event.”¹⁰⁶ This is exactly what happens in the story in Ether as the daughter of Jared attaches her actions and those she urges her father to engage to antique patterns, and Moroni associates typologically to the Nephite events in his own day while also warning that his latter-day readers will persist in theirs. The account is explicit in asserting its typological designs.

“Originality Is Undetected Plagiarism”¹⁰⁷

Additionally, like the New Testament narratives, the Book of Mormon story makes no attempt at originality. It is deliberately archaizing; when the daughter of Jared proposes her plan, she points to older patterns of monarchical succession: “Hath [my father] not read the record which our fathers brought across the great deep? Behold, is there not an account concerning them of old that they by their secret plans did obtain kingdoms and great glory” (Ether 8:9). A character within the story makes the association to older patterns (before the biblical account of the separation of peoples at the Tower of Babel), and the editor relates the narrative of Jaredite leadership corruption, decline, and self-annihilation to his own people’s impending extinction. Moroni, son of Mormon, connects the story to others both past and future; Moroni notes that the Jaredites “formed a secret combination, even as they of old” (Ether 8:18). These secret combinations, older than antiquity even to the Jaredites, circulated among the Lamanites of Moroni’s day. The narrator made the pattern relevant from the past and updated the concern to his day (even the evil characters within the narrative told by Moroni — the daughter of Jared in this case — can “liken the scriptures to themselves” along with nonscriptural records to Jaredite events). Moroni makes the

105. Ibid., 122, citing Niditch.

106. Ibid., 129.

107. This *bon mot* is most commonly attributed to William Inge but has also been ascribed to many other writers.

link clearer because he notes that these conspiracies “have caused the destruction of this people of whom I am now speaking, and also the destruction of the people of Nephi” (Ether 8:21) while relaying the story of the earlier extinguished people, the Jaredites. If the archetypal nature of these actions isn’t sufficiently evident, Moroni projects their danger to the future as a warning about these perils to the Gentiles (Ether 8:23). The Book of Mormon contains a theory of history; societies repeatedly make the same mistakes just as descendants repeat ancestors’ actions: in brief, history repeats. That historical theory must become part of the interpretive background rather than having fragments of the narrative torn from context to justify glib readings. The text’s own theory of textuality and of history must be clarified and considered; the modern reader doesn’t have to accept the historical theory of repetition that the ancient text asserts, but that reader needs to make that theory explicit and engage it in order to understand the text.

After this digression about universal themes, Moroni returns to the Jared story. Omer escapes the murderous combination, and Jared becomes king, only to be beheaded by Akish, who succeeds Jared. This conspiratorial act then infects the entire Jaredite nation as Akish administers “the oath of the ancients” to his conspirators (Ether 9:6).

This story plainly tells readers not to expect originality. Yet modern readers criticize it for not being sufficiently original. Any adequate reading must recognize that “Nephite typology is more than a literary feature; it acts as a revelation of the divine scheme of history.”¹⁰⁸ The Book of Mormon intends its stories to illuminate these universal truths: “The plots are formulaic and repetitive because the Book of Mormon presents history following universal patterns. Thus, by presenting a repetitive history and familiar types of characters, the Book of Mormon makes statements about the universal nature of human experience and social history.”¹⁰⁹

Listening More Carefully to the Text

Linguistics teachers often perform an exercise with their students wherein they have them invent words, which the students do with gusto. The next phase is to show the students that they have been following rules unawares, “rules that determine precisely which kinds of syllables they can imagine and which they cannot: e.g., that they will not imagine

108. Mark D. Thomas, *Digging in Cumorah: Reclaiming Book of Mormon Narratives* (Salt Lake City: Signature, 1999), 11.

109. *Ibid.*, 15.

a syllable that begins with the last sound in the word *sing*, for instance, or begin a syllable with an *ft*. And from this the students gain two lessons.” One is that when we acquire language, we learn a complex of rules quite arbitrary but powerfully influential. The second is that once the student becomes aware of those rules, he or she can easily devise syllables to transgress them.¹¹⁰ Similarly with Brodie/Ham’s assumptions about what makes for history, if critics were aware of their conjectures and the resulting explanations ruled in or ruled out by such presuppositions, all would benefit. What is generally true of historians is *a fortiori* true of Mormon historians: “Most historians obfuscate the theory behind their work and rely on implicit theory instead of explicitly formulated theory.”¹¹¹ Ours is a theoretical age in which a writer’s presuppositions require explicit articulation and theoretical elaboration. Those who think they operate without ideologically inflected assumptions and theories and just engage the text that speaks for itself must understand that theory is implicit if it isn’t explicit; to assert that one approaches explanation without presuppositions, ideologies, and commitments is to adhere to a theory called positivism. Applying the conventional wisdom of the modern age is most often a strategy for clinging stubbornly to the theory of the age just before the current one.

Dismissing accounts as plagiarisms or folkloristic borrowings may satisfy some readers, but we ought to recognize that “universal story motifs quickly infiltrate accounts of historical events.”¹¹² Jared’s dancing daughter incorporates a universal motif. That it is unhistorical has yet to be argued rather than conclusorily asserted. “It ought to be a rule in dealing with scriptural texts that any time they make us very uncomfortable and we are tempted to deny them, expunge them or explain them away, that is precisely when we need to listen to them even more carefully and avoid dismissing them. Perhaps the problem lies with our assumptions rather than with the ancient texts.”¹¹³ When Brodie, Ham, or even lesser Book of Mormon critics make explicit their interpretive rules, we can then better analyze the textual relationship between similar Book of Mormon and Bible stories.

110. Thomas J. Roberts, *When Is Something Fiction?* (Carbondale: Southern Illinois University Press, 1972), x.

111. Norman J. Wilson, *History in Crisis? Recent Directions in Historiography* (Upper Saddle River, NJ: Prentice Hall, 1999), 54.

112. Flory, *Archaic*, 155.

113. Ben Witherington III, “Laying Down the Law: A Response to John Gager,” *Bible Review* 15, no. 2 (Apr. 1999): 42.

I have been arguing three-plus decades for a more sophisticated approach to Book of Mormon textuality; we have seen the beginning stages of such appreciation over the past 40 years. The transformation in both Book of Mormon readers and Book of Mormon readings now should follow the lead of changes in biblical criticism over the past generation. Thomas Brodie, a biblical critic himself and not merely my attempt to write a “Good Brodie, Bad Brodie” scenario into my narrative, summarizes the evolution nicely, and his point is much larger than the specific context in which he explores oral composition and the biblical text. During much of the 20th century, biblical critics were persistently taught in graduate schools, and overwhelmingly accepted the notion, that the Bible is a primitive text composed by writers and consumed by listeners and readers who were, well, stupid. The text suffered in comparison to classical Greek and Roman writings. Speaking of the Hebraic writers and more generally about Hebraic narrative, he notes the condescension, “Again, [the writers and audience] were uncultured people” who in hearing and writing oral tradition “could cope only with little episodes,” so the book of Genesis, for example, was a hodgepodge of fragments, disunified and often incoherent.¹¹⁴ Hermann Gunkel’s¹¹⁵ attitude toward biblical composition was representative of the profession rather than aberrant.

This direction has reversed, and biblical criticism is now much more likely to read the text as a complex literary composition with a sophisticated intellectual narrative framework that accounts for the text’s theory of history. Some of that contemptuous outlook toward ancient texts and audiences persists in the discipline, but “given such an attitude, it becomes more understandable how, even when faced with a superb writing, magnificently crafted, Gunkel’s imagination jumped to something naïve or simple.”¹¹⁶ A similar revolution has occurred over the past 40 years in New Testament criticism. Mark and the other synoptic gospels were previously viewed as a conglomeration of disjointed found objects gathered by tinkers and plagiarists of the Hebrew Bible who were sometimes competent to stitch together narrative elements but never able to bring the compositions up to literary standards of a unified text

114. Thomas L. Brodie, *The Birthing of the New Testament: The Intertextual Development of the New Testament Writings* (Sheffield, UK: Sheffield Phoenix, 2004), 54.

115. Gunkel, 1862–1932, was the founder of biblical form criticism and the influential history of religions school.

116. *Ibid.*, 54–55.

to achieve pinnacles that we might call masterpieces of world literature worthy of comparison to Genesis, other selected parts of the Hebrew Bible, works of literature and history written by Greeks, Romans, Chinese, Russians, Germans, British, French, Americans, and other historians, novelists, and historians/novelists too numerous to name or nationalize. The founders of modern biblical criticism (of both the New Testament and the Hebrew Bible) too often were disdainful of the texts they specialized in analyzing,¹¹⁷ and that scorn prevented them from reading the complexity of writing and the audiences' sophistication in reading those texts, a fault at least partially remedied by the current generation of biblical critics. "Many New Testament scholars have now reached the conclusion that the gospels are fine writings"¹¹⁸ that require the highest literary skills to be read with scholarly adequacy and appropriate presuppositions in order to be understood as master works of the ancient world, and not just run-of-the-mill fare written by semi-literate and half-civilized writers, but "the issue is not whether the gospels are works of genius and inspiration that portray God-based freedom. They are."¹¹⁹

Biblical scholars, from the birth of their discipline at the inception of modernity, have viewed their calling to be scientific and historical — the opposite (they thought) of literary. But the past four decades have changed that orientation, for the understanding has dawned and has now advanced to midday that historical skills divorced from literary talents (in both writer and reader) misappropriate the text; in texts from antiquity (and the Bible in particular) the historical and the literary are so intricately and complexly interwoven as to be unravelable. Religious communities, as much as scholarly ones, need a shift of reading approaches, for "reading scripture is an *art* — a creative discipline that requires engagement and imagination, in contrast to the Enlightenment's ideal of detached objectivity. In our practices of reading the Bible, we are (or should be) something like artists." What is disagreeable to some in

117. "The tragedy of Gunkel and Bultmann, scientifically speaking, is that despite their wonderful talents and contributions, they violated this first principle [that the biblical writers built upon prior biblical texts in sophisticated ways, a feature Brodie refers to as intertextuality]. Partly because of regarding the people as 'uncultivated' and the gospels as 'unliterary,' they effectively severed the fundamental relationship between biblical texts and the larger world of earlier writing, and left the biblical books stranded and fragmented." Brodie, *Birthing*, 85n4 (internal citations omitted).

118. *Ibid.*, 55.

119. *Ibid.*, 71.

calling for better reading habits in communities of faith is that “like every other true art, reading scripture is a difficult thing to do well. Strangely, we do not often mention this difficulty in church, in sermons or in teaching. Our attitude seems to be that interpreting scripture is a cut-and-dried kind of thing.”¹²⁰ Davis and Hays note that Christians ought to emulate Jews in this regard, for one of the distinctions between the Jewish tradition and the Christian scriptural reading heritage is that “Jews have always revered the reading of scripture as the greatest and most difficult of all art forms.”¹²¹ Such artistic readings don’t yield univocal readings or definitive answers, and we moderns abhor the requirement that our interpretations incorporate skillful close reading but also negative capability. Historical approaches without literary competencies fail to do justice to the subject matter. Good readers who have literary talents and close reading abilities to study the scripture brought forth by Joseph Smith have emerged recently in the restoration religious tradition: Terryl Givens,¹²² Grant Hardy,¹²³ Bob Rees,¹²⁴ Joseph Spencer,¹²⁵ Adam Miller,¹²⁶ and I¹²⁷ (a list that is not comprehensive) have begun to model what such

120. Ellen F. Davis and Richard B. Hays, “Learning to Read the Bible Again,” *The Christian Century* (April 20, 2004): 23–24, <https://www.religion-online.org/articale/learning-to-read-the-bible-again/>.

121. Ibid.

122. Terryl L. Givens, *By the Hand of Mormon: The American Scripture that Launched a New World Religion* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2002).

123. Grant Hardy, *Understanding the Book of Mormon: A Reader’s Guide* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2010).

124. Robert A. Rees, “Joseph Smith, the Book of Mormon, and the American Renaissance,” *Dialogue* 35, no. 3 (Fall 2002): 83–112. Rees, “Joseph Smith, the Book of Mormon, and the American Renaissance: An Update,” *Interpreter: A Journal of Latter-day Saint Faith and Scholarship* 19 (2016): 1–16. Rees, “Inattentional Blindness: Seeing and Not Seeing the Book of Mormon,” *Interpreter: A Journal of Latter-day Saint Faith and Scholarship* 12 (2014): 33–47. Rees, *A New Witness to the World* (Salt Lake City: BCC, 2020).

125. Joseph M. Spencer, *An Other Testament: On Typology* (Provo, UT: Maxwell Institute, 2016).

126. Adam S. Miller, “Messianic History: Walter Benjamin and the Book of Mormon,” *Rube Goldberg Machines: Essays in Mormon Theology* (Salt Lake City: Kofford, 2012), 21–36.

127. Alan Goff, “Alma’s Prophetic Commissioning Type Scene,” *Interpreter: A Journal of Latter-day Saint Faith and Scholarship* 51 (2022): 115–64, <https://journal.interpreterfoundation.org/almas-prophetic-commissioning-type-scene/>. Goff, “Vox Populi and Vox Dei: Allusive Explorations of Biblical and Book of Mormon Politeias,” *Interpreter: A Journal of Latter-day Saint Faith and Scholarship* 47 (2021): 1–80, <https://journal.interpreterfoundation.org/>.

scholarly reading of Book of Mormon narrative, informed by literary sensitivity and adequate historical theories without being screened by modernity's blinders toward faith commitments, might look like as it matures.

Davis and Hays refer their readers to Paul's admonition, which Joseph Smith incorporated into the Articles of Faith, to consider scripture reading not just a religious experience but also an aesthetic one, and even more intensely religious in proportion to the beauty discovered: if we judge scriptures as we do works of art "to use Paul's language — more 'lovely,' more 'gracious,' more 'excellent,' 'noble,' 'worthy of praise' (Philemon 4:8)," our Christian devotion would also be formed to become more lovely, gracious, excellent, noble, and praiseworthy.¹²⁸

As Davis and Hays note, a crucial ability in Christian reading of the Bible is the capacity to read the text at the same time "back to front" and "front to back." "The Bible must be read 'back to front' — that is, understanding the plot of the whole drama in light of its climax in the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ. This suggests that figural reading is to be preferred over messianic proof-texting as a way of showing how the Old Testament opens toward the New."¹²⁹ But too often Latter-day Saint readers are too hasty to make a passage from Isaiah, Genesis, or Jeremiah mean only its messianic prophetic prediction fulfilled in the life of Christ as revealed in the New Testament or what it might mean to believers in the 21st century, skipping over what Ezekiel might have meant to Ezekiel and the Jews in exile, for example. The scripture also needs to be read "front to back," highlighting what it meant to its initial audience, but not confining its meaning to that original context. "Yet the Bible must also be read 'front to back' — that is, understanding its climax of the drama, God's revelation in Christ, in light of the long history of God's self-revelation to Israel."¹³⁰ We ought to be bold enough to reach for the plentitude and abundance of meaning in the Bible and the Book of Mormon. Speaking for a group of scholars at the Center of Theological Inquiry assembling "The Scripture Project," Davis and Hays assert that "we affirm that our interpretation of Jesus must return

org/vox-populi-and-vox-dei-allusive-explorations-of-biblical-and-book-of-mormon-politeias/. Goff, "Types of Repetition and Shadows of History in Book of Mormon Narrative," *Interpreter: A Journal of Latter-day Saint Faith and Scholarship* 45 (2021): 263–318, <https://journal.interpreterfoundation.org/types-of-repetition-and-shadows-of-history-in-hebraic-narrative/>.

128. Davis and Hays, "Learning."

129. Ibid.

130. Ibid.

repeatedly to the Old Testament to situate him in direct continuity with Israel's hopes and Israel's understanding of God."¹³¹ That is the approach the Book of Mormon writers took when writing history in advance of its unfolding in addition to the retrospective glance: "And we talk of Christ, we rejoice in Christ, we preach of Christ, we prophesy of Christ, and we write according to our prophecies, that our children may know to what source they may look for a remission of their sins" (2 Nephi 25:26), wrote Nephi, more than 500 years before that humble birth.

As Davis and Hays assert for all Christians that the two Christian testaments are to be read in a unified way both back-to-front and front-to-back, so too that third testament of Christ — the Book of Mormon — needs similar readerly treatment. The scripture itself asserts such a reading approach a number of times. Mormon, with a primary audience of descendants of Laman and Lemuel but a secondary audience of latter-day Gentiles, asserts a relationship between the record he is adding to (the Book of Mormon) and the record of the Jews (the Bible): "Therefore repent, and be baptized in the name of Jesus, and lay hold upon the gospel of Christ, which shall be set before you, *not only in this record but also in the record which shall come unto the Gentiles from the Jews*, which record shall come from the Gentiles unto you." Notice the direction of attestation between "this" (the Book of Mormon) and "that" (the record of the Jews): the Book of Mormon is given to witness to the truth of the Bible, not the other way around. "For behold, *this* is written for the intent that ye may believe *that*; and if ye believe *that* ye will believe *this* also; and if ye believe *this* ye will know concerning your fathers, and also the marvelous works which were wrought by the power of God among them" (Mormon 7:8–9). But the two witnesses are so interwoven that if one believes the Bible, then one will believe the Book of Mormon also.

We members of the Church of Christ more often use the Bible to attempt to prove the Book of Mormon true. But in a day when astute readers of the Bible such as Thomas Brodie find in the allusive and literary character of the Bible evidence that Jesus and Paul were never real historical people but merely fictional characters, the Book of Mormon testifies, using the same intertextual and literary features, that the historical and belletristic features are evidence not only of the historical nature of Book of Mormon narrative but biblical narrative also: *this* supports *that*.

131. Ibid.

Readers professionally devoted to reading the Bible, as biblical critics are, too often assert its fictional rather than its historical nature because it demonstrates literary features such as allusion and intertextuality. Thomas Brodie's memoir traces the trajectory he followed as a Dominican priest in helping to uncover the constant intertextuality of the New Testament as it incorporated the Old Testament narrative material through allusion; this Brodie has the reading and literary skills to reveal the complexity of the writing in both parts of the Christian Bible. The failure of both Brodies is to see in such liberal narrative metalepsis and repetition not just that such writing techniques are literary but to mistakenly assert that to the extent writing is literary it can't be historical.¹³² This assumption that the literary and the historical are mutually exclusive is a crude version of positivism that in contemporary historical theory and historiography has been decimated in the past 40 years, the same historical period in which views of biblical narrative have been equally revolutionized. Thomas Brodie goes so far as to assert that the Jesus and Paul characterized in (and in the latter case putatively authored a good portion of) the New Testament never existed as historical persons. He doesn't assert the less controversial claim that we can never uncover through the sources available to us (primarily the New Testament and early Christian writings) the historical figures of Jesus and Paul; he asserts they didn't exist, but were made up by schools of writers who transformed Old Testament sources into stories about Jesus and Paul, not entirely whole cloth but at least transferring old wine from Old Testament narrative wineskins into new receptacles. The Book of Mormon uses those same literary features to assert the truth and historicity of *that record of the Jews*. If the Bible needs to be read ambidextrously, both front-to-back and back-to-front at the same time, then the Book of Mormon simultaneously needs to be read left-to-right and right-to-left concurrently to provide a complex weaving of Hebraic scripture whose warp and woof both witness the grace of God manifesting in the gift of Jesus Christ. To shift to a different metaphor, remember the transparencies formerly used to project messages to large audiences? Sometimes we would overlay them on overhead projectors to build various levels of textual and graphic content into a layered message. That is how combining the First Testament, the Second Testament, and Another Testament provides a deeper picture of God's various interventions into human history and fills out the horizontal

132. Thomas L. Brodie, *Beyond the Quest for the Historical Jesus: Memoir of a Discovery* (Sheffield, UK: Sheffield Phoenix, 2012).

human-to-human and vertical divine-to-human relationships manifest in scripture.

The Book of Mormon is just at the beginning of a similar scholarly revolution in understanding and appreciation, such as both the Hebrew Bible and the New Testament underwent in the last two decades of the 20th century and continuing into the 21st. However, such an apotheosis requires readers to match the text and the appropriate reading approaches exhibiting a competent understanding of the relationship between history and literature in both the ancient and modern worldviews, of Hebraic narrative in particular. We have the texts to match the subject matter of God's graceful outreach to his children in ages past, present, and the past in the present: we now lack only sufficient readership to measure up to the texts.

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THE HOLY GHOST IN THE BOOK OF MORONI: POSSESSED OF CHARITY

Newell D. Wright and Val Larsen

Abstract: *The role played by the Holy Ghost is an especially important connecting thread that runs through the Book of Moroni. The book illuminates the various ways in which the Holy Ghost transforms fallen human beings into redeemed members of the kingdom of God. Three phrases — “cleave unto charity,” “possessed of it,” and “that ye may be filled with this love” — are particularly revelatory of the role the Holy Ghost plays in our exaltation. But the positive process illuminated by these phrases has an obverse. Those who reject the Holy Ghost cleave to and are possessed of Satan. They are filled with his hatred. Though his message is primarily positive, Moroni has witnessed and describes what happens to those who reject the influence of the Holy Ghost.*

When he was young, Moroni saw firsthand the unspeakable misery that befalls human beings as their society collapses from the weight of its own wickedness, as its citizens become “a people like this, that are without civilization ... a people like this, whose delight is in so much abomination” (Moroni 9:11, 13). Following the total destruction of Nephite society, Moroni lived the final 36 years of his life in extreme isolation and, evidence and common sense suggest, great loneliness.¹ During that lengthy period, his companions were the people he found inscribed in the pages he carried with him. As Grant Hardy has shown, his writings were a dialogue with his only available mortal companions

1. Sidney B. Sperry, “Moroni the Lonely: The Story of the Writing of the Title Page to the Book of Mormon,” *Journal of Book of Mormon Studies* 4, no. 1 (1995): 255–59, <https://scholarsarchive.byu.edu/jbms/vol4/iss1/29>. See also Grant Hardy, *Understanding the Book of Mormon: A Reader's Guide* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2010), 218.

— the dead who spoke to him from the dust.² While Moroni's mortal companions were those he found inscribed in the pages he carried, the dead were not his only companions. The three Nephites met with him (Mormon 8:10–11), and the Holy Ghost was his constant companion. Brant Gardner suggests that he also saw Joseph Smith in vision and engaged in conversation with him, because Ether 5 is basically “Moroni's instructions to Joseph Smith.”³

In his isolation, Moroni seems to have developed a deep appreciation for the Holy Ghost and the important roles it plays in mortal and immortal lives. This divine companion and the ways in which it incorporates us in the divine community became a connecting thread that runs through the materials Moroni assembled in the Book of Moroni. Moroni did not write most of the content in his book. What he appears to have done is compile a set of documents handed down to him from his father, Mormon, that were especially meaningful to him as he wandered alone. Those materials feature the Holy Ghost and the progressively larger role it can play in our lives.

The first five chapters of the Book of Moroni⁴ are all very short, the longest only 153 words. After the first-chapter introduction, each successive chapter focuses on some function of the Holy Ghost that brings us into communion with heaven, allowing us to be possessed by this member of the Godhead and become one with God, Christ, and our brothers and sisters in Christ. We begin this paper by analyzing each of the 10 chapters in Moroni, following the connecting and developing thread of the Holy Ghost that runs through them.

Chapters 1 through 6

In Chapter 1, his introduction, Moroni anticipates important themes in later chapters, especially chapters 9 and 10. He tells us that though Nephite civilization is now destroyed, exceedingly fierce wars continue among the Lamanites, with attendant destruction and misery. He will return to this theme in chapter 9. The Lamanites, he here tells us (and will reiterate in the first verse of Chapter 10) are his intended audience. Even as he wanders alone, he is not alienated from and full of hatred toward

2. Hardy, *Understanding the Book of Mormon*, 242, 252–54.

3. Brant A. Gardner, *Second Witness: Analytical and Contextual Commentary on the Book of Mormon*, vol. 6, *Fourth Nephi-Moroni* (Salt Lake City: Greg Kofford Books, 2007), 333.

4. The ten Moroni chapters in our modern Book of Mormon correspond exactly with the ten chapters in the 1830 edition.

those who would destroy him. He continues to care about their welfare and wishes to hand down to their descendants material that is precious to him and that will be of great benefit to them. The Lamanite hatred which forces him to wander alone is focused, in particular, on those who will not deny Christ. “And I, Moroni, will not deny the Christ.”⁵ The word and phrase he invokes here, deny and deny not, will be an important motif in Chapter 10. There in verses 5–8 and 32–33, Moroni will discuss what we must deny (all ungodliness) and what we must not deny (Christ, the power of God, the gifts of God, the power and witness of the Holy Ghost). Having concluded Chapter 1, Moroni will focus on Christ’s conferral of the Holy Ghost, the agent that transformed history’s best known Christ denier, Peter — only fifty days later on the day of Pentecost — into a fearless, life-long witness of Christ, into one who rejoiced that he was counted worthy to suffer beatings and ultimately crucifixion for Christ’s name (Acts 4:41).

As just noted, Chapter 2 focuses on the conferral of the Holy Ghost, the connecting thread mentioned in every subsequent chapter in the Book of Moroni and the one constant companion Moroni has during his years in the wilderness. Chapter 2 can be read as an announcement of the Book of Moroni’s theme: the transformation of fallen mortals through the ministrations of Christ and the Holy Ghost. To confer the Holy Ghost, the chapter tells us, one calls upon the Father in the name of Christ. Thus, the ritual invokes all members of the Godhead and links the recipient to all. Since the Holy Ghost is a spirit and can dwell within us, we can be one with this personage. And because this member of the Godhead is one with the Father and Son, to be one with the Holy Ghost is to be one with them.⁶

Chapter 3 focuses on the conferral of a divine attribute, God’s power, priesthood power, on human beings. Like the person giving the gift of the Holy Ghost, the person conferring the priesthood calls upon the Father in the name of Christ. The recipient of God’s power is charged to use

5. David F. Holland explains that Moroni could have chosen to align himself with those who deny the Christ and not wander in isolation, but he did not make that choice. David F. Holland, *Moroni: A Brief Theological Introduction* (Provo, UT: Neal A. Maxwell Institute for Religious Scholarship, Brigham Young University, 2020), 18.

6. This chapter in the Book of Moroni focuses on the five companions Moroni had during his time in the wilderness: Christ, the Holy Ghost, and the three Nephites, who were among the twelve apostles mentioned in the chapter. That Christ was Moroni’s companion is apparent in the two-way conversation between them recorded in Ether 12.

that power “to preach repentance and remission of sins through Jesus Christ, by the endurance of faith on his name to the end” (Moroni 3:3). The person conferring priesthood power functions as an agent of God’s earthly agent, the Holy Ghost, for “they ordained them by the power of the Holy Ghost, which was in them” (Moroni 3:4). As a member of the Godhead, the Holy Ghost has God’s power. When priesthood holders properly confer priesthood power on others, they do so by virtue of the Holy Ghost, which is in them, and which has the power that is being conferred.

Chapter 4 focuses on how elders and priests use the priesthood power conferred on them as specified in chapter 3 to administer the body of Christ to a congregation. As in chapters 2 and 3, the officiant calls upon the Father in the name of Christ. And like those chapters, this one introduces a new dimension on which human beings may become one with God. The Holy Ghost, being a spirit, can dwell within us, be one with us, and make us one with God. Indwelling is not an option for the Father and Son, members of the Godhead who have physical bodies (D&C 130:22). And yet, when priests administer “the flesh and blood of Christ unto the Church” (Moroni 4:1), Christ, like the Holy Ghost, does become part of us.⁷ The prayer suggests that, from within, he empowers us to become like him, to take his name as our name, his identity and way of being as our identity and way of being. Thus, in a profound sense, the Son, like the Holy Ghost, becomes one with us and empowers us to be one with God.

In Chapter 5, priests use priesthood power to administer the blood of Christ. But this prayer does more than merely repeat the words in the previous prayer, replacing bread with wine (or water). In the prayer on the bread, we indicate that we “are willing to take upon [us] the name of thy Son, and always remember him, and keep his commandments which he has given [us]” (Moroni 4:3). As the prayer is pronounced, we are willing⁸

7. See also John 6:53–58.

8. Bowen points out that the name Aminadab in Helaman 5:39 means “my people are willing.” Comparing his name with Mormon’s word choice in Helaman 6:39, “their ... willingness to believe,” Bowen suggests this reflects the covenantal nature of their relationship with God. Matthew L. Bowen, “‘My People Are Willing’: The Mention of Aminadab in the Narrative Context of Helaman 5–6,” *Interpreter: A Journal of Mormon Scripture* 19 (2016): 105, <https://journal.interpreterfoundation.org/my-people-are-willing-the-mention-of-aminadab-in-the-narrative-context-of-helaman-5-6/>. See also Godfrey J. Ellis, “Experiential Knowledge and the Covenantal Relationship in Alma 7,” *Interpreter: A Journal of Latter-day Saint Faith and Scholarship* 51 (2022): 59–62.

but, of ourselves, unable to do these things. However, between the prayer on the bread and the prayer on the wine/water, we symbolically put the body of Christ within us. His being becomes part of our being. Through grace, his power to keep the commandments becomes our power. Thus, what we were willing to do during the pronouncement of the prayer on the bread, we are now able to do as the prayer on the water is uttered. Now instead of saying we are willing to always remember him, we say we “do always remember him”⁹ and, having him always in mind, we are able to keep the commandments which he has given us. As a consequence of our grace-empowered new capacity to keep the commandments, an identity is formed between his spirit and ours. We covenant to always remember him, so that he may always be with us. His spirit is our spirit, his name our name. We are incorporated into the body of Christ and, through him, into the kingdom of God.¹⁰

Chapter 6 focuses on the Church, the earthly analog of heaven, the covenant community Moroni no doubt longed for in his solitude. The chapter discusses baptism, then the membership in the Church that follows. Baptism here marks a person’s formal admission into the community of the redeemed. To enter this community, converts are required to come “forth with a broken heart and contrite spirit” and

9. Elder Kevin W. Pearson makes a similar argument in his October 2022 general conference talk “Are You Still Willing?” Kevin W. Pearson, “Are You Still Willing?” *Liahona* 46, no. 11 (November 2022): 67–69, <https://www.churchofjesuschrist.org/study/liahona/2022/11/33pearson>. Elder Dallin H. Oaks made a similar argument in another talk. Dallin H. Oaks, “Taking Upon Us the Name of Jesus Christ,” *Ensign* 15, no. 5 (May 1985), <https://www.churchofjesuschrist.org/study/ensign/1985/05/taking-upon-us-the-name-of-jesus-christ>.

10. John Welch notes the persistence of themes in the sacramental prayers from Mosiah 5 and 3 Nephi 18: “The persistence of certain precise covenantal terms throughout these three texts from Benjamin to Moroni, separated over many years and pages of Nephite history, speaks highly of the cultural sensitivity and logical orderliness of this inspired textual and historical development. . . . Thus it is impressively consistent that Benjamin’s three main covenantal phrases should reappear in Moroni 4 in ways that show continuity with the older covenantal patterns as well as sensitivity to the newer revelation at the time of Christ’s appearance. The phrase ‘take upon them the name of Christ,’ for example, appears in Mosiah 5, but not in 3 Nephi 18. It seems that Nephite texts and traditions have combined and coalesced beautifully into the final sacrament prayers of Moroni 4–5.” John W. Welch, “Our Nephite Sacrament Prayers,” in *Reexploring the Book of Mormon*, ed. John W. Welch, (Provo and Salt Lake City: FARMS and Deseret Book, 1992), 286–89. Gardner, however, describes Welch’s argument as “weak.” Gardner, *Second Witness*, 6:348.

witness that they have “truly repented of all their sins” (Moroni 6:2). Enveloped in the waters of baptism, the converts emerge born again as members of the kingdom of God on earth, as part of a community charged to reflect on earth to the best of its ability the kingdom of God in heaven (see verse 4). Their old spirits having been buried in and washed away by the baptismal waters, the converts are “wrought upon and cleansed by [a new spirit,] the power of the Holy Ghost.” “Their names [are] taken, that they might be remembered and nourished by the good word of God, to keep them in the right way” (Moroni 6:4). They “meet together oft to partake of the bread and wine” that makes them one with Christ (Moroni 6:6). They attend meetings “conducted ... by the power of the Holy Ghost,” which guides them as they preach, exhort, pray, supplicate, and sing (Moroni 6:9). If in this heaven on earth, they willfully and persistently sin, “their names [are] blotted out, and they [are] not numbered among the people of Christ” (Moroni 6:7). They are excluded from this heaven on earth for the same reason Satan and the souls that followed him were excluded from heaven in the wake of the war in heaven — because whether above or below, heaven ceases to be heaven if it is populated by willful sinners. “But as oft as they repent ... with real intent, they [are] forgiven” (Moroni 6:8) and readmitted to God’s kingdom.¹¹

Chapter 7

Chapter 7, the longest of Moroni’s ten chapters, is the one that most fully develops the themes that the proper telos for human beings is to become like God and that the agent of transformation is the Holy Ghost through charity. Moroni’s placement of this material in his seventh and eighth chapters probably marks its importance. The number seven is associated with the Sabbath, completion, and fulness, meanings aptly linked with attaining the “rest of the Lord.” The number eight is associated with new beginnings.¹² Moroni develops these themes by citing what seems to be a seventh-day Sabbath sermon his father, Mormon, gave to “you that are

11. God and Christ focus not on what we have been but on what we are. When we — empowered by the enabling power of the atonement — repent, we become sinless, a proper member of the earthly community that strives to live without sin and of the heavenly community that is formed by those who now are without sin.

12. 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): 254–55, <https://journal.interpreterfoundation.org/josiah-to-zoram-to-sherem-to-jarom-and-the-big-little-book-of-omni/>.

of the church, that are the peaceable followers of Christ, and ... can enter into the rest of the Lord, from this time henceforth until ye rest with him in heaven” (Moroni 7:3).¹³ Rest with the Lord is already an option for these earthly saints. Membership in the kingdom of God is open to them while they are yet on earth because a properly functioning Christian congregation is a piece of heaven on earth.

As predicate for his discussion of charity, Mormon articulates the doctrine of the two ways¹⁴ by juxtaposing the way of God/Christ/Holy Ghost and the way of Satan.¹⁵ By the end of one’s life, the cumulative set of choices made during mortal life follows either the way of God/Christ/Holy Ghost or the way of Satan.¹⁶ The dichotomous character of this cumulative set of choices is stated still more clearly elsewhere in the Book of Mormon: “there are save two churches only; the one is the church of the Lamb of God, and the other is the church of the devil; wherefore, whoso belongeth not to the church of the Lamb of God belongeth to that great church, which is the mother of abominations” (1 Nephi 14:10). The church of the Lamb of God obviously includes devoted followers of Christ in many different denominations on the earth today, so it is not limited to and does not perfectly correspond with any one earthly denomination. And members of any earthly denomination or no denomination may, through their bad faith, be members of the church of the devil. This dichotomous framing suggests the following.

13. John W. Welch enumerates all the ways that Mormon’s sermon in Moroni 7 echoes the Savior’s sermon at the Temple in 3 Nephi 11–18, suggesting that much of the content in Moroni 7 comes from or was inspired by that sermon. John W. Welch, “Moroni 7–9,” November 16, 2020, John W. Welch Notes, Book of Mormon Central, https://archive.bookofmormoncentral.org/sites/default/files/archive-files/pdf/welch/2020-11-16/moroni_7-9_formatted.pdf. See pages 1161–63.

14. Noel B. Reynolds, “The Ancient Doctrine of the Two Ways and the Book of Mormon,” *BYU Studies Quarterly* 56, no. 3 (2017): 49–76, <https://www.jstor.org/stable/44507654>. See also Hugh Nibley, *An Approach to the Book of Mormon* (Salt Lake City: Deseret News Press, 1957): 204; and Mack C. Stirling, “The Way of Life and the Way of Death in the Book of Mormon,” *Journal of Book of Mormon Studies* 6, no. 2 (1997): 152–204, <https://scholarsarchive.byu.edu/jbms/vol6/iss2/8/>.

15. It is emblematic of the difference between God and Satan that God is part of a collective, the Godhead that unites him with Christ and the Holy Ghost. Satan always stands alone. He has subordinates but no true partners.

16. This is not to say that one cannot make individual choices to follow Christ or Satan, and then reverse those choices later on in life, through conscious repentance or blatant acceptance of Satan’s way. We all make such choices. Rather, it focuses in on who we have become by the totality of those choices at the end of our lives.

The ability to choose between good and evil comes to us as a gift from the Spirit of Christ (Moroni 7:16). Thereafter, the choices we make are not so much between discrete good or bad acts as they are between the divine and the demonic, the heavenly and the hellish team we choose to join. If we are with Satan, even gifts and prayers will profit us nothing because they will be tainted by a corrupt motive. If we are with Christ, those same acts will have merit because, being manifestations of charity, they bless both us and others. “A bitter fountain cannot bring forth good water; neither can a good fountain bring forth bitter water; wherefore, a man being a servant of the devil cannot follow Christ; and if he follow Christ he cannot be a servant of the devil” (Moroni 7:11).¹⁷ Through angels and prophets, Christ is preached to us that we may have faith and witness miracles, the greatest of which is, as we shall see, our own transformation from fallen human beings into fully divine sons and daughters of God.

Charity

We come now to a central focus of this article, to charity, which is most fully discussed here in Moroni 7 but which is insightfully alluded to throughout the Book of Mormon. We here combine exegesis of chapter 7 with citations of related passages elsewhere in the Book of Mormon. The telos of this chapter (both its last verse and its summative concept), like the telos of a properly lived life, is that “we shall be like [Christ], ... that we may be purified even as he is pure” (Moroni 7:48). Christ is a divine being who dwells in the kingdom of heaven. His work and glory is to recast us in his image and welcome us into that community. Charity is the efficient cause of our transformation.

17. “[W]e can better appreciate Alma’s words to Corianton that ‘it is also requisite with the justice of God that men should be judged according to their works. And if their works were good in this life and the desires of their hearts were good, that they should also at the last day be restored unto that which is good, ... the one restored to happiness according to his desires of happiness — or to good according to his desires of good — and the other to evil according to his desires of evil’ (Alma 41:3, 5). This is the ultimate reality to which Mormon’s ‘good fountain’ and ‘bitter fountain’ point (Moroni 7:11).” Matthew L. Bowen, “‘That Which They Most Desired’: The Waters of Mormon, Baptism, the Love of God, and the Bitter Fountain,” *Interpreter: A Journal of Latter-day Saint Faith and Scholarship* 39 (2020): 297, <https://journal.interpreterfoundation.org/that-which-they-most-desired-the-waters-of-mormon-baptism-the-love-of-god-and-the-bitter-fountain/>.

Mormon helpfully defines charity as “the pure love of Christ” (Moroni 7:47).¹⁸ This phrase is fruitfully ambiguous. It can refer either to Christ’s love for us or our love for Christ. Context suggests that here, its primary meaning is Christ’s love for us, though as we shall see, our love for Christ is also in play. Relevant context includes the adjective “pure,” which is more likely to characterize Christ’s love than our love. It also includes the immediately preceding discussion of the doctrine of the two ways, which suggests that like our ability to choose, our ability to love is a gift given by Christ: “We love him, because he first loved us” (1 John 4:19). In chapter 8, Mormon calls charity “perfect love” (Moroni 8:26) and “everlasting love” (Moroni 8:17). Moroni elsewhere describes it as atoning or redeeming love (Ether 12:33–34). We focus, in particular, on three phrases Mormon uses that each illuminate how this perfect, everlasting, redeeming love, charity, transforms us, fitting us to be members of God’s kingdom: “cleave unto charity,” “possessed of it,” and “that ye may be filled with this love.”

Cleave Unto Charity

In Moroni 7:46, Mormon issues the imperative: “cleave unto charity, which is the greatest of all.” In scripture the word cleave is most often used to mean adhering firmly and closely or loyally and unwaveringly to some person, e.g., as one would “cleave” unto the Lord (e.g., Deut. 4:4) or unto a spouse (e.g., Gen. 2:24).¹⁹ It is also used with more abstract direct objects, as in cleaving “unto every good thing” (Moroni 7:28) or “to that which is good” (Romans 12:9).

18. Our focus in this paper is not the definition of charity but rather its operation in our lives. The following essays focus fruitfully on the definition of charity: Richard D. Draper and Michael D. Rhodes, “Excursus on Love/Charity” in *Paul’s First Epistle to the Corinthians* (Provo, UT: BYU Studies, 2017), 655–65; H. Dean Garrett, “Light in our Vessels: Faith, Hope, and Charity,” in *The Book of Mormon: Fourth Nephi Through Moroni, From Zion to Destructions*, edited by Monte S. Nyman and Charles D. Tate, Jr. (Provo, UT: Religious Studies Center, 1995), 81–93, <https://rsc.byu.edu/book-mormon-fourth-nephi-through-moroni-zion-destruction/light-our-vessels-faith-hope-charity>; Matthew O. Richardson, “‘The Pure love of Christ’: The Divine Precept of Charity in Moroni 7,” in *Living the Book of Mormon: Abiding by Its Precepts*, edited by Gaye Strathearn and Charles Swift (Provo and Salt Lake City: Religious Studies Center, Brigham Young University and Deseret Book, 2007), 290–301, <https://rsc.byu.edu/living-book-mormon-abiding-its-precepts/pure-love-christ-divine-precept-charity-moroni-7>; and Gardner, *Second Witness*, 6:298–99, among many other excellent examples.

19. A secondary meaning of cleave is to cut in two, e.g., “cleave in twain” (D&C 45:48).

Here, Mormon seems to use it in the more specific, personal sense. And the being he urges us to cleave to would seem to be the Holy Ghost. The text explicitly links charity to the visitation of the Holy Ghost. In Moroni 7:44, Mormon teaches that if a man is “meek and lowly in heart and confesses by the power of the Holy Ghost that Jesus is the Christ, he must have charity.” This is an important idea for Mormon, which he reiterates in his Chapter 8 sermon: “because of meekness and lowliness of heart cometh the visitation of the Holy Ghost, which Comforter filleth with hope and perfect love, which love endureth ... until the end shall come, when all the saints shall dwell with God” (Moroni 8:26). Thus, having charity means that one is filled with the Holy Ghost: we cannot have the one without the other.

The potential intimacy of this cleaving is worth comment. When we physically cleave to someone, we get as proximate to that person as possible. Hence, one aspect of cleaving to one’s spouse is to be one flesh through sexual relations. With human beings, being one flesh is metaphorical because we never fully integrate ourselves into another person and literally become “one flesh,” though we approximate that oneness when a child produced by a man and a woman combines the physicality of its parents into one literal flesh.

But with the Holy Ghost, human beings may attain a degree of oneness impossible to attain with any other entity. By its very nature, the Holy Ghost is indwelling. It penetrates us more fully than any physical thing ever could, being in and through us. What physical cleaving attempts but fails to fully achieve, the indwelling of the Holy Ghost does achieve. When we cleave to and become one with the Holy Ghost who is one with God and Christ, we also become one with God and Christ. In that state, we may experience the pure love of God and Christ not as the object that is loved but as the subject that purely loves others as the Father and Son love them.

Possessed of Charity

Let us return to Mormon’s definition of charity and focus on a phrase he couples with it: “charity is the pure love of Christ, and ... whoso is found possessed of it at the last day, it shall be well with him” (Moroni 7:47). An important question, here, is who does the possessing? The word *possessed*, like the word *inspired*, is a past participle. In English, past participles form the passive voice, expressions in which the subject of the sentence receives the action rather than doing it. Thus, if we say, Jacob was inspired by the Holy Ghost, Jacob (the sentence subject) is not the one who inspires. He is the recipient of inspiration. The agent doing the

inspiring is the object, Holy Ghost, of a preposition, *by*, that follows the verb. If we apply this analysis to Mormon's phrasing, the *whoso* becomes the thing possessed and the *it*, charity, does the possessing. In the first instance, we do not possess charity. Charity possesses us.²⁰ Or more precisely, the Holy Ghost, the bearer of charity, the pure love of Christ, possesses us.

This reading partially reflects common usage, in which being "possessed" suggests that an external entity, usually a malevolent ghost or other evil spirit, has taken over and now controls a person's body. The human host, no longer having volition, is captained by the malevolent evil spirit, e.g., like Korihor, who was "possessed by a lying spirit, ... the devil [who] has power over [him]" (Alma 30:42). The Book of Mormon mentions numerous types of spirits that can possess us, rest upon us, be in, captivate, or purge us, bring us out of darkness, be poured out, be resisted, or be shown in or by us, and which can stir up our hearts. Thus, figures speak of the "spirit of the Devil," which can captivate them (2 Nephi 2:29); the "spirit of judgment" and "the spirit of burning," which can purge them of the blood of Jerusalem (2 Nephi 14:4); the "spirit of deep sleep," which can be poured out upon them (2 Nephi 27:5); the "spirit of prophecy" or the "spirit of revelation" or "the power of his word," which is in them (e.g., Alma 4:20; 17:3; 43:2; 26:13); the "spirit of power," which can bring them out of darkness (2 Nephi 3:5); and the spirits of "wisdom," "understanding," "counsel," "might," "knowledge" and "fear of the Lord," which can rest upon them (2 Nephi 21:2). We can let "the spirit of contention," which comes from the Devil stir up our hearts "to anger, one with another" (3 Nephi 11:29); we can resist the "spirit of the truth" (Alma 30:46); or we can show a "true spirit of freedom" (Alma 60:25; cf. Alma 61:15). Satan can have power over our hearts if we let him in, because the Devil and other evil spirits can "dwell in the hearts of the children of men" (Mosiah 3:6) or get "great hold upon the hearts of the people" (Alma 8:9; see also Alma 10:25, 27:12; Helaman 16:23; 4 Nephi 1:28; Ether 15:19) such that they are "taken captive by the devil" (Alma 12:11). When Satan gets "possession of the hearts of the people," the Spirit of the Lord ceases to strive with them (Moroni 9:4) and they are led away from belief in Christ and into iniquity (3 Nephi 2:2; 6:15–16). All these Book of Mormon phrases are consistent with the doctrine of the two ways — the idea that our lives and choices

20. Later in this paper, we will return to this point and discuss how we can also *possess* charity in addition to being "*possessed of it*."

are, in great measure, a function not of each discrete choice but of the divine or demonic team we have joined.

The magnitude of this choice of ways is well reflected in Alma 34:34–38, Amulek’s preaching to the Zoramites:

Ye cannot say, when ye are brought to that awful crisis, that I will repent, that I will return to my God. Nay, ye cannot say this; for that same spirit which doth possess your bodies at the time that ye go out of this life, that same spirit will have power to possess your body in that eternal world. For behold, if ye have procrastinated the day of your repentance even until death, behold, ye have become subjected to the spirit of the devil, and he doth seal you his; therefore, the Spirit of the Lord hath withdrawn from you, and hath no place in you, and the devil hath all power over you. ... And this I know, because the Lord hath said he dwelleth not in unholy temples, but in the hearts of the righteous doth he dwell. ... And now, my beloved brethren, I desire that ye ... contend no more against the Holy Ghost, but that ye receive it, and take upon you the name of Christ;

Let us focus on the phrase “seal you his” in this and another passage. John Gee notes that there are only two verses in the Book of Mormon where the verb seal is followed by a person as the direct object, the verse cited above in Alma 34 and Mosiah 5:15.²¹ In Alma 34, those who procrastinate repentance and are possessed of the Devil are sealed to Satan. Conversely in Mosiah 5:15, those who repent and are steadfast in their faith in the Lord are sealed to Christ:

Therefore, I would that ye should be steadfast and immovable, always abounding in good works, that Christ, the Lord God Omnipotent, may seal you his, that you may be brought to heaven, that ye may have everlasting salvation and eternal life, through the wisdom, and power, and justice, and mercy of him who created all things, in heaven and in earth, who is God above all. Amen.

These contrasting sealings are yet another example of the doctrine of the two ways.

21. John Gee, “Book of Mormon Word Usage: ‘Seal You His,’” *Insights* 22, no. 1 (2002): 4.

In Alma 40:13, Alma₂, admonishing his son Corianton, makes the same point as Amulek in Alma 34: "... for behold, they have no part nor portion of the Spirit of the Lord; for behold, they chose evil works rather than good; therefore the spirit of the devil did enter into them, and take possession of their house." Here, the Devil "takes possession" of the "house," or the body of the person who has chosen to follow Satan rather than the Lord. Similar concepts include Satan raging in the hearts of the children of men (2 Nephi 28:20; cf. Moses 6:15). But when humankind is righteous, Satan has no power over their hearts (1 Nephi 22:15, 26). Here again we see the doctrine of the two ways.

In Moroni 7, speaking to the righteous, "the peaceable followers of Christ" (Moroni 7:3), Mormon offers the antithesis of Amulek's message to the Zoramites. To reiterate, "charity is the pure love of Christ, and ... whoso is found *possessed of it* at the last day, it shall be well with him" (Moroni 7:47). If at the time that we go out of this life, we have allowed the Holy Ghost to possess us, if we have voluntarily subjected ourselves to the Spirit of the Lord, if that Spirit has sealed us his, it shall be well with us because the Holy Ghost will "possess [our bodies] in that eternal world" (Alma 34:34).

Here in this temporal, mortal world the Holy Ghost is the essential enabler and catalyst of charity. All properly motivated acts of grace toward others that we colloquially call charity are outward manifestations of that inward possession by the Holy Ghost. Paul makes an important distinction between giving alms and having charity. In 1 Corinthians 13:3, he says, "And though I bestow all my goods to feed the poor, and though I give my body to be burned, and have not charity, it profiteth me nothing." Here Paul sets up a contrast between alms giving on the one hand (bestowing all one's goods to feed the poor) and charity, the pure love of Christ, on the other. Charity and alms giving are two separate things. "The precept of charity as contained in the Book of Mormon is particular in that it is divinely connected and can never be reduced to mere ethical behavior."²² Giving and serving and caring for others are epiphenomena, are observable manifestations of the presence of the Godhead within us in the personage of the Holy Ghost. And when God is in us, we are like him, and see him as he is and others as they are. And like God, we want others to come to the Tree of Life, partake of the fruit, be filled, and then be transformed as Lehi, Sariah, Sam, and Nephi were

22. Richardson, "Pure love of Christ," 294.

(1 Nephi 8:12–18).²³ When we are possessed of charity, it shall be well with us at the last day (Moroni 7:46) because we have received the Holy Ghost and taken upon us the name of Christ and have entered into the kingdom of God, the community of beings whose work and glory is to redeem others and draw them into the joyous, loving community of the exalted.

Relevant context includes the adjective “pure,” which is more likely to characterize Christ’s love than our love. It also includes the immediately preceding discussion of the doctrine of the two ways, which suggests that like our ability to choose, our ability to love is a gift given by Christ: “We love him, because he first loved us” (1 John 4:19).²⁴ (The phrase would have been unambiguous had it been translated whoso is possessed by charity.) In addition to being a past participle, possessed can be a simple active voice past tense verb, e.g., Jacob possessed the brass plates. And in some phrasing — Jacob was in possession of the brass plates — *of* can mark the word that follows it as the object rather than the agent of an action. Here, it is fruitful to see both a primary and a secondary meaning for whoso is found possessed of [charity].

Absent the reception of grace inherent in possession by the Holy Ghost, no human being could ever feel the pure love of Christ as the agent of that love. We must first be possessed before we can possess. To reiterate, “We love him because he first loved us” (1 John 4:19). Our ability to have charity depends upon our relationship with Christ and the Holy Ghost. The greatest grace inherent in Christ’s pure love for us is that if we receive it with a broken heart and contrite spirit, with meekness and lowliness of heart, Christ’s attribute, charity, becomes our attribute, and

23. John A. Tvedtnes suggests that the tree of life is an olive tree and that the fruit of the olive tree produces oil that is a symbol of the Holy Ghost. When new converts are baptized, they symbolically partake of the fruit of the tree of life by receiving the gift of the Holy Ghost and become anointed members of the Lord’s earthly kingdom. John A. Tvedtnes, “Olive Oil: Symbol of the Holy Ghost,” in *The Allegory of the Olive Tree: The Olive, the Bible, and Jacob 5*, ed. Stephen D. Ricks and John W. Welch (Provo and Salt Lake City: FARMS and Deseret Book, 1994), 427–59, https://archive.bookofmormoncentral.org/sites/default/files/archive-files/pdf/tvedtnes/2016-02-04/ch._18-_the_allegory_of_the_olive_tree.pdf.

24. Indeed, this is the argument David Holland makes in *Moroni*, 96–98. His interpretation of *having*, *cleaving*, *possessing*, and *being filled with* charity depends on the idea that we possess charity, not that charity possesses us. Matthew O. Richardson makes the same argument, that we must possess charity. Richardson, “Pure Love of Christ,” 295–97, 300.

we love as he loves. In other words, having first been possessed of charity, we may also possess charity.

Being Filled with Charity

As noted previously, the telos of this chapter and of a properly lived life is beautifully articulated in the last verse of chapter seven. And the import of that informative verse, Moroni 7:48, is clarified if its structure is highlighted.

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

We are to pray with all the energy of heart to receive the gift of charity, to be possessed of and then possess it, so that we may become the children of God, be like him, have hope, and be pure even as he is pure. The first, longest *that* clause sets the predicate for all that follows. As Kylie Nielson Turley has suggested, there is an implicit “so” or “in order” after “Jesus Christ.”²⁵ The Father, Son, and their earthly agent, the Holy Ghost, are engaged in theosis.²⁶ They seek to fill human souls with charity, the unbounded, generous love they themselves feel for all humanity, “black and white, bond and free, male and female; and [they] remember ... the heathen; and all are alike unto [them], both Jew and Gentile” (2 Nephi 26:33).

In this summative verse, Mormon echoes what he and others had written in the Book of Mormon, which is full of filling and very specific about what one is filled with when wickedness is rooted out. One is filled with charity in its various manifestations. Here are examples:

- 1 Nephi 1:12: “And it came to pass that as he read, he

25. Kylie Nielson Turley suggested this reading while reviewing an earlier draft of this paper.

26. Andrew Skinner describes theosis as “the restoration of ancient doctrine, specifically the doctrine of deification or, as it is called in classical Christian theology, *theosis* — the teaching that mortals can become gods.” Andrew C. Skinner, *To Become Like God: Witnesses of Our Divine Potential* (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 2016), x.

was *filled with the Spirit of the Lord*.” (cf. 1 Nephi 2:14; Alma 31:36; 3 Nephi 20:8–9; Helaman 5:44).

- 1 Nephi 8:12: “And as I partook of the fruit thereof it *filled my soul with exceedingly great joy*” (cf. 5:17, Mosiah 4:3, 4:20, 25:8; Alma 4:14, 22:15, 29:10, 36:20, 57:36, 62:1; Helaman 3:35, 5:44).
- 2 Nephi 4:21: “*He hath filled me with his love*, even unto the consuming of my flesh.”²⁷ (cf. Mosiah 2:4, 3:19, 4:12; Alma 13:28, 38:12; Moroni 7:48, 8:26).
- Mosiah 18:16: “...and they were baptized in the waters of Mormon, and *were filled with the grace of God*.”
- Mosiah 25:8–11: “*they were filled with sorrow*, and even shed many tears of sorrow [for the slain Lamanites] ... when they thought upon the Lamanites, who were their brethren, of their sinful and polluted state, *they were filled with pain and anguish* for the welfare of their souls.”
- Alma 8:30: “And Alma went forth, and also Amulek, among the people, to declare the words of God unto them; *and they were filled with the Holy Ghost*.” (cf. Alma 36:24; 3 Nephi 12:6, 26:17, 30:2, and 27:15–16).
- 3 Nephi 19:24: “...for it was given unto them what they should pray, and they *were filled with desire*.”
- Moroni 8:17: “And I *am filled with charity*, which is everlasting love.”

In each case, a divine manifestation of charity is “bestowed” upon the true followers of Christ. Each time, an entity fills them, comes upon them, abides or dwells in them, or possesses them. Having the indwelling Holy Ghost in their hearts, they become part of the kingdom of God, one with the Father and Son in their generous love for all humanity.

Chapter 8

Chapter 8 contains a letter Mormon wrote to Moroni “soon after [Moroni’s] calling to the ministry.” It begins as follows: “My beloved

27. Compare this with 1 Nephi 17:48: “[Laman and Lemuel] were angry with me, and were desirous to throw me into the depths of the sea; and as they came forth to lay their hands upon me I spake unto them, saying: In the name of the Almighty God, I command you that ye touch me not, for *I am filled with the power of God, even unto the consuming of my flesh*.” The passage in 2 Nephi 4:21 is likely alluding to this verse. The difference between these two passages is the word “love” in 2 Nephi 4:1 and the word “power” in 1 Nephi 17:48.

son, Moroni, I rejoice exceedingly that your Lord Jesus Christ hath been mindful of you, and hath called you to his ministry, and to his holy work” (Moroni 8:1–2). At this time — unlike most of the rest of his life — Moroni is still part of an earthly community of believers. He is formally engaged in “the work and glory” of the gods: drawing others into the kingdom of God that still exists on earth in the form of a congregation of believers.

But Mormon is concerned that Moroni’s group of believers, which should be an earthly manifestation of the heavenly community, is split apart by disputations about who will ultimately be covered by the love and grace of Christ. Some want to exclude from Christ’s grace unbaptized children and “all they that are without the law,” beings who can neither sin nor repent. Speaking “the word of the Lord [that] came to me by the power of the Holy Ghost” (Moroni 8:7), Mormon declares that it is a grave sin to have a crabbed vision of heaven, to gratuitously exclude others from God’s kingdom. We can’t be saved and dwell in heaven if we feel ill will toward anyone else who is there, no matter how severely they may have injured us. We must feel the same joy in their salvation that Christ, who most fully suffered the injury of their sin, abundantly feels in their repentance and redemption. If it is a grave sin to resent the salvation of those who have grievously sinned against us, it is a still graver sin to deny or resent the exaltation of those who have committed no sin: innocent children and those who sinned unknowingly, not having the law.

Being one with Christ through the power of the Holy Ghost, Mormon speaks the words that Christ himself would speak: “I am filled with charity, which is everlasting love; wherefore, all children are alike unto me; wherefore, I love little children with a perfect love; and they are all alike and partakers of salvation. . . . Little children cannot repent; wherefore, it is awful wickedness to deny the pure mercies of God unto them, for they are all alive in [me] because of [my] mercy” (Moroni 8:17, 19).²⁸

28. As we note in the text, the content of the Book of Moroni seems to be material that was especially meaningful to Moroni as he wandered alone. This particular epistle from his father presumably reminded him of a time when he was still part of a community of believers, however misguided some of his then companions may have been. And it is very possible that Moroni had young children who were killed in the chaos of war when his military position and duties left him unable to be with and protect them. If so, he would have taken special comfort from the promise of this epistle that his young children were all alive in Christ, members, like him (though not now with him) of the heavenly community.

As for those who are under the law and can sin and repent, Mormon describes very clearly the process by which they may be incorporated into the kingdom of God. Donald W. Parry's analysis of the rhetorical structure highlights the importance of Holy Ghost and charity or love in that incorporation:²⁹

for repentance is unto them that are under condemnation
and under the curse of a broken law.
And the first fruits of repentance is
baptism; and
baptism cometh by faith unto the
fulfilling the commandments; and the
fulfilling the commandments bringeth
remission of sins; And the
remission of sins bringeth
meekness, and lowliness of heart; and because of
meekness and lowliness of heart cometh the visitation of the
Holy Ghost, which
Comforter filleth with hope and perfect
love, which
love endureth by diligence unto prayer, until the end
shall come, when all the saints shall dwell with God.
(Moroni 8:24–26)

Here, as in Chapter 7, Mormon describes how one comes to be possessed of charity, of perfect love, through the indwelling visitation of the Holy Ghost. Through this process that is open to all who will receive it, souls possessed by the Holy Ghost perform the works of grace and qualify themselves to join the Father, Son, and Holy Ghost in heaven.

Chapter 9

The structure of the Book of Moroni is similar to the structure of the larger Book of Mormon. Just as the Book of Mormon describes the complete collapse of Jaredite civilization in its next to last book, Ether, so the Book of Moroni describes the complete moral collapse of the Nephites in its next to last chapter, Chapter 9. These accounts of civilizational collapse underscore in the penultimate position in the text how much is at stake in

29. Donald W. Parry, *Poetic Parallelisms in the Book of Mormon: The Complete Text Reformatted* (Provo, UT: Neal A. Maxwell Institute for Religious Scholarship, Brigham Young University, 2007): 559, <https://scholarsarchive.byu.edu/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=1060&context=mi>.

the choices we make as individuals and as societies, i.e., the importance of the choice Moroni will so powerfully lay before us in Chapter 10. After describing very clearly in Chapters 7 and 8 the process by which people may be incorporated in the divine community of heaven, Mormon concludes Chapter 8 by sadly saying that the Nephites are now refusing to repent, that they reject all “authority which cometh from God; and they are denying the Holy Ghost” which has “ceased striving with them” (Moroni 8:28–29). Then Chapter 9, a second letter from Mormon vividly delineates the consequences of that rejection of God’s way. As previously noted, in the Book of Mormon account, there are only two paths one may tread, two teams one may join. Since the Nephites no longer follow Christ and participate in the process of theosis, they *ipso facto* follow Satan and participate in its obverse, what one might call demonosis.³⁰ As followers of Satan, both Nephites and Lamanites are now a part of the community of the damned.

Unsurprisingly, these followers of the ultimate anti-Christ, Satan, are possessed by feelings that are the opposite of charity, the pure love of Christ: “They have lost their love, one towards another; and they thirst after blood and revenge continually. ... And they have become strong in their perversion; and they are alike brutal, sparing none, neither old nor young; and they delight in everything save that which is good” (Moroni 9:5, 19).

Having become servants of Satan, both Lamanites and Nephites administer a kind of anti-sacrament. Mormon succinctly marks their demonization by describing two particular and related acts of evil. The Lamanites kill the Nephite men they capture. Then “they feed the women upon the flesh of their husbands, and the children upon the flesh of their fathers” (Moroni 9:8). Not to be outdone in their devotion to Satan, in what seems to be an act of ritual evil, the Nephites rape the daughters of the Lamanites, then torture them to death, “and after they have done this, they devour their flesh like unto wild beasts, ... and they do it for a token of bravery” (Moroni 9:10). Clearly, the moral degradation of both Nephites and Lamanites could have been signified by any number of atrocities. It is probably no accident that Mormon (and

30. For a discussion of theosis in the Book of Mormon, see Val Larsen and Newell D. Wright, “Theosis in the Book of Mormon: The Work and Glory of the Father, Mother and Son, and Holy Ghost,” *Interpreter: A Journal of Latter-day Saint Faith and Scholarship* 56 (2023): 275–326, <https://journal.interpreterfoundation.org/theosis-in-the-book-of-mormon-the-work-and-glory-of-the-father-mother-and-son-and-holy-ghost/>.

Moroni) illustrated that degradation with two acts of cannibalism that contrast on so many dimensions with the most important ritual act we perform to memorialize and accept the sacrifice of the Savior on our behalf.

These instances of literal cannibalism,³¹ inspired by Satan, are the antitype of what some anthropologists would call the spiritual or ritual³² cannibalism³³ Moroni described in chapters 4 and 5. In the sacrament ritual Christ gave us, the Savior signifies his sacrifice of himself to save us by having us symbolically eat his body and drink his blood as a token of our faith. We are strengthened spiritually and empowered to enter heaven by making him part of us, us part of him. The suffering signified in the ritual was fully and voluntarily borne by the Savior. It is the ultimate example of charity, of magnanimous love and grace, that if received, transforms us into pure and holy inhabitants of heaven. In the Satanic anti-sacraments of the Lamanites and Nephites, all suffering is involuntary and inflicted on others. The narcissist Satan's sacrament entails no self-sacrifice, no self-giving on his part. It is wholly grounded in hatred for and the suffering of others. And it transforms those who participate in it into inhabitants of hell.³⁴

31. Brant Gardner correlates these instances of cannibalism with the Aztec practice of human sacrifice. "Eating human flesh is best known from Aztec times. Pieces of the victims were cooked and distributed to be eaten. Because this was a religious rite, it would be unfair for us to label it cannibalism because of the connotations we bring to that label. For the Aztecs, it would be more accurate to see it as a rather too-literal 'sacrament' of flesh. Where the Christian symbolically eats the flesh of the Savior, the Aztecs literally ate the flesh of their sacrifices." Gardner, *Second Witness*, 6:400.

32. "While other forms of cannibalism may be unethical, ritualistic cannibalism, in which the human and divine come into relation, supersedes any moral rule against cannibalism." Lucilla Pan, "Cannibalism and the Eucharist: The Ethics of Eating the Human and the Divine," *SOPHIA: International Journal of Philosophy and Traditions* 61, no. 4 (2022), <https://doi.org/10.1007/s11841-022-00928-x>.

33. For profound thoughts from a faithful Christian on the ritual cannibalism of the sacrament, see James R. Wheeler, "The Shocking Nature of Holy Communion" (sermon), Saint John's Episcopal Church, August 19, 2018, <https://stjohns-stamford.org/sermon-archives/shocking-nature-holy-communion-august-19-2018/>.

34. The episode in the Book of Mormon most analogous to the two demonic acts Mormon describes in Chapter 9 is the one recounted in Alma Chapter 14:9–27. There, too, women and children are brutally murdered. When the perpetrators of that evil act, gnashing their teeth and spitting, ask, "How shall we look when we are damned?", the answer is, much as they look in that moment. They are being transformed into demons and stand on the threshold of hell, about to enter it. The

What is striking is that even while surrounded by people engaged in so much evil, Mormon and Moroni must manifest charity, the pure love of Christ, having as the objects of their love both the Savior who saves them and the sinners who surround them. Thus, Mormon instructs Moroni as follows:

And now, my beloved son, notwithstanding their hardness, let us labor diligently; for if we should cease to labor, we should be brought under condemnation; for we have a labor to perform whilst in this tabernacle of clay, that we may conquer the enemy of all righteousness, and rest our souls in the kingdom of God. ... My son, be faithful in Christ; and ... may Christ lift thee up, and may his sufferings and death, and the showing his body unto our fathers, and his mercy and long-suffering, and the hope of his glory and of eternal life, rest in your mind forever. And may the grace of God the Father, whose throne is high in the heavens, and our Lord Jesus Christ, who sitteth on the right hand of his power, until all things shall become subject unto him, be, and abide with you forever. Amen. (Moroni 9:6, 25–26)

Mormon here echoes Lehi's account of his First Vision. Charity will qualify Moroni to enter the divine community Lehi saw in that vision, where the Father is seated on his heavenly throne and the Son sits at his right hand.³⁵

Chapter 10

In chapter 10, Moroni exhorts us to receive the message that has come to us in the Book of Mormon, to “ask God the Eternal Father, in the name of Christ, if these things are not true.” If we “ask with a sincere heart, with real intent, having faith in Christ, he will manifest the truth of it unto [us], by the power of the Holy Ghost” (Moroni 10:4). And having received this testimony through the Holy Ghost, we qualify ourselves to receive as gifts the attributes and powers that divine beings possess: wisdom, knowledge, the power to heal and work mighty miracles, to prophesy, to consort (as God consorts) with angels, to speak and understand all languages (Moroni 10:9–16). And chief among the divine

Nephites and Lamanites in Moroni Chapter 9 are likewise being transformed into demons as they immiserate themselves and others by following Satan.

35. See Larsen and Wright, “Theosis,” for an in-depth analysis of this proposition.

gifts, we qualify ourselves to receive is charity, the pure love of Christ, without which we “can in nowise be saved in the kingdom of God” (Moroni 10:20–22).

Moroni reiterates this principle: If we refuse to receive the testimony and gifts he lays before us in this chapter, we “cannot be saved in the kingdom of God” (Moroni 10:26). If we do receive them, he tells us in his concluding message, we will be made perfect and achieve our divine destiny. His phrasing suggests that we, like the twelve who descended with the One (1 Nephi 1:8–11), have inborn potential to be like our Heavenly Parents, godly. Our task is to shed all the “ungodliness” that we accrue in the course of our mortal lives, to “come unto Christ, and be perfected in him, ... [to] love God with all [our] might, mind and strength, ... that by his grace [we] may be perfect in Christ, ... sanctified in Christ, ... that [we] become holy, without spot” (Moroni 10:32–33). If we do these things, Moroni optimistically concludes in the final verse of the Book of Mormon, we will meet him and the Savior “before the pleasing³⁶ bar of the great Jehovah, the Eternal Judge of both quick and

36. Royal Skousen argues that *pleasing* should be replaced here and in Jacob 6:13 with *pleading* because *pleasing* does not make sense. For Jacob 6:13, which reads, “I bid you farewell, until I shall meet you before the pleasing bar of God, which bar striketh the wicked with awful dread and fear,” the change from *pleasing* to *pleading* does seem to be justified by the context. In Moroni 10:27, where Moroni has just said, “wo unto them who shall do these things away and die, for they die in their sins, and cannot be saved,” a *pleading* bar would have been more apt than a *pleasing* bar. But here in the context of all the promises that one can be made perfect in Christ (Moroni 10:30–33), *pleasing* seems at least as appropriate as *pleading*. Royal Skousen, “The Pleading Bar of God,” *Interpreter: A Journal of Latter-day Saint Faith and Scholarship* 42 (2021): 21–36, <https://journal.interpreterfoundation.org/the-pleading-bar-of-god/>. Even though Skousen recommends *pleading* instead of *pleasing* (and incorporated it into *The Book of Mormon: The Earliest Text*, 2nd ed., New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2022), not all scholars agree with him. John Welch offers ten reasons why he disagrees with Skousen’s interpretation in “Keep the Old Wine in Old Wineskins: The Pleasing (Not Pleading) Bar of God,” *FARMS Review of Books on the Book of Mormon 1989–2011* 18, no. 1 (2006): 139–47, <https://scholarsarchive.byu.edu/msr/vol18/iss1/9/>. “In summary, based on these ten points, I see no viable basis for accepting the proposed conjectural emendation to replace the traditional *pleasing bar* with the problematical phrase *pleading bar*. ... There is no adequate reason to think that Jacob and Moroni would have engraved the words equivalent to *pleading bar* on the gold plates, that the words *pleading bar* would have been revealed to Joseph Smith in the translation process, that Joseph would have thought of them himself, or that he would have dictated them to Oliver Cowdery. The term *pleasing bar* should be retained in the Book of Mormon, where it has been since 1829” (146–47).

dead” (Moroni 10:34), a place of judgment that can be pleasing only if we have been transformed by grace, filled with charity, and have thus qualified ourselves to be fully and finally included through that judgment in the divine kingdom of heaven.

If that does not happen, we will be like Alma₂ in his pre-repentant state, desiring to “be banished and become extinct both soul and body, that [we] might not be brought to stand in the presence of [our] God, to be judged of [our] deeds” (Alma 36:15), “for our words will condemn us, yea, all our works will condemn us; we shall not be found spotless; and our thoughts will also condemn us; and in this awful state we shall not dare to look up to our God; and we would fain be glad if we could command the rocks and the mountains to fall upon us to hide us from his presence” (Alma 12:13–14).

Conclusion

The Holy Ghost is the connecting thread that runs throughout the Book of Moroni. In particular, the Holy Ghost is the source and bestower of charity, the “pure love of Christ.” Three phrases in Mormon’s discussion of charity in Moroni 7:44–48, “cleave unto charity,” “possessed of it,” and “that ye may be filled with this love,” help enlarge our understanding of how charity operates in our lives. We *cleave* unto charity by allowing ourselves to be *possessed* of and be *filled* with the Holy Ghost, which, when it is in us, fills us with charity. When we cleave unto the Holy Ghost and are possessed of charity, we become one with Christ and the Father, see them as they are and become like them. The obverse is also true: if we cleave unto, are possessed of, and filled with the spirit of the Devil, we become one with him, possessed of his spirit, and are filthy as he is filthy. Those two paths are open to us. It is, thus, vitally important that, influenced by the Holy Ghost, we make the choice Moroni urges us to make as he concludes the Book of Moroni — the choice to be “sanctified in Christ by the grace of God [and] become holy, without spot” (Moroni 10:22).

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DOCTRINE AND COVENANTS 21: METANARRATIVE OF THE RESTORATION

Steven L. Olsen

Abstract: *Joseph Smith dictated Doctrine and Covenants 21 at the inaugural meeting of the Church of Jesus Christ on April 6, 1830. The present study examines the literary craftsmanship of the revelation to plumb the depths of its role in the restoration of the gospel of Jesus Christ. The analysis explores the meaning of patterns of usage in the text from the most specific (diction, syntax, figures of speech) to the most general (tone, rhetoric, and structural logic). The hypothesis of this study is that Doctrine and Covenants 21 provides a metanarrative of the Restoration — that is, a set of governing principles and guidelines for keeping the official record of the gospel's final dispensation.*

The revelation known as section 21 of the Doctrine and Covenants was dictated by Joseph Smith on April 6, 1830, during the inaugural meeting of the Church of Jesus Christ at the home of Peter and Mary Whitmer in Fayette Township, New York. The revelation:

- Provides crucial details about the order and identity of the Church of Jesus Christ and instructs Joseph Smith and Oliver Cowdery on its formal organization.
- Defines core spiritual responsibilities for Church members and leaders and promises sublime heavenly blessings for their faithfulness.
- Identifies the three members of the Godhead and clarifies their complementary roles in the restoration of the gospel of Jesus Christ in this dispensation.

- Confirms Joseph Smith's central roles in the Restoration¹ and his qualification to perform them.

To illustrate the implications and complex interconnections of these points, the present study takes a “deep dive” into the canonized text of the revelation — that published in the current edition of the Doctrine and Covenants. While I acknowledge the analytical value of earlier editions of the text, this study privileges that which The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints accepts as scripture — the authoritative word of God.² In studying this sacred text, I explore multiple features of its literary craftsmanship, ranging from the most specific, e.g., diction, syntax, and figures of speech, to the most general, e.g., tone, rhetoric, and structural logic.

The present approach is greatly indebted to scholarly studies of the literary crafts manship of biblical texts from the mid-twentieth century to the present.³ Cultural studies of foundational texts from an array

1. “Restoration” is the specialized Latter-day Saint term for the establishment of the Kingdom of God on earth in preparation for the Second Coming of Jesus Christ. See Cory H. Maxwell, “Restoration of All Things,” *Encyclopedia of Mormonism*, Daniel H. Ludlow, ed. (New York: Macmillan, 1992), 1218–19.

2. The first published edition of section 21 is almost identical to the current published edition in the Doctrine and Covenants. Textual changes between the two editions include a few examples of capitalization and punctuation and a few minor word changes, e.g., “our” (1833) to “your” (1981). Except as noted in footnote 21 below, none of these changes affect the present textual analysis. See “Book of Commandments, 1833,” pp. 45–46, The Joseph Smith Papers, <https://www.josephsmithpapers.org/paper-summary/book-of-commandments-1833/49>. See also W. D. Davies and Truman G. Madsen, “Scriptures,” *Encyclopedia of Mormonism*, 1277–80.

3. See Erich Auerbach, *Mimesis: The Representation of Reality in Western Literature*, trans. Willard R. Trask (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1953), 3–23; Robert Alter, *The Art of Biblical Narrative* (New York: Basic Books, 1981); Robert Alter, *The Art of Biblical Poetry* (New York: Basic Books, 1985); Robert Alter, *The Five Books of Moses: A Translation with Commentary* (New York: W. W. Norton, 2004); Adele Berlin, *The Dynamics of Biblical Parallelism* (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 1985); Meir Sternberg, *The Poetics of Biblical Narrative: Ideological Literature and the Drama of Reading* (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 1987); Jason P. Rosenblatt and Joseph C. Sitterson, Jr., eds., “Not in Heaven:” *Coherence and Complexity in Biblical Narrative* (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 1991); Steven L. Olsen, “Birth and Calling of the Prophet Samuel: A Literary Reading of the Biblical Text,” *BYU Studies* 56, no. 1 (2017): 7–44.

of traditional and modern societies have also been influential.⁴ These sources ground the present study in the following perspectives:

- **Meaning.** The expressive value of texts is as crucial to their understanding as their evidentiary value. A full appreciation of sacred texts depends as much on their ideological as their empirical contents. The eminent early American historian Alan Heimert puts the point thus: “To discover the meaning of any utterance demands what is in substance a continuing act of literary interpretation, for the language with which an idea is presented, and the imaginative universe by which it is surrounded, often tells us more of an author’s meaning and intention than his declarative propositions.”⁵
- **Coherence.** Sacred texts are best understood as unified statements, rather than as assemblages of disparate comments, especially if their literary craftsmanship implies a high degree of integration. Even if inherited texts have received multiple edits and redactions, they may yet retain considerable interpretive unity. The analytical focus of the present study is the meaningful coherence of the received text of D&C 21 as expressed in its literary conventions.
- **Author.** The present study accepts Joseph Smith’s claim that God is the source of this text. While dictation by the Latter-day Saint prophet likely influenced its craftsmanship to some extent, this study does not attempt to parse the text’s purely divine and predominantly human sources. The meaning of the official text as reflected in its literary craftsmanship, not the history of its authorship, is my principal concern.

4. See Claude Levi-Strauss, *Structural Anthropology*, trans. Claire Jacobson and Brooke Grundfest Schoepf (New York: Basic Books, 1963); Edmund Leach, *Genesis as Myth and Other Essays* (London: Jonathan Cape, 1969); James M. Redfield, *Nature and Culture in the Iliad: The Tragedy of Hector* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 1975); Steven L. Olsen, “Literary Craftsmanship of the Joseph Smith Story,” *Joseph Smith and His First Vision: Context, Place, and Meaning*, eds. Alexander L. Baugh, Steven C. Harper, Brent M. Rogers, and Benjamin C. Pykles (Provo, UT: BYU Religious Studies Center, 2021), 219–36.

5. Alan Heimert, *Religion and the American Mind: From the Great Awakening to the Revolution* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1966), 11.

- **Cultural context.** The meaning of a text is a complex “social fact.”⁶ That is, its meaning does not exist outside specific cultural contexts, whether of its creation, circulation, or transmission. Many contemporary scholars focus on textual meaning as reflected in its shared experience among living members of a social group.⁷ While I recognize the value of this perspective, the present study is based on an alternate premise that, consciously or not, authors inevitably communicate meaning in their literary creations. Attempting to recover authors’ meanings by examining the literary craftsmanship of their texts remains a worthy, if challenging, scholarly endeavor.
- **Comparative method.** The craftsmanship of literary creations includes mechanics, aesthetics, and patterns of usage, not only of the given texts themselves but also of the larger literary traditions from which they emerged.⁸ Thus, to plumb the “imaginative universe” of D&C 21, I consider literary conventions of not only the sacred text itself but also related scriptures of the Church of Jesus Christ.⁹ In many cases, the comparison of usage patterns among related texts reveals increased complexity and nuances of meaning for a given literary convention.

6. The eminent French sociologist Emile Durkheim coined the phrase to support the claim that social phenomena must be understood in sociological, not psychological, physiological, or ecological terms, see *The Rules of the Sociological Method*, ed. Steven Lucas, trans. W. D. Halls (New York: Free Press, 1982).

7. See Andre LaCocque and Paul Ricoeur, *Thinking Biblically: Exegetical and Hermeneutical Studies*, trans. David Pellauer (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1998), xii.

8. See Neil L. Rudenstine, *Ideas of Order: A Close Reading of Shakespeare’s Sonnets* (New York: Farrar, Straus, and Giroux, 2014).

9. Expanding the scope of this study to include the literary qualities of other writings of Joseph Smith and the Church of Jesus Christ — including other scriptures, non-canonized revelations, letters and journals, sermons, epistles, and so on — may provide additional insights into the meaning of section 21. Practical considerations led the author to limit the comparative scope of the present analysis to Joseph Smith’s canonized revelations in the Doctrine and Covenants. Rudenstine (footnote 8) productively examined Shakespeare’s sonnets within the literary context of the sonnets themselves, not all of Shakespeare’s writings. If readers see interpretive value in this somewhat limited perspective, a more qualified scholar may discover deeper insights from a broader comparative analysis.

The following, then, is a detailed textual analysis of D&C 21 that illustrates the expressiveness of its literary craftsmanship. The “big idea” of this study is that the revelation provides Latter-day Saints with a metanarrative of the Restoration.

Metanarrative

Many divine communications, like much poetry, contain layers of significance that go far beyond the surface meaning. While ostensibly about the formal organization of the Church of Jesus Christ, D&C 21 cannot be reduced solely to a set of operational instructions. For example, its opening clause, “Behold, there shall be a record kept among you,” implies the presence of layers of meaning beyond the organizational and operational. This directive raises the core questions, “What does a record have to do with the Church of Jesus Christ in the latter days?” and “What kind of record will fulfill this lofty mission?” As was seen above, a literary analysis is especially suited to consider questions like these. In what follows I pay particular attention to the literary craftsmanship of section 21, especially its contents that explicate the interpretive focus of its opening clause.

As will be seen, D&C 21 does not provide explicit instructions about the record to be kept. Rather, it implicitly identifies a series of principles, guidelines, and building blocks that define an acceptable record to the Lord. The set of principles that guide the construction of an acceptable record is called a metanarrative. While its metanarrative is neither complete nor exhaustive, the revelation provides a sufficient foundation for subsequent revelations to build upon and subsequent records stewards to follow. The conclusion to this study further reflects on this analytical perspective and illustrates its impact on Joseph Smith and other Church leaders of the time.

“A Record Kept” (D&C 21:1–3)

Behold, there shall be a record kept among you; and in it thou shalt be called a seer, a translator, a prophet, an apostle of Jesus Christ, an elder of the church through the will of God the Father, and the grace of your Lord Jesus Christ,

Being inspired of the Holy Ghost to lay the foundation thereof, and to build it up unto the most holy faith.

Which church was organized and established in the year of your Lord eighteen hundred and thirty, in the fourth month, and on the sixth day of the month which is called April.

The first two sentences of section 21 define the spiritual identity of the Godhead and of the Church of Jesus Christ and the essential, God-given roles of its founder.

Behold. The text begins as many other modern revelations. *Behold* appears nearly 500 times in the Doctrine and Covenants, one-quarter of which predate the formal organization of the Church. Three-quarters of modern revelations contain at least one use of the term, and nearly one-third begin with the term either as the opening word or in the opening phrase.¹⁰ Such widespread usage and crucial placement reflect its traditional biblical meaning: This word “points generally to some truth either newly asserted or newly recognized . . . making the narrative graphic and vivid, enabling the reader to enter into the surprise or satisfaction of the speaker or actor concerned.”¹¹ Thus, the opening word of section 21 encourages readers to anticipate essential and newly revealed statements of divine truth.

There shall be a record kept among you. Despite the revelation’s attention-getting opening word, its initial clause seems rather prosaic. *There shall be* employs an uncertain subject and a passive verb, both rhetorically weak conventions. In addition, the prepositional phrase *among you* has an unclear pronoun referent. Who is the intended audience of the directive: Joseph Smith, Oliver Cowdery, the limited congregation at the Whitmer home, Latter-day Saints generally, the Church as an organized religion, all these audiences together, some of them separately, or someone(s) else entirely? Not only is the principal audience of the opening clause uncertain, but the command itself lacks rhetorical strength.

Further investigation of this clause, however, reveals considerable semantic significance. For example, the prepositional phrase *among you* appears forty-eight additional times in the Doctrine and Covenants, almost exclusively in the context of such key religious actions as obeying commandments, administering emblems of the sacrament, performing

10. R. Gary Shapiro, comp., *An Exhaustive Concordance of the Book of Mormon, Doctrine and Covenants, and Pearl of Great Price* (Salt Lake City: Hawkes, 1977), s.v. “behold.” Hereafter cited as “Exhaustive Concordance.”

11. Francis Brown, S. R. Driver, and Charles A. Briggs, *The Brown-Driver-Briggs Hebrew and English Lexicon*, rep. ed. (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson Publishers Marketing, 2014), 2009. Hereafter cited as “BDB.”

priesthood ordinances, retaining spiritual purity, shunning evil, maintaining moral boundaries, and preserving sacred funds and other resources — all core spiritual practices of the Church of Jesus Christ.¹² In short, use of this prepositional phrase at the beginning of section 21 links the Church's *record* with a host of distinctive features of the restored gospel.

Furthermore, the general ambiguity of the initial clause effectively draws readers' attention to the noun phrase that serves as its interpretive focus. While *a record kept* does not specify its medium — is it to be written? oral? performative? visual? material? artistic? published? manuscript? some/all of these? or something else entirely? — the divine command, the first given to the newly organized Church, implies that its official *record* will be a crucial element of the Restoration.

Use of the collective noun "record" instead of "records" further implies that it is to be unified, integrated, and focused on a lofty purpose. The term's general pattern of usage in Latter-day Saint scripture reinforces this perspective. The Doctrine and Covenants contains 57 uses of *record*, more than half (34) occur in the verb phrase *bear record* (with variations), connoting profoundly spiritual roles for the *record* to "testify," "witness," and "declare," not simply to "describe" and "document." As a noun, *record* overwhelmingly refers to sacred Church documents — The Book of Mormon, latter-day revelations, and official lists of members who have either joined the Church through baptism or made eternal covenants through the performance of living or vicarious temple ordinances.¹³ Thus, as used in Smith's revelations, including section 21, *record* carries considerable spiritual weight, defining the divine identity of the Church of Jesus Christ and witnessing to its earthly mission, not simply documenting its history or tracking its demographics.

Reinforcing this spiritual focus, the verb *kept* is also full of spiritual significance. Variations of the verb find widespread use in the Doctrine and Covenants: *keep* (61 uses), *kept* (37), *keepeth* (10), *keeping* (10), and *keepeth* (1). The infinitive occurs most frequently in the phrase, *keep My commandments* and variations (68 uses). Other common expressions associate *keep* with *genealogy* or *history* (nine uses), the Lord's *treasury* or *storehouse* (7 uses), and *covenants* or *pledges* (4 uses), all central characteristics of the Church of Jesus Christ. Its widespread and diverse pattern of usage implies that the verb carries a range of deeply spiritual connotations, including "obey," "guard," "protect,"

12. *Exhaustive Concordance*, s.v. "among."

13. *Exhaustive Concordance*, s.vv. "record," "records."

“create,” “hold sacred,” and “preserve.”¹⁴ Thus, the entire phrase *a record kept* connotes more than a descriptive account and empirical evidence of Church history. Rather, “keeping the record” implies a sacred, perpetual stewardship for an official witness to the truth of the Restoration that identifies the Church of Jesus Christ as the institutional agent of the gospel’s eternal mission.

That the opening noun phrase in section 21 carries great spiritual significance, but considerable ambiguity implies that subsequent revelations will refine and expand the commandment and that the rest of section 21 nuances the contents and purpose of the prescribed *record*. While previous studies develop the former point, the present explores the latter one.

And in it thou shalt be called a seer, a translator, a prophet, an apostle of Jesus Christ, an elder of the church. The next clause in the revelation’s first sentence continues use of the passive voice: “shalt be called.” While often rhetorically weak, the passive voice can play a constructive semantic role, especially when the actor in a sentence is less important than the object of the action. For example, in section 21, record (the object of the action of being kept) is more important than its keepers, and the various roles of Joseph Smith’s mission (the object of the action of being known) are more important than those who know him by these roles. Thus, in the revelation’s opening sentence, the passive voice reinforces a single-minded interpretive focus on the record.

Called. This term appears 118 times in the Doctrine and Covenants, with roughly 70% of all uses connoting a “divine, spiritual, or sacred appointment” and roughly one-quarter connoting “to name or give a name or designation to.” Both uses of the term in Section 21 (vv. 1, 3) carry the “naming” connotation, which is also used throughout the Doctrine and Covenants to distinguish such central religious concepts as “Zion,” “New Jerusalem,” “Son of God,” “United Order,” “Holy Priesthood,” “The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints,” and even “Perdition,” as a synonym for Satan.¹⁵ Thus, the “naming” convention along with its passive voice implies that the formal roles of Joseph Smith’s earthly ministry and the date of the Church’s official organization are of considerable spiritual value to the Restoration.

14. *Exhaustive Concordance*, s.vv., “keep,” “keepest,” “keepeth,” “keeping,” “kept.”

15. *The Oxford English Dictionary* 2nd ed. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2003), s.v., “called.” Hereafter cited as “OED.” See also *Exhaustive Concordance*, s.v., “called.”

The clause also enumerates a specific detail of the record's principal contents. Five roles define and distinguish Joseph Smith's God-given ministry. By the time he receives this revelation, Smith had already assumed all five roles, and he magnifies and refines all five through his subsequent service in the Kingdom. While this study is not the place for a full exposition of these roles in early Church history, two details of the list affect the meaning of section 21:

- **Sequence.** The roles are listed in the chronological order in which Joseph Smith assumes them. He becomes a *seer* in the early spring of 1820 when he sees God the Father and His Son Jesus Christ in the incomparable spiritual experience known as the First Vision. He becomes a *translator* in the winter of 1827–28 as he begins dictating The Book of Mormon in English by “the gift and power of God” with the assistance of Emma Smith, Oliver Cowdery, and other scribes. He becomes a *prophet* in the summer of 1828 as he begins receiving revelations from and speaking in the name of God. He becomes an *apostle of Jesus Christ* in mid-1829 upon receiving the “keys of the apostleship” from Christ's ancient apostles, Peter, James, and John, shortly after being ordained to the “priesthood of Aaron” by John the Baptist. He becomes an *elder of the church* on April 6, 1830, through his ordination by Oliver Cowdery.¹⁶ Thus, the list of roles not only implies a multi-faceted and God-given ministry for Joseph Smith but also identifies another essential characteristic of the *record to be kept* — chronological precision.
- **Patterns of usage.** In the Doctrine and Covenants, *seer*, *translator*, and *prophet* appear six, three, and fourteen times, respectively, nearly always in combination with one another and with an additional God-given role — “revelator.”¹⁷ This pattern implies that *seer*, *translator*, *prophet*, and *revelator* complement one another in Joseph's ministry and are not ordained priesthood offices in the Church of Jesus Christ. Rather, they are complementary spiritual gifts or endowments of spiritual power received directly from God without the formal action of a human intermediary. As such,

16. See “Joseph Smith – History,” *Pearl of Great Price*.

17. *Exhaustive Concordance*, s.vv., “prophet,” “revelator,” “seer,” “translator.”

their operation is not limited by time, place, or other earthly conditions.

By contrast, *apostle* and *elder* refer almost exclusively to ordained offices in the Church of Jesus Christ. *Elder* (32 singular and 85 plural uses) is the generic office of those who are ordained to the Church's "higher" or Melchizedek Priesthood. By far, revelations with the most frequent uses of *elder(s)* address crucial aspects of Church government.¹⁸ *Apostle* is the highest ordained office in the Melchizedek Priesthood, possessing all "keys," or formal authorities, to administer the Church and direct the performance of sacred ordinances of salvation. *Apostle* (singular) appears eight times in the Doctrine and Covenants, three of which refer to individual apostles from the Christian Bible (Paul, John, etc.) and five to Joseph Smith and Oliver Cowdery in their role as special witnesses of Jesus Christ in the present dispensation. *Apostles* (plural) appears 30 times in Joseph's revelations, mostly referring to members of the Quorum of the Twelve Apostles once this executive council of the Church is formally organized on 14 February 1835.¹⁹ In short, the list identifies five essential roles that distinguish Joseph Smith's God-given ministry. It also specifies crucial contents of the *record* that bears witness of *the church* as the Kingdom of God on earth, namely, a focus on its key offices, spiritual authorities, and essential operations.

Through the will of the Father and the grace of your Lord Jesus Christ, being inspired of the Holy Ghost. The next phrase of the revelation's first sentence addresses the questions, "By whose authority is the Church established, and what roles do they play in its earthly mission?" This is one of only a few passages from the Doctrine and Covenants that identify all three members of the Godhead and their distinctive roles.²⁰ From this perspective, the Savior Jesus Christ organizes and directs His Church on earth by the will of God the Father and through the inspiration of the Holy Ghost. The complementarity of their divine roles is reinforced by the parallel construction of the respective noun phrases: "[role] of [identity]."

Your Lord. *Lord* is one of the most frequent proper nouns in the Doctrine and Covenants, used nearly 700 times, making it the most

18. D&C 20 (30 combined uses) and 107 (10 uses).

19. *Exhaustive Concordance*, s.vv. "apostle," "apostles," "elder," "elders." See also S. Kent Brown, "Apostle," *Encyclopedia of Mormonism*, 59–61.

20. Distinctive membership of the Godhead is enumerated three times in section 20 in the prayers of the ordinance of baptism and administration of the emblems of the sacrament of the Lord's Supper (D&C 20:28, 73–79).

common title for Jesus Christ in the Doctrine and Covenants. Some 75 of these uses include the second-person possessive pronouns, *your* [or *thy*] *Lord*, as in section 21, reinforcing His intimate and personal relationship with the Church of Jesus Christ.²¹

To lay the foundations thereof and to build it up unto the most holy faith. The last phrase in the revelation's opening sentence identifies two distinguishing markers of the Church of Jesus Christ. *The church* is established on a firm *foundation* and thereby becomes *the most holy faith*. While section 21 does not elaborate either term, it implies that subsequent revelations will do so and that the official *record of the church* will feature both.

Uses of *foundation* in the Doctrine and Covenants (30 singular and 2 plural) connote both existential beginnings, e.g., "before the foundations of the world," and structural stability, i.e., the basis of permanence, for example, of a building.²² Its use in section 21 aligns with both connotations. *Lay the foundations* of the Church of Jesus Christ relates to its inspired beginnings as authorized by God, implemented by heavenly messengers, and administered by earthly servants and to its permanence as secured by enduring spiritual features, key examples of which are identified in the rest of the revelation.

While *foundation* emphasizes the formal, structural, and enduring qualities of *the church*, *most holy faith* addresses its spiritual qualities. That both *foundation* and *faith* are collective nouns implies an essential integrity, coherence, and unity to *the church*. The whole clause identifies complementary, comprehensive, and distinctive features of *the church* and essential contents of the *record to be kept* — a multifaceted definition of *church*.

Together, these initial clauses of the revelation's first sentence (vv. 1–2) identify four crucial qualities of the Church of Jesus Christ:

- It is directed from heaven by the Godhead who play key, complementary roles in its mission.
- It is led on earth by a chosen servant of God who performs a variety of divinely directed roles.

21. Frequency of usage makes *Lord* also the most common title for Jesus Christ in the New Testament and Book of Mormon. *Exhaustive Concordance*, s.v., "Lord." Stephen E. Robinson, "Jesus Christ, Names and Titles of," *Encyclopedia of Mormonism*, 740–42.

22. *Exhaustive Concordance*, s.vv. "foundation," "foundations."

- It is distinguished from all other earthly institutions by structural/formal (*foundation*) and spiritual/behavioral (*most holy faith*) qualities.
- It keeps an official *record* that features these and other defining characteristics of *the church*, thus performing essential documentary and testamentary roles.

Which church was organized and established. While the second sentence of section 21 may itself seem rather matter of fact, it fulfills three crucial rhetorical roles in the revelation:

- It authorizes the formal organization of the Church of Jesus Christ. In doing so, the sentence strengthens a central theological premise of the Restoration: if the Church that Joseph Smith founded is indeed the Church of Jesus Christ, then its genesis and operation should be directed by divine revelation.
- It specifies the kind of details to be included in the official *record of the church*: date-specific events essential to the Restoration. Thus, the record's documentary function, i.e., preserving crucial historical facts like times, places, people, and events, complements its testamentary function, i.e., witnessing to the pervasive influence of the Godhead in fulfilling its divine mission.
- It provides the revelation with a transition from its introductory declaration (vv. 1–2) to the rest of its contents (vv. 4–12), including (1) key roles of Church leaders and members, (2) sublime blessings that result from their faithfulness, (3) crucial qualities of its earthly head, and (4) essential events of its formal organization. These will be addressed below.

Organized and established. Before exploring these additional contents, we must examine the literary significance of two past participles of this transitional sentence. *Organized* appears eighteen times in the Doctrine and Covenants, all connoting the formal and official existence of an earthly institution, that is, “formed into a whole with interdependent parts, coordinated so as to form a system or orderly structure.” Its complement, *established*, appears 22 times in the revelations, all with the connotation of an institution's having not only formal existence but also permanent legal status. The complete phrase, *organized and established*, appears three times in the Doctrine and Covenants, the first two in sections 20 and 21 which together address the Church's

formal beginnings, central mission, revealed character, and essential operations.²³

In sum, the first two sentences of section 21 introduce key personnel of the Restoration — Joseph Smith and the Godhead — and an essential product of their combined mission — the Church of Jesus Christ. Its opening also identifies a distinctive feature of *the church* — an official *record* whose contents, media, stewards, and repositories may be diverse and diffuse, but whose God-given purpose and contents are single-minded and unequivocal. As commissioned by God, the *record* illustrates the diverse but complementary roles of the earthly head of the Church of Jesus Christ whose ministry witnesses to the will of the Father, the grace of the Son, and the inspiration of the Holy Ghost in fulfilling the covenant of salvation through the gospel of Jesus Christ. The rest of the revelation defines other distinguishing features of the Lord's Church and specifies essential qualities of its earthly mission.

“Thou Shalt Give Heed” (D&C 21:4–6)

Wherefore, meaning the church, thou shalt give heed unto all his words and commandments which he shall give unto you as he receiveth them, walking in all holiness before me;

For his word ye shall receive, as if from mine own mouth, in all patience and faith.

For by doing these things the gates of hell shall not prevail against you; yea, and the Lord God will disperse the powers of darkness from before you, and cause the heavens to shake for your good, and for his name's glory.

The revelation's next three verses clarify God's covenant relationship with *the church* and its earthly head.

Give and *receive*. These complementary verbs each appear twice in the text and signify the covenant's crucial, enduring, and mutual nature — parties to the covenant exchanging things of eternal value. Thus, God gives gospel truth and heavenly blessing to His prophet, who receives them from God and gives them to *the church*. *The church*, in turn, gives heed to and receives these things from the prophet, as if they had come from God's *own mouth*.

The first use of *give* in section 21 occurs in the verb phrase *give heed*, instructing *the church* to accept, understand, learn from, and act on

23. *Exhaustive Concordance*, s.vv. “organized,” “established,” *OED*, s.vv. “organized,” “established.”

the *words and commandments* of its divinely chosen and duly ordained leader as though they come directly from God. *Heed* appears thirty times in the Doctrine and Covenants, nearly all in the complementary verb phrases *give* [or *take*] *heed*, and variations, with connotations consistent with its use in section 21.²⁴

Give and *receive* with their variations are among the most frequent and widespread verbs in the Doctrine and Covenants, used 504 and 390 times, respectively.²⁵ While the verbs appear individually throughout Joseph's revelations, their combined usage is concentrated in only four, to which they contribute significantly:

- Section 84 reflects on the promised glories of Zion, the New Jerusalem. The 47 combined uses of these verbs connect the intergenerational priesthood lineage from Adam to Moses (vv. 6–17), effect the transfer of heavenly blessings, including that of eternal life (vv. 28, 63–64, 73, 75–76), animate the oath and covenant of the priesthood (vv. 33–42), and strengthen the enduring covenant relationship between God and His children (vv. 77, 85, 88–89).
- Section 88 identifies the universe as a physical manifestation of the light of Christ and as the spatial ordering of the plan of salvation. The 41 combined uses of these verbs transmit or transfer heavenly blessings (vv. 4, 21, 44–45, 62–64, 99, 104, 107, 137), fulfill the plan of salvation (vv. 27–34, 126), bestow eternal spiritual status (vv. 36–42), and strengthen covenant relations (vv. 131–40).
- Section 124 explicates the identity and purpose of Nauvoo as the “cornerstone of Zion.” The 43 combined uses of these verbs fulfill the plan of salvation (vv. 34–39), manage sacred financial donations to the Church (vv. 61–72), and confirm the divine inspiration of key callings in the Church (vv. 123–44).

24. *Exhaustive Concordance*, s.v. “heed”; *OED*, s.v. “heed.” The three unrelated uses of *heed* as a standalone verb suggest how a series of civic officials (judge, governor, and president) are expected to attend Latter-day Saints as they importune for legal redress for the violent destruction and confiscation of their property and possessions in the Missouri persecutions, see D&C 101:87–89.

25. *Exhaustive Concordance*, s.vv. “gave,” “give,” “given,” “gives,” “giveth,” “giving,” “receive,” “received,” “receives,” “receiveth,” “receiving.”

- Section 132 emphasizes the covenant of sealing as essential to the plan of exaltation for all humanity.²⁶ The 48 combined uses of these verbs transfer heavenly blessings (vv. 3, 12), fulfill the plan of exaltation (vv. 6, 18, 22–41), and establish eternal covenants (vv. 45–48, 61–65).

While the two verbs also have mundane connotations in the Doctrine and Covenants, their sublime connotations identify key features of God's covenant of eternal life, a meaning consistent with their uses in section 21.

Words and commandments. In Joseph's canonized revelations, the entire phrase *words and commandments* appears only here. However, the two nouns also appear frequently alone and in combination with other significant nouns. For example, *word(s)* and *commandment(s)* appear a total of 237 and 248 times, respectively, most in the possessive phrases, *my w.* or *my c.*, reflecting God's personal ownership of these profoundly spiritual concepts.²⁷ In combination with other significant nouns, *word(s) of wisdom* appears 11 times;²⁸ *commandments and revelations* appears eight times with variations;²⁹ *covenants and commandments* appears four times with variations;³⁰ *law and commandments* appears four times with variations;³¹ *word of truth* appears twice;³² and the following meaningful phrases each appear once: *word of knowledge* (D&C 46:18); *word of exhortation* (50:37); *word of prophecy* (131:5); *calling and commandment* (36:5); *holy commandment* (49:13); *commission and commandment*, (75:7); *precepts and commandments*, (103:4); *counsel and commandment*, (104:1); and *will and commandments of God* (20:1). These patterns of usage imply that *word(s)* and *commandment(s)* comprehend all the divine communication designed to clarify and fulfill God's mission in the latter days. Thus, their use in section 21 encompasses all truth that God shares with His children in mortality.

As if from mine own mouth. This phrase underscores the covenant relationship among God, His prophet, and *the church* as articulated above.

26. "Exaltation" is a specialized Latter-day Saint term for eternal life, see Margaret McConkie Pope, "Exaltation," *Encyclopedia of Mormonism*, 479.

27. *Exhaustive Concordance*, s.vv. "commandment," "commandments," "word," "words."

28. D&C 46:17; 50:1; 88:118; 89:1–4; 98:20; 109:7, 14.

29. D&C 20:45, 28:1, 43:5, 70:3, 75:4, 103:1, 109:60, 132:7.

30. D&C 68:13, 24; 107:12, 63.

31. D&C 43:8, 48:6, 103:35, 124:50.

32. D&C 50:17, 19.

The entire phrase *mine* [or *my*] *mouth*, with variations, appears ten times in the Doctrine and Covenants, all of which identify a principal source of God's divine authority and power. In addition, the possessive *mine* is used 195 times in the revelations, twice in section 21, identifying items of such spiritual significance that God claims as His own. The extensive use of first-person possessive pronouns (*mine*, *my*) in section 21 reinforces the heavenly significance of its sacred contents.³³

Walking in all holiness before me and *in all patience and faith*. Two additional phrases from this sentence deepen the covenant relationship with God. The gerund phrase, *walking in all holiness*, defines an essential pre-condition for the Lord's mouthpiece to *receive words and commandments* from God and to *give* them to *the church*. While this phrase places an immense spiritual burden on the prophet, the accompanying prepositional phrase *before me* indicates that God alone determines the worthiness of His servant to bear this crucial responsibility.³⁴

The complementary prepositional phrase, *in all patience and faith*, identifies two additional pre-conditions of the covenant that qualify *the church* to *receive* the prophet's *words and commandments* as if from God's *own mouth*. On the one hand, *all patience and faith* are essential for *the church* to *receive*, comprehend, and act on the holy word of God. While the scriptures acknowledge God's condescension to speak to his children "according to their language, unto their understanding" (2 Nephi 31:3), the scriptures also recognize God's inevitable superior position vis-à-vis His creations: "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). Thus, receiving God's *words and commandments* as intended is a "stretch" assignment at best, even for those with *all patience and faith*. Those lacking these virtues will likely fail to understand God's sublime truths. On the other hand, these godly virtues are crucial for *the church* to sustain the *prophet*, especially on the occasion that he falls short of *walking in all holiness* and thereby fails to *receive* and *give* God's *words and commandments as if from [His] own mouth*.

33. *Exhaustive Concordance*, s.vv. "mine," "mouth."

34. The phrase *before me*, with variations, appears 104 times in the D&C, most of which imply the responsibility of judgment, as in this case, see *Exhaustive Concordance*, s.v. "before." The standard English definition of *before* which best fits this use is "open to the knowledge of, displayed to or brought under the conscious knowledge or attention of," *OED*, s.v. "before."

In short, the complementary pre-conditions, *all holiness* and *all patience and faith*, endow this sacred covenant relationship with sanctity, charity, perspective, and endurance in view of its glorious fulfillment. Reinforcing this sacred bond, the inclusive adjective “all” applies not only to these crucial pre-conditions but also to the breadth of God’s *words and commandments* which the prophet speaks on His behalf.

By doing these things. The next sentence in the revelation expands the definition of *church* and extends three incomparable blessings to *the church* thus defined. The prepositional phrase *by doing these things* indicates that *church* is more than the ecclesiastical organization that keeps an official *record* of the Restoration or the formal body of believers who profess Jesus Christ as their Savior and Joseph Smith and his rightful successors as the earthly head of His Church. *Church* is also the covenant community that embraces God’s *words and commandments* as though He speaks directly to them. This perspective implies that the Church’s spiritual and behavioral qualities are as central to its identity and mission as are its organizational, doctrinal, and demographic characteristics.

The church thus defined and distinguished realizes three sublime heavenly promises:

- *The gates of hell shall not prevail against you.* The entire phrase appears six times in the Doctrine and Covenants, half in revelations that precede the Church’s formal organization.³⁵ Canonized compositions of Joseph Smith imply that the phrase carries two complementary connotations: (1) resisting evil in all its forms and (2) extending the blessings of salvation to all mankind, including the dead, who are thereby released from hell, or “spirit prison,” in the afterlife.³⁶
- Expressed in the negative — *the gates of hell shall not prevail* — the phrase implies that the promised blessing entails necessary but not sufficient conditions. That is, while heeding the prophet’s words and commandments is required for the Church to prevail against the gates of hell in both senses, doing so does not by itself guarantee the promised outcome. Other spiritual conditions may also be required. These are found in the Church’s standard works and other official publications.

35. *Exhaustive Concordance*, s.vv. “gates,” “hell.” See D&C 10:69; 17:8; 18:5.

36. D&C 109:24–28; 128:10–11, the latter passage quotes from the gospel of Matthew. For a summary of the Latter-day concept of hell, see M. Catherine Thomas, “Hell,” *Encyclopedia of Mormonism*, 585–86.

- *The Lord God will disperse the powers of darkness from before you.* In the Doctrine and Covenants, the verb *disperse* appears only here and connotes “dissipate [or] ... cause to disappear.”³⁷ The noun phrase, *powers of darkness*, appears twice in the revelations, initially in section 21. Its other use occurs in a revelation that contrasts the general wickedness of the world with the glories of Zion which the Church as a covenant community is commanded to establish on earth in preparation for the Savior’s Second Coming (D&C 38:11–22). Thus, this literary pattern implies that “establishing Zion” effectively disperses the powers of darkness and lays the foundation of the kingdom of God on earth.
- *[The Lord God] will cause the heavens to shake for your good, and his name’s glory.* Even though the verb *shake* has a variety of connotations in Smith’s revelations, all five uses of the entire phrase, *cause the heavens to shake*, are extremely positive, implying the bestowal of a multitude of divine blessings. The English definition of *shake* that most closely reflects this usage is “to cast out the contents of; to empty,” as with a salt or pepper shaker.³⁸ Thus, the entire phrase, used initially here, implies that God will “empty” heaven of its sacred contents to bless the Church defined as those who give heed to the words and commandments of the prophet as though they come from God’s own mouth. While the phrase does not specify what heavenly blessings the Church of Jesus Christ receives through its faithfulness, it implies that they will far exceed any earthly benefits.
- The second beneficiary of the heaven’s “shaking” is his name’s glory. *Name* appears 208 times in the Doctrine and Covenants, nearly all with reference to the identity, status, mission, authority, and power of Jesus Christ, the Son of God. Similarly, *glory*, as both a noun and a verb, appears 171 times, all connoting a distinctive quality of godliness, especially that of preparing the earth and its inhabitants for eternal life, “the greatest of all the gifts of God.”³⁹

37. *Exhaustive Concordance*, s.v. “disperse;” *OED*, s.v. “disperse.”

38. *Exhaustive Concordance*, s.vv. “shake,” “shaken;” *OED*, s.v. “shake.”

39. *Exhaustive Concordance*, s.vv. “name,” “name’s,” “glory;” D&C 14:7.

Thus, the entire clause implies that God's central mission is to sanctify all creation, including the earth, and that the Church of Jesus Christ is the institution to extend the blessings of life eternal to all mankind.

In sum, section 21 declares that to become the *most holy faith* the *church* must not only keep a *record* consistent with the commandment but also *give heed to all the words and commandments* of Christ as given through His chosen prophet, who walks *in all holiness* before God. At the same time, *the church* exercises *all patience and faith* to sustain the prophet and to understand and act on God's lofty counsel, thereby filling its divinely ordained mission. This covenant with God further distinguishes the Church of Jesus Christ from all other earthly institutions and prepares it for incomparable heavenly blessings.

“Him Have I Inspired” (D&C 21:7–9)

For thus saith the Lord God: Him have I inspired to move the cause of Zion in mighty power for good, and his diligence I know, and his prayers I have heard.

Yea, his weeping for Zion I have seen, and I will cause that he shall mourn for her no longer; for his days of rejoicing are come unto the remission of his sins, and the manifestations of my blessings upon his works.

For, behold, I will bless all those who labor in my vineyard with a mighty blessing, and they shall believe on his words, which are given him through me by the Comforter, which manifesteth that Jesus was crucified by sinful men for the sins of the world, yea, for the remission of sins unto the contrite heart.

The revelation's next three sentences endorse Joseph Smith as the Lord's chosen servant to lead *the church* in its redemptive mission. The strategic placement of this endorsement within the text underscores its significance.

Thus saith the Lord God. Section 21 contains the first of 185 uses of this crucial clause in the Doctrine and Covenants. Nearly one-third of its sections open with this solemn declaration. Its frequency and pattern of usage in modern revelations are consistent with its widespread use in the Hebrew Bible — asserting that what follows comes directly from or is confirmed by God and reinforcing the authority of His earthly

spokesman.⁴⁰ That section 21 also closes with the same phrase (v. 12) reinforces the revelation's divine authority.

Him have I inspired. The importance of this clause is underscored not only by its placement immediately after the authoritative declaration *thus saith the Lord God* but also by its literary aesthetics and structure. Iambic meter accents, and thus emphasizes, the clause's most meaningful syllables:

/ ˘ / ˘ / ˘ / ˘ / ˘
 him have / I in / spired to / move the / cause of /
 / ˘ / ˘ / ˘ / ˘
 Zion in / might y / pow'r for / good.⁴¹

It thereby asserts the divine source of Joseph's spiritual capacities and reinforces a key role of the Holy Ghost — inspiration — introduced in the revelation's opening sentence. Moreover, the past perfect verb tense acknowledges that the essential action of the clause — divine inspiration — began with Smith in the past and continues to the present. Thus, the special relationship between the Lord and His *prophet* is ongoing, reinforcing the necessity of *the church* to understand and accept *all his words and commandments*.

To move the cause of Zion in mighty power for good. The infinitive phrase addresses the question, “what is the net effect of the prophet's divinely inspired mission?” For Latter-day Saints, “Zion” is the name of the Kingdom of God, identified as God's “abode forever” in the vision of Enoch (Moses 7:20–22), and as the millennial “New Jerusalem” in Christ's prophecies from the Book of Mormon (3 Nephi 20–22).⁴² In the Doctrine and Covenants, *Zion* is one of the most frequently used and widespread proper nouns, appearing 210 times in roughly 40% of the canonized revelations, with 14 sections having six or more uses.⁴³ The last of five uses of the entire phrase, *cause of Zion*, appears in section 21, suggesting that “establishing Zion” is a primary focus of Smith's inaugural revelations. In short, two of the prophet's earliest and most sacred texts — the Book of Mormon and the vision of Enoch — and

40. *Exhaustive Concordance*, s.v. “saith;” BDB, s.vv. #559, 5002.

41. See “Iamb (or Iambus)” and “meter” in William Harmon, *A Handbook to Literature*, 10th ed. (New York: Pearson Prentice Hall, 2005), 266, 323–24.

42. See also A. D. Sorensen, “Zion,” *Encyclopedia of Mormonism*, 1624–26.

43. D&C 63 (9 uses); 64 (9), 68 (6), 72 (10), 84 (10), 90 (7), 97 (14), 101 (11), 103 (12), 105 (8), 107 (8), 119 (6), 124 (11), and 133 (10). All these revelations are received later than the formal dedication of Zion's “center place” in Jackson County, Missouri (see D&C 57–59).

several of his initial revelations identify “establishing Zion” as central to the latter-day mission of the Church of Jesus Christ. Its use in section 21 places “establishing Zion” as not only essential to the mission of the Church of Jesus Christ, but also central to the ministry of God’s *prophet*, and a major focus of the Church’s official *record*.

The complementary prepositional phrases, *in mighty power for good*, identify the desired outcome of establishing Zion and complete God’s initial endorsement of His prophet. In the Doctrine and Covenants, the entire phrase is used only here; however:

- *Mighty* appears twenty other times, all but one (1:19) as a key descriptor of God’s heavenly work.
- *Power* (singular) appears 228 times, nearly all with reference to God’s capability to accomplish His divine will.
- *Good* appears 87 times in 51 revelations, most connoting, as an adjective: “the most general adj. of commendation, implying the existence of a high ... degree of characteristic qualities which are either admirable in themselves or useful for some purpose,” and as a noun, “the resulting advantage, benefit, or profit of anything.” While section 21 does not enumerate the *good* that Smith’s ministry will accomplish, its benefits necessarily align with God’s eternal covenant and the mission to establish *Zion*. The prepositional phrase, *for good*, also has English connotations relevant to this literary context, “a final conclusion ... a fixed final act,” and “Highest (first, chief, etc.) good; SUMMUM BONUM.”⁴⁴ Thus, the phrase, *for good*, connotes a high moral quality to Joseph’s ministry and a teleological quality to his and, by implication, his successors’ prophetic ministries in earth’s final dispensation.

God’s endorsement of Joseph Smith continues with a series of his admirable qualities, including *diligence*, *prayers*, *weeping*, *rejoicing*, and *works*. In the Doctrine and Covenants:

- *Diligence* appears nine times, all connoting an essential quality of godliness.
- *Prayers* (plural) appears 25 times, nearly half (11) affirm that God hears the supplications of the righteous, as in this case.

44. *Exhaustive Concordance*, s.vv. “good,” “mighty,” “power,” *OED*, s.v. “good.” Regarding the use of the Latin phrase in Joseph’s revelations, see D&C 128:11.

- *Weeping* appears six times, but this is the only use with a positive connotation, i.e., pleading for Zion's redemption. All others refer to lamentations of the wicked.
- *Rejoicing* appears 11 times, all with a positive connotation, with the entire noun phrase, *days of rejoicing*, appearing only here.
- *Works* (plural) appears 54 times across 33 revelations, referring variously to the meaningful actions of humans, devils, angels, and God. In section 21, the term refers to Joseph Smith's actions that are distinctive of his ministry and accepted of heaven.⁴⁵

Remission of his sins. Joseph's misdeeds are explicitly referenced, but not specifically detailed, in section 21 and four other latter-day revelations. Readers might ask, "what do Joseph's sins have to do with God's endorsement?" Exploring further these sacred texts reveals that all explicit references to Joseph's sins accompany examples of God's ringing endorsement of him. For example:

- Section 3 chastens Joseph, "how oft you have transgressed the commandments and the laws of God, and have gone on in the persuasions of men," immediately prior to God's confirming his identity and divine calling: "Behold, thou art Joseph, and thou wast chosen to do the work of the Lord" (D&C 3:6, 9).
- Section 20 acknowledges that Joseph "was entangled again in the vanities of the world" after receiving an initial "remission of his sins" in the same context in which he is "called of God, and ordained an apostle of Jesus Christ, to be the first elder of this church" (D&C 20:2, 5).
- Section 21 references God's "remission of [Joseph's] sins" immediately after declaring, "him have I inspired to move the cause of Zion in mighty power for good" (D&C 21:7, 8).
- Section 64 bluntly acknowledges, "he has sinned," in the context of the declaration that the atonement of Jesus Christ applies to all who repent of their sins, but "who have not sinned unto death." At the same time, the passage asserts the qualified blessing, "the keys of the mysteries of the kingdom shall not be taken from my servant Joseph Smith, Jun., through

45. *Exhaustive Concordance*, s.vv. "diligence," "prayers," "rejoicing," "weeping," "works."

the means I have appointed, while he liveth, inasmuch as he obeyeth mine ordinances” (D&C 64:5–7).

- Section 132 indicates that Joseph will perform a “sacrifice which I require at his hands for his transgressions, saith the Lord your God,” almost in the same breath in which God entrusts him with the priesthood keys of sealing and promises him his own “exaltation” (D&C 132:45–49, 60).

While all five revelations acknowledge Joseph’s persistent imperfections, they also affirm his special standing before God and the eternal benefits that obtain from faithfully completing his earthly ministry. In fact, the above scriptural passages which acknowledge Joseph’s sins progressively increase the spiritual significance of his divine calling and its attendant blessings: (1) chosen of God, (2) ordained an apostle to lead the Church of Jesus Christ, (3) inspired to move the cause of Zion, (4) administers the mysteries of the Kingdom, and (5) holds the priesthood keys of sealing and receives the promise of exaltation.

An implication of God’s multifaceted endorsement of the Prophet in section 21 is that God chose him not because of his degree of perfection, i.e., the absence of sin in his life, but because of his capacity and willingness *to move the cause of Zion*, his abiding commitment to the divine purpose of the Restoration, and related personal character traits to complete his lofty ministry. It also implies that Joseph’s process of becoming perfect mirrors that of all God’s children — having sins remitted through repentance, the atonement of Jesus Christ, ordinances of His gospel, obedience to His commandments, and service in His kingdom. These latter points are further developed below.

The next sentence complements the definition of *the church* and the associated blessings addressed above. Its first clause, *all those who labor in my vineyard*, reinforces the behavioral definition of *the church*, namely those who *give heed unto all [the prophet’s] words and commandments ... as if from [God’s] own mouth* (D&C 21:4–5). While both phrases imply service as a defining characteristic of *the church*, the former phrase promises blessings to *the church* as a corporate body, i.e., a formally organized religion, and the latter recognizes *the church* as a collection of individual Latter-day Saints. The *mighty blessing* that *the church*, in the individual member sense, receives through gospel service is that Latter-day Saints will “believe on [the prophet’s] words, which are given him through me by the Comforter” (v. 9). Inspiration is the essence of the Comforter’s divine role mentioned two other times

in section 21 (vv. 2, 7) and as a key blessing of keeping the covenant of baptism (D&C 20:77).

This general rhetorical pattern implies that heeding the prophet's *words and commandments*, laboring in the kingdom, being inspired by the Holy Ghost, receiving remission of one's sins, and fulfilling the mission of *the church* in both corporate and individual member senses are complementary and interrelated. That is, individual Church members cannot truly believe in Jesus Christ without also laboring in His *vineyard* and seeking forgiveness of sins, and the covenant community cannot fulfill the Church's mission without heeding the prophet's *words and commandments* as if they come from God's *own mouth*.

The rest of this sentence addresses the question, "What is the essence of Latter-day Saint belief?" It is "that Jesus was crucified by sinful men for the sins of the world, yea, for the remission of sins unto the contrite heart." In the Doctrine and Covenants, only section 64, verse 7, referenced above, mentions sin more frequently than section 21, verse 9.⁴⁶ From this perspective, the atonement of Jesus Christ is not only the doctrinal foundation of *the church* and the essence of members' faith, but also the basis of the testamentary mission of the Holy Ghost, and the means of receiving a key gospel blessing — *remission of sins*.

Remission of sins is not only an essential outcome of the atonement of Jesus Christ but also a central purpose of baptism, which also serves as the foundational priesthood ordinance of the gospel, the ritual entrée into the Church of Jesus Christ, and the official beginning of the covenant path to eternal life. In the Doctrine and Covenants, *remission* appears seventeen times with variations but only in the context of this phrase.⁴⁷ The two uses of the entire phrase in section 21 — once in general reference to the atonement of Jesus Christ (v. 9) and once in specific reference to Joseph's own sins (v. 8) — imply that Joseph is a beneficiary with all mankind of the atonement of Jesus Christ and that the Prophet is the exemplar of baptism in the gospel's final dispensation as the Savior was in the meridian of time (see D&C 13:1 and 19:31).

Manifest with variations appears 38 times in the revelations, never more than twice in any single revelation, as in section 21 (vv. 8, 9). Its scriptural use implies formal, official actions of Jesus Christ and His

46. *Exhaustive Concordance*, s.vv. "sin," "sinful," "sinned," "sinner," "sinners," "sinneth," "sins."

47. *Exhaustive Concordance*, s.v. "remission," "remit," "remitted."

Church “to make manifest or visible or known what has been hidden or unknown.”⁴⁸

In sum, these sentences authoritatively endorse Joseph Smith as God’s earthly agent with the mission to restore to earth the gospel of Jesus Christ for the eternal benefit of all mankind. They also imply that the Church’s official *record* indicates that a testimony of Jesus Christ enables faithful Latter-day Saints to assist the Prophet to establish Zion, that devoted service in *the church* helps the Saints and their Prophet to obtain and retain a remission of their sins, and that gospel service by Latter-day Saints will be featured in the official *record*.

“He Should be Ordained” (D&C 21:10–12)

Wherefore, it behooveth me that he should be ordained by you, Oliver Cowdery mine apostle;

This being an ordinance unto you, that you are an elder under his hand, he being the first unto you, that you might be an elder unto this church, bearing my name —

And the first preacher of this church unto the church, and before the world, yea, before the Gentiles; yea, and thus saith the Lord God, lo, lo! to the Jews also. Amen.

The closing sentence of section 21 specifies the next major step in the organization of the Church of Jesus Christ and identifies the principal beneficiaries of its mission.

It behooveth me. This reflexive phrase appears three times in the Doctrine and Covenants, first in section 21. In each case, the phrase implies a moral necessity, obligation, or incumbent response.⁴⁹ Therefore, the archaic phrasing increases the imperative that Oliver ordain Joseph *first elder* of the Church of Jesus Christ and reinforces the significance of Smith’s ordination in the formal organization of *the church*.

He should be ordained by you. Once again, the revelation employs the passive voice. Rather than weakness, however, its syntax correctly places emphasis on Joseph Smith as the receiver of the ordination rather

48. *Exhaustive Concordance*, s.v. “manifest,” “manifestation,” “manifestations,” “manifested,” “manifesteth;” Joseph H. Thayer, *Thayer’s Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament* (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson Publishers, 2014), s.v. #5319. The most relevant standard English definition of manifestation is, “the demonstration, revelation, or display of the existence, presence, qualities, or nature of some person or thing.” *OED*, s.v. “manifestation.”

49. *Exhaustive Concordance*, s.v. “behooveth;” *OED*, s.v. “behoove.”

than on Oliver Cowdery as the person performing the ordination, who is mentioned only in a prepositional phrase. The opening sentence of section 20 distinguishes Joseph and Oliver as *first elder* and *second elder*, respectively (D&C 20:1–3). While the final sentence in section 21 reinforces Oliver’s subordinate status, it also recognizes his complementary standing with Joseph as a fellow apostle because of their earlier ordination by the ancient apostles Peter, James, and John. The possessive (*mine apostle*) adds a term of endearment and intimacy to Oliver’s special relationship with the Lord. In addition, section 21 gives Oliver the distinctive role of *first preacher* in the Church of Jesus Christ. This is the only instance of *preacher* in the Doctrine and Covenants, and the Church of Jesus Christ has never had *preacher* as a formal office or calling.⁵⁰

Ordained appears 96 times in the Doctrine and Covenants, nearly all in reference to the formal ritual authorization for someone to act in an official capacity in the Church of Jesus Christ. While distributed among 38 revelations, its use is concentrated in three, each of which features the priesthood order and formal governance of *the church*.⁵¹ The ordination of Joseph Smith as *first elder* as specified by revelation is a crucial action in bringing *the church* officially into existence.

Unto the church, and before the world. The revelation’s final clause specifies the principal beneficiaries of the Restoration. Using ecclesiastical and ethnic idioms, respectively, two contrasting pairs of groups — *the church* and *the world*, on the one hand, and *Jews* and *Gentiles*, on the other — distinguish God’s covenant people from the rest of humanity.⁵² For example, *world* is one of the most frequent and widely used common nouns in the Doctrine and Covenants, appearing 211 times in half of the revelations and connoting either (1) the locus

50. *Exhaustive Concordance*, s.v. “preacher.” One respected commentary on the Doctrine and Covenants interprets the phrase thus: “Oliver Cowdery was to be the first to proclaim the gospel in this dispensation. He delivered the first public discourse on the 11th of April 1830, in the home of Peter Whitmer Sr., in Fayette.... Oliver Cowdery was called to go on a mission to the Lamanites.... And thus he became the first preacher to the Gentiles, and also to the “Jews,” as the Revelation says.” Hyrum M. Smith and Janne M. Sjodahl, *Doctrine and Covenants Commentary*, rev. ed. (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 1954), loc. 1753 of 11023, Kindle.

51. D&C 20 (7 uses), 107 (13), and 124 (9); *Exhaustive Concordance*, s.v. “ordained.”

52. Scott W. Hahn, *Kinship by Covenant: A Canonical Approach to the Fulfillment of God’s Saving Promises* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2009).

of Christ's redemptive mission, e.g., "Savior of the World," or (2) the unredeemed portion of humanity, e.g., "wicked world." In section 21, *world* carries the latter connotation, in contrast with *church* which is understood in this context as God's covenant people who have been redeemed through the atonement of Jesus Christ and the covenants and commandments of His gospel. Similarly, *Gentiles* represents the residual portion of humanity who have yet to make a binding covenant with God. By contrast, in section 21 *Jews* represents God's covenant community, regardless of their specific descent lines. Thus, this double-edged, covenant-based distinction reminds those who formally accept the gospel of Jesus Christ of their sacred obligation to participate in its redemptive mission for all mankind.

Amen. This word appears 150 times in the Doctrine and Covenants and is the final word in all but 20 of its sections. In scriptural and devotional settings in the Judeo-Christian tradition, *amen* affirms the truth of the preceding statement or action.⁵³ Through its use at the end of section 21, God assures Joseph Smith, *the church*, and all mankind of the revelation's divine origin and eternal value.

Metanarrative of the Restoration

D&C 21 plays a crucial role in the latter-day restoration of the gospel of Jesus Christ — identifying essential components of the Restoration and specifying their core purposes. The Church of Jesus Christ is a key outcome of the covenant relationship between God and mankind as administered initially through Joseph Smith who performs a variety of crucial God-given roles. One of these roles, *prophet*, involves receiving from God the *words and commandments* of the gospel and giving them to *the church* who accept and act on them as though they come from God himself. By doing so, *the church* becomes the institutional means of extending the blessings of eternal life to all mankind, whether in mortality or eternity. Thus, the plan of exaltation distinguishes the Church of Jesus Christ from all other earthly institutions and commits Latter-day Saints to a life of holiness and gospel service. Section 21 directs *the church* not only to perform this multi-faceted, God-given mission but also to keep a permanent, official *record* that documents and bears witness of it. Thus, the ministries of its leaders and members are only incidentally pastoral, instructional, ecclesiastical, humanitarian, and administrative. Rather, the essence of their gospel service is redemptive. Whatever other

53. *Exhaustive Concordance*, s.v. "amen;" BDB, #543.

good the Church and its leaders accomplish in mortality, their principal purpose is preparing the earth and its inhabitants for life eternal.

The revelation's opening commandment, *there shall be a record kept among you*, prefaces all these truths, forecasts other truths, and anticipates an official account of this dispensation of the gospel. Whatever other things it preserves, the *record of the church* documents and bears witness of the fulfillment of the plan of exaltation as directed by the Godhead through the earthly head of *the church* in the last days. Key measures of success for this endeavor include prevailing over the *gates of hell* in two complementary senses, dispersing the *powers of darkness*, manifesting a multitude of heavenly blessings for its *good* and *his name's glory*, and realizing in their lives the blessings of the Atonement of Jesus Christ. The official *record* of this dispensation must also be accurate and true, that is, precise, detailed, ordered, and focused, with an eternal perspective on the dynamic relation between mankind and God, earth and heaven, and time and eternity, especially the intricate and intimate connections between earth's mortal existence and the plan of salvation.

It is uncertain whether Joseph Smith fully understood the revelation as he received it on April 6. Regardless, he understood it well enough to organize the Church and appoint trusted colleagues to begin keeping a record. While fulfilling both commandments encountered many challenges, keeping an acceptable record was especially fraught. Joseph's own strength was not in writing, so he appointed Oliver Cowdery to begin keeping the Church's record. Oliver's less than satisfactory effort resulted in Joseph's delegating the assignment to John Whitmer, who did his best but also fell short of Joseph's expectations. In early 1832, the Prophet assumed responsibility for the Church's record and produced a six-page autobiography that included the first written account of the First Vision and summarized his ministry to the beginning of the translation of the Book of Mormon.⁵⁴

The Church continues its efforts through the present to keep an official record expanded and refined. Record-keeping has become a major enterprise of the Church of Jesus Christ and its members. A summary of this widespread initiative goes far beyond the scope of the present study which focuses on defining qualities of the divinely acceptable record of

54. Richard L. Bushman, *Joseph Smith, Rough Stone Rolling* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 2005), 233; Dean C. Jessee, "The Writing of Joseph Smith's History," *BYU Studies* 11, no. 4 (1971), <https://scholarsarchive.byu.edu/byusq/vol11/iss4/8>.

the Restoration. D&C 21 provides the initial impetus and grand vision of this remarkable mission.

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“THEY SHALL BE SCATTERED AGAIN”: SOME NOTES ON JST GENESIS 50:24–25, 33–35

Matthew L. Bowen

Abstract: *This article examines the extension of the etiological wordplay on the name Joseph (in terms of the Hebrew verbs *’āsap* and *yāsap*), recurrent in the canonical text of Genesis, into the JST Genesis 50 text, where Joseph learns about and prophesies of a future “Joseph” who would help gather Israel after they had been “scattered again” by the Lord. This article also analyzes the pairing of the prophetic and seeric roles of Moses and the latter-day “Joseph” at the beginning and ending of JST Genesis and explores the significance of this framing. The importance of Moses and Joseph Smith writing the word of the Lord in order to fulfill their prophetic responsibility to “gather” Israel emerges.*

Over the past few years, several articles exploring potential instances of wordplays related to the name Joseph in the Book of Mormon have appeared in print. For example, initial forays explored Nephi’s exegetical juxtaposition of Isaiah’s prophecies on the basis of the *yāsap/yōsīp*-idiom as a wordplay on the name *Joseph* (compare 2 Nephi 25:17, 21; 29:1 to Isaiah 11:11; 29:14) in anticipation of a future seer named Joseph.¹ Subsequent studies have identified Nephi’s adaptation

1. Matthew L. Bowen, “‘He Shall Add’: Wordplay on the Name Joseph and an Early Instance of *Gezera Shawa* in the Book of Mormon,” *Insights* 30, no. 2 (2010): 2–4, <https://scholarsarchive.byu.edu/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=1048&context=insights>; Matthew L. Bowen, “Onomastic Wordplay on *Joseph* and *Benjamin* and *Gezera Shawa* in the Book of Mormon,” *Interpreter: A Journal of Mormon Scripture* 18 (2016): 255–73, <https://journal.interpreterfoundation.org/onomastic-wordplay-on-joseph-and-benjamin-and-gezera-shawa-in-the-book-of-mormon/>. Nephi’s evident use of wordplay on “Joseph” in 1 Nephi 22:8–12 has recently been given a more in-depth treatment in Matthew L. Bowen, “‘The Lord God Will Proceed’: Nephi’s Wordplay in 1 Nephi 22:8–12 and the Abrahamic Covenant,” *Interpreter: A Journal of Latter-day Saint Faith and Scholarship* 50 (2022): 51–70, <https://>

of biblical Joseph-wordplay to draw parallels between his own life and that of Joseph in Egypt (his ancestor),² the interrelated meanings of the names Joseph and Ephraim,³ Jacob's use of the *yôsip*-idiom in Isaiah 11:11, 2 Nephi 6:14, and Jacob 6:2 (in connection with the name Joseph), and other potentially significant examples of similar phenomena in the Book of Mormon.⁴ The present study differs from these previous efforts in that it explores the text of the Joseph Smith Translation of Genesis 50, including the Joseph-relevant onomastic phenomena. I will attempt to show that this novel aspect of scriptural wordplay is worthy of our attention.

Wordplay on the name Joseph [*yôsep*] exploiting the verbs *yâsap* ("add") and *ʿâsap* ("take away"; "gather") constitutes a prominent feature of the Hebrew text of the Genesis narratives that recount the life of Joseph the patriarch and its aftermath (Genesis 37–Exodus 1).⁵ Famously, Rachel explains Joseph's naming in Genesis 30:23–24 on the basis of both verbs ("And she conceived, and bare a son; and said, God **hath taken away** [*ʿâsap*; or, has gathered up] my reproach: and she called

journal.interpreterfoundation.org/the-lord-god-will-proceed-nephis-wordplay-in-1-nephi-228-12-and-the-abrahamic-covenant/.

2. Matthew L. Bowen, "Their Anger Did Increase Against Me': Nephi's Autobiographical Permutation of a Biblical Wordplay on the Name Joseph," *Interpreter: A Journal of Mormon Scripture* 23 (2017): 115–36, <https://journal.interpreterfoundation.org/their-anger-did-increase-against-me-nephis-autobiographical-permutation-of-a-biblical-wordplay-on-the-name-joseph/>.

3. Matthew L. Bowen and Loren Blake Spendlove, "Thou Art the Fruit of My Loins': The Interrelated Symbolism and Meanings of the Names Joseph and Ephraim in Ancient Scripture," *Interpreter: A Journal of Mormon Scripture* 28 (2018): 273–298, <https://journal.interpreterfoundation.org/thou-art-the-fruit-of-my-loins-the-interrelated-symbolism-and-meanings-of-the-names-joseph-and-ephraim-in-ancient-scripture/>.

4. See, e.g., Matthew L. Bowen, "They Shall No More Be Confounded': Moroni's Wordplay on Joseph in Ether 13:1–13 and Moroni 10:31," *Interpreter: A Journal of Latter-day Saint Faith and Scholarship* 30 (2018): 91–104, <https://journal.interpreterfoundation.org/they-shall-no-more-be-confounded-moronis-wordplay-on-joseph-in-ether-13-13-and-moroni-1031/>; Matthew L. Bowen, "The Messiah Will Set Himself Again': Jacob's Use of Isaiah 11:11 in 2 Nephi 6:14 and Jacob 6:2," *Interpreter: A Journal of Latter-day Saint Faith and Scholarship* 44 (2021): 287–306, <https://journal.interpreterfoundation.org/the-messiah-will-set-himself-again-jacobs-use-of-isaiah-1111-in-2-nephi-614-and-jacob-62/>. These examples are not intended to be exhaustive.

5. See Moshe Garsiel, *Biblical Names: A Literary Study of Midrashic Derivations and Puns*, trans. Phyllis Hackett (Ramat Gan, Israel: Bar-Ilan University Press, 1991), 172–74.

his name **Joseph** [*yôšēp*]; and said, The Lord **shall add** [*yôšēp*] to me another son"). Joseph's brothers' hatred for him and his spiritual gifts receives a double emphasis in terms of the verb *yāsap* ("**and they** hated him **yet the more** [*wayyôšipû 'ôd*]; "**And they** hated him **yet the more** [*wayyôšipû 'ôd*] for his dreams, and for his words," Genesis 37:5, 8).⁶ The narrator further describes Joseph's "gathering" his brothers into prison or a place of keeping using the verb *'āsap* ("**And he put them all together** [*wayye'ēsōp*; or, he gathered them] into ward three days," Genesis 42:17) — a very early "gathering" of the *bēnē yiśrā'el* (the sons/children of Israel, so designated in Genesis 42:5). Judah recounts the threat of Joseph (still in disguise) that will be activated if he and his brothers failed to bring Benjamin down to Egypt, a threat which subtly recalls the brothers' earlier hatred for Joseph ("Except your youngest brother come down with you, **ye shall** see my face **no more** [*lō' tōšipûn*]," Genesis 44:23). The death of the patriarch Jacob/Israel is also described in terms of a "gathering" of Israel in Joseph's presence: "And when Jacob had made an end of commanding his sons, **he gathered up** [*wayye'ēsōp*] his feet into the bed, and yielded up the ghost, **and was gathered** [*wayye'āsep*] unto his people. And **Joseph** [*yôšēp*] fell upon his father's face, and wept upon him, and kissed him" (Genesis 49:33–50:1). Lastly, the transition in the book of Exodus from the preceding patriarchal Genesis narratives to an account of Israel's gathering and exodus from Egypt includes a final direct wordplay on the name Joseph: "Now there arose up a new king over Egypt, which knew not **Joseph** [*yôšēp*] ... And he said ... Come on, let us deal wisely with them; lest they multiply, and it come to pass, that, when there falleth out any war, **they join** [*wēnōsap*, be added] also unto our enemies, and fight against us, and so get them up out of the land" (Exodus 1:8, 10). These examples demonstrate how firmly the narrative welds the name Joseph to the two verbs with which his name is first etilogized⁷ and to the concepts these verbs express: adding/doing again and gathering/taking away.

In this study, I endeavor to show that the thematic emphasis on Joseph's name with regard to the verbs *yāsap* and *'āsap* extends to the

6. On how the Joseph-wordplay recurs as a theme in Nephi's writings, see Bowen, "Their Anger Did Increase Against Me."

7. "As a critical term applied to narrative, etiology refers to stories that tell how something came to be or came to have its definitive characteristics. In Scripture such stories are typically told about names of persons and places, rites and customs, ethnic identities, and natural phenomena." Michael H. Floyd, "Etiology," in *The New Interpreter's Bible Dictionary of the Bible* (Nashville: Abingdon, 2007), 2:352. In the Hebrew Bible, these etiologies frequently involve wordplay.

textual restorations⁸ of JST Genesis 50. Joseph’s prophecy “that **they** [i.e., the house of Israel] **shall be scattered again**” (JST Genesis 50:25) links Israel’s future to the meaning of Joseph’s name, “may he [God] add,” “may he do again.” In other words, the phrase “they shall be scattered again” functions as an expression of the *yāsap* concept with the Lord as the implied agent of the divine passive,⁹ just as he is the implied subject of the verb *yôsēp* as constituting the name Joseph.

Moreover, the Lord’s swearing a prophetic oath to Joseph replicates the onomastic connection between Joseph and *’āsap*/“gathering”: “And the Lord sware unto **Joseph** [*yôsēp*] that he would preserve his seed forever, saying, I will raise up Moses [*mōšeh*], and a rod shall be in his hand, **and he shall gather together** [cf. *wē’āsap*] my people, and he shall lead them as a flock” (JST Genesis 50:34). The future raising-up of Moses as a “seer” tasked with the “gathering” of Israel in fulfillment of promises made to Joseph in Egypt anticipates the role of a future “Joseph” who, after Israel had been “scattered again,” would be similarly tasked as “seer” with commencing the work of gathering Israel for the last time in fulfillment of the same divine promises. In fact, it is the prophetic reality of Israel’s being “scattered again” that will necessitate the Lord “set[ting] his hand again [*yôsîp* ... *yādô*]” by raising up a Moses-like seer who would be named *yôsēp* to commence the work of gathering Israel “again.” The name *Joseph/yôsēp*, understood in terms of the two verbs with which it is etiologized in Genesis 30:23–24 (*’āsap* and *yāsap*), succinctly summarizes the divine action of “gathering” Israel “again” as a complete redress of Israel’s being “scattered again,” all in fulfillment of the Abrahamic Covenant.

The work of gathering of Israel for the final time would include the restoration of divine words originally given to and written down by Moses in fulfillment of promises made to Joseph the patriarch — words

8. Robert J. Matthews, “A Plainer Translation”: *Joseph Smith’s Translation of the Bible — A History and Commentary* (Provo, UT: Brigham Young University Press, 1975), 253. David Rolph Seely suggests that “Some of the corrections and revisions were small, including sometimes only vital punctuation changes. Other revisions were much more lengthy, restoring large passages of text.” David Rolph Seely, “The Joseph Smith Translation: ‘Plain and Precious Things’ Restored,” *Ensign*, 27, no. 8 (August 1997): 10, <https://www.churchofjesuschrist.org/study/ensign/1997/08/the-joseph-smith-translation-plain-and-precious-things-restored>. The content of JST Genesis 50, much of it found in another version in 2 Nephi 3, suggests that it had once existed as an ancient text in some form.

9. A divine passive construction is a grammatical construction in which the implied but unstated agent of the passive verb is God.

that would be “had again,” even after their deliberate diminution and suppression. The proposed “Joseph” wordplay in JST Genesis 50, together with the pairing of Moses’s and Joseph Smith’s seeric roles, helps to form a kind of Moses- and “Joseph”-centric *inclusio* with the Lord’s promise to Moses in Moses 1:41. This *inclusio* frames the JST Genesis material in terms of the work of two great prophet-seers: Moses and a latter-day Joseph.

**“They Shall Be Scattered Again and a Branch Shall Be
Broken Off”: The Scattering of Gathered Israel**

Joseph “gathers” (*wayye’ēsōp*) his brothers into “prison” in Egypt and eventually the whole family of Jacob-Israel (Genesis 42). Years later, the narrative of the latter’s life concludes with a scene that poignantly emphasizes “gathering.” Moshe Garsiel avers¹⁰ that this scene is punctuated with wordplay on the name Joseph: “**And** when Jacob had made an end of commanding his sons, **he gathered up** [*wayye’ēsōp*] his feet into the bed, and yielded up the ghost, **and was gathered** [*wayyē’āsep*] unto his people. And **Joseph** [*yôsēp*] fell upon his father’s face, and wept upon him, and kissed him” (Genesis 49:33–50:1). This wordplay explicitly links Joseph’s name to the Pentateuchal theme of divine “gathering” in the spirit world,¹¹ including the “gathering” of Israel in the spirit world. In a symbolic sense, Jacob’s “gathering up” his feet and being “gathered to his people” represents Israel’s gathering on both sides of the veil. Phillip S. Johnston notes that the phrase “gathered unto his people” as a thematic expression “indicates joining one’s ancestors in the afterlife. Most scholars assume this reunion takes place in Sheol (as in Ps. 49), even if Sheol is never mentioned in the same context.”¹² The image of *wayyē’āsep*/gathering of Jacob-Israel to his “people” in Sheol or the spirit world is consonant with this scene from the vision of President Joseph F. Smith:

And there were gathered together in one place an innumerable company of the spirits of the just, who had been faithful in the

10. Garsiel, *Biblical Names*, 173.

11. In addition to Genesis 49:33, the phrase “gathered unto his people” occurs in Genesis 25:8, 17; 35:29; Numbers 20:24, 26; 27:13; 31:2; and Deuteronomy 32:50 (2 x). Philip S. Johnston notes that “this distinctive phrase occurs ten times, and only in the Pentateuch. It is only used of the patriarchs, Moses and Aaron, and only occasionally.” Philip S. Johnston, *Shades of Sheol: Death and Afterlife in the Old Testament* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2002), 33.

12. Johnston, *Shades of Sheol*, 34.

testimony of Jesus while they lived in mortality; and who had offered sacrifice in the similitude of the great sacrifice of the Son of God, and had suffered tribulation in their Redeemer's name. All these had departed the mortal life, firm in the hope of a glorious resurrection, through the grace of God the Father and his Only Begotten Son, Jesus Christ. I beheld that they were filled with joy and gladness, and were rejoicing together because the day of their deliverance was at hand. They were assembled awaiting the advent of the Son of God into the spirit world, to declare their redemption from the bands of death. Their sleeping dust was to be restored unto its perfect frame, bone to his bone, and the sinews and the flesh upon them, the spirit and the body to be united never again to be divided, that they might receive a fulness of joy. (D&C 138:12–17)

President Smith goes on to state that he saw the patriarch Jacob-Israel himself in this august gathering, along with Abraham and Isaac (D&C 138:41).

The image of Jacob being “gathered” to his people or kindred in the spirit world helps establish the backdrop for Joseph’s prophecy of Israel’s being scattered again and then gathered. In the context of the JST’s expansion of Genesis 50, the Joseph-wordplay in Genesis 49:33–50:1 sets the stage for the onomastic allusions to the names Joseph and Ephraim that occur in Joseph’s speech to his brothers:

And **Joseph** [*yôšēp*] said unto his brethren, I die, and go unto my fathers; and I go down to my grave with joy. The God of my father Jacob be with you, to deliver you out of affliction in the days of your bondage; for the Lord hath visited me, and I have obtained a promise of the Lord, that out of the **fruit** [*pěri*] of my loins, the Lord God will raise up a righteous branch out of my loins; and unto thee, whom my father Jacob hath named Israel, a prophet; (not the Messiah who is called Shilo;) and this prophet shall deliver my people out of Egypt in the days of thy bondage. And it shall come to pass that **they shall be scattered again** [cf. *yôšîpû *lēhizzārôt*¹³] and a branch shall be broken off, and shall be carried into a *far country* [cf. *’ereš rēhōqâ*]; nevertheless they shall be remembered in the

13. Cf., e.g., Ezekiel 6:8: “Yet will I leave a remnant, that ye may have some that shall escape the sword among the nations, when ye shall be scattered [*bēhizzārôtēkem*] through the countries.”

covenants of the Lord, when the Messiah cometh; for he shall be made manifest unto them in the latter days, in the Spirit of power; and shall bring them out of darkness into light; out of hidden darkness, and out of captivity unto freedom. (JST Genesis 50:24–25)

The phrase “they shall be scattered again,” as antonymic of Israel’s initial “gathering” under Moses and as synonymic of the Lord’s “adding” or doing something “again” to gather Israel in the future recalls the name Joseph (cf. *yôšîp* ... *yādô liqnôt*, “[he] shall set his hand again ... to recover,” Isaiah 11:11). This phrase particularly recalls the double-etiology for Joseph’s naming in terms of the verbs *’āsap* (“take away,” “gather”) and *yāsap* (“add,” “do something again”) in Genesis 30:23–24. The apparent wordplay or onomastic allusion creates a link between the name Joseph and the destiny of Joseph’s descendants as those who would “add” to be scattered by the Lord, broken off from the tree of Israel (cf. Jacob 5), and exiled to a far country (including the Americas), but then remembered when the Lord would gather Israel in fulfilment of the Abrahamic covenant.

Joseph’s prophecy of “branches” being “broken off, and carried into a far country” furnishes an immediate interpretation of one part of his father Jacob’s blessing upon him: “**Joseph** [*yôšēp*] is a **fruitful bough** [*bēn pōrāt*; literally, a fruitful son], even a **fruitful bough** [*bēn pōrāt*] by a well; whose **branches** [*bānôt*; literally, daughters] run over the wall” (Genesis 49:22). The “fruitful son” concept is particularly reinforced by Joseph’s use of the phrase “fruit of my/thy loins” (JST Genesis 50:24, 26–27, 30–31), since the name Ephraim suggests the meaning “doubly fruitful.” Joseph clearly uses “branch” in the same familial or kinship sense as “descendants.” Joseph’s reference to his father’s poetic blessing and the derived image of a “righteous branch” raised up “out of the fruit of my loins” also recalls the much earlier interrelated etiological wordplay on the name of Joseph’s son Ephraim in the etiology for his name: “And the name of the second called he Ephraim: For God **hath caused me to be fruitful** [*hipranî*] in the land of my affliction” (Genesis 41:52; cf. Genesis 48:4, and especially JST Genesis 48:9–10).

Lehi’s prophecy concerning the scattering and gathering of Israel in 1 Nephi 10, which Nephi places in between his account of his father Lehi’s dream of the tree of life (1 Nephi 8) and his own vision of the tree

of life (1 Nephi 11–14), constitutes the first such prophecy¹⁴ in the Book of Mormon:

Yea, even my father spake much concerning the Gentiles, and also concerning the house of Israel, that they should be compared like unto an olive tree, whose branches should be broken off and should be scattered upon all the face of the earth. Wherefore, he said it must needs be that we should be led with one accord into the land of promise, unto the fulfilling of the word of the Lord, that we should be scattered upon all the face of the earth. And after the house of Israel should be scattered they should be gathered together again; or, in fine, after the Gentiles had received the fulness of the Gospel, the natural branches of the olive tree, or the remnants of the house of Israel, should be grafted in, or come to the knowledge of the true Messiah, their Lord and their Redeemer. (1 Nephi 10:12–14)

Lehi clearly had Zenos's allegory of the olive trees (later reproduced *in toto* in Jacob 5) in mind when he made this prophecy. Noel B. Reynolds notes that Lehi's use of Zenos here constitutes "the earliest use of Zenos's allegory in the Book of Mormon."¹⁵ But Lehi also appears to have had Joseph's prophecy in mind, forms of which appear in 2 Nephi 3 and JST Genesis 50. Both texts existed on the brass plates of Laban. Lehi's phrase "whose branches should be broken off and scattered" (as recorded by Nephi) clearly "uses language from Zenos's allegory."¹⁶ Nevertheless, Lehi's words are also clearly consonant with Joseph's prophecy ("they shall be scattered again and a branch broken off"). This raises the intriguing possibility of a more ancient inspiration for Zenos's allegory, namely, textual dependency on the prophecy of Joseph in Egypt. Elements of Zenos's allegory and his other prophecies regarding the gathering of Israel¹⁷ may originally stem from the prophecy of

14. This, of course, excludes the title page of the Book of Mormon, authored by Moroni many centuries later.

15. Noel B. Reynolds, "Nephite Uses and Interpretations of Zenos," in *The Allegory of the Olive Tree: The Olive, The Bible, and Jacob 5*, ed. Stephen D. Ricks and John W. Welch (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book; Provo, UT: FARMS, 1994), 22.

16. *Ibid.*

17. See, e.g., 1 Nephi 19:15–16: "Nevertheless, when that day cometh, saith the prophet, that they no more turn aside their hearts against the Holy One of Israel, then will he remember the covenants which he made to their fathers. Yea, then will he remember the isles of the sea; yea, and all the people who are of the house of

Joseph in Egypt. Another textual indication that such may be the case is Zenos's evident use of the *yôsîp*-idiom throughout the allegory (i.e., language expressing iterative divine action or results in terms of doing or becoming something "again"; Jacob 5:29, 33, 58, 60–61, 63, 67, 73–75 [cf. v. 77]).¹⁸ If so, Zenos's replete use of this idiom functions as an onomastic allusion back to Joseph in Egypt and his prophecy, including the Lord's promises to gather Israel again. At the same time, it would also function as an allusion forward to a future Joseph through whom the Lord of the vineyard's iterative action and iterative results would be accomplished.

Jacob, the son of Lehi and the brother of Nephi — the one who later provides a complete text for Zenos's allegory for the olive tree in Jacob 5 — relays the following prophetic promise regarding the scattering and gathering of Israel spoken to him by an angel. Jacob's inclusion of this prophecy constitutes part of an interpretive introduction to his covenant speech, a speech which begins in 2 Nephi 6 and runs through 2 Nephi 10, the central text of which is Isaiah 49:22–52:2:

Wherefore, after they are driven to and fro, for thus saith the angel, many shall be afflicted in the flesh, and shall not be suffered to perish, because of the prayers of the faithful; they shall be scattered, and smitten, and hated; nevertheless, the Lord will be merciful unto them, that when they shall come to the knowledge of their Redeemer, they shall be gathered together again to the lands of their inheritance. (2 Nephi 6:11)

This verse, like Jacob's sermon as a whole, looks forward on the gathering of Israel as described in Isaiah 49:22–23, but also on the fulfillment of Isaiah 11:11–12:

And it shall come to pass in that day, that the Lord shall set his hand again [*yôsîp*] the second time to recover the remnant

Israel, will I gather in, saith the Lord, according to the words of the prophet Zenos, from the four quarters of the earth"; 3 Nephi 10:16–17: "Yea, the prophet Zenos did testify of these things, and also Zenock spake concerning these things, because they testified particularly concerning us, who are the remnant of their seed. Behold, our father Jacob also testified concerning a remnant of the seed of Joseph. And behold, are not we a remnant of the seed of Joseph? And these things which testify of us, are they not written upon the plates of brass which our father Lehi brought out of Jerusalem?" See also Helaman 15:11.

18. See Matthew L. Bowen, "I Have Done According to My Will": Reading Jacob 5 as a Temple Text," in *The Temple: Ancient and Restored*, ed. Stephen D. Ricks and Donald W. Parry (Salt Lake City: Eborn Books, 2016), 247–48; see also Bowen and Spendlove, "Thou Art the Fruit of My Loins."

of his people, which shall be left, from Assyria, and from Egypt, and from Pathros, and from Cush, and from Elam, and from Shinar, and from Hamath, and from the islands of the sea. And he shall set up an ensign for the nations, and shall assemble [*wě'āsap*, gather] the outcasts of Israel, and gather together [*yěqabbēš*] the dispersed of Judah from the four corners of the earth.

Jacob's particular interest in Isaiah 11:11 is confirmed three verses later when he directly quotes or paraphrases this prophecy: "And behold, according to the words of the prophet, **the Messiah will set himself again** [cf. *yôšîp*] the second time to recover [his people]" (2 Nephi 6:14).¹⁹ Jacob's interpretation of Isaiah 11:11 is clearly reminiscent of Joseph's prophecy regarding Israel, "nevertheless they shall be remembered in the covenants of the Lord, when the Messiah cometh; for he shall be made manifest unto them in the latter days, in the spirit of power" (JST Genesis 50:25). Assuming this part of Joseph's prophecy existed on the brass plates along with the portion attested in 2 Nephi 3, Jacob's use of the term Messiah (*māšîah* = anointed one) here may have been influenced by the use of the same or a similar term in Joseph's prophecy.

Jacob's covenant sermon in 2 Nephi 6–10 represents something of a sequel to, or a fuller working out of, Nephi's exegetical explanation of Isaiah 48–49 to his brothers (see 1 Nephi 22). Nephi sees in Isaiah's words a fulfillment of the Abrahamic Covenant in Israel's scattering and subsequent gathering. Isaiah 49:22–23 serves as a key text both in Jacob's covenant sermon and in Nephi's earlier exegesis. However, Nephi's exegesis also relies heavily on the prophecy of the coming forth of the sealed book Isaiah 29, including v. 14, wherein the Lord promises "I will proceed [*yôšîp*] to do a marvellous work among this people." Nephi's exegesis and Isaiah's prophecy also use language reminiscent of Joseph's prophecy.

Comparing the language of JST Genesis 50:25 with 1 Nephi 22:8, 11–12 and Isaiah 29:14, 18–19 helps visualize the similarity and possible intertextual relationships between these prophecies:

19. See Matthew L. Bowen, "'The Messiah Will Set Himself Again': Jacob's Use of Isaiah 11:11 in 2 Nephi 6:14 and Jacob 6:2," *Interpreter: A Journal of Latter-day Saint Faith and Scholarship* 44 (2021): 287–306, <https://journal.interpreterfoundation.org/the-messiah-will-set-himself-again-jacobs-use-of-isaiah-1111-in-2-nephi-614-and-jacob-62/>.

JST Genesis 50:25	1 Nephi 22:8, 11–12	Isaiah 29:14, 18–19
And it shall come to pass that they shall be scattered again [cf. <i>yôšîpû *lēhizzārôt</i>] and a branch shall be broken off, and shall be carried into a far country; nevertheless they shall be remembered in the covenants of the Lord , when the Messiah cometh; for he shall be made manifest unto them in the latter days, in the Spirit of power; and shall bring them out of darkness into light; out of hidden darkness, and out of captivity unto freedom.	And after our seed is scattered the Lord God will proceed [cf. <i>yôšîp</i>] to do a marvelous work among the Gentiles, which shall be of great worth unto our seed; wherefore, it is likened unto their being nourished by the Gentiles and being carried in their arms and upon their shoulders.... Wherefore, the Lord God will proceed [cf. <i>yôšîp</i>] to make bare his arm in the eyes of all the nations, in bringing about his covenants and his gospel unto those who are of the house of Israel. Wherefore, he will bring them again [cf. <i>yôšîp</i>] out of captivity, and they shall be gathered together to the lands of their inheritance; and they shall be brought out of obscurity and out of darkness ; and they shall know that the Lord is their Savior and their Redeemer, the Mighty One of Israel.	Therefore, behold, I will proceed [<i>yôšîp</i> or <i>yôšîp</i>] to do a marvellous work among this people, even a marvellous work and a wonder ... And in that day shall the deaf hear the words of the book, and the eyes of the blind shall see out of obscurity, and out of darkness. The meek also shall increase [<i>wēyospû</i>] their joy in the Lord, and the poor among men shall rejoice in the Holy One of Israel.

It is also clear that Nephi’s exegesis of Isaiah 48–49 is textually dependent upon Isaiah 29:14, 18–19 among other texts.²⁰ However, the language of Nephi’s exegesis and that of Isaiah 29:14, 18–19 exhibit remarkable similarity to Joseph’s prophecy in JST Genesis 50:25. It is likely that Nephi knew some form of this prophecy (cf. 2 Nephi 3), and it is not impossible that Isaiah himself knew some form of the prophecy of Joseph in Egypt.

The language of divine deliverance from bondage is prominent and very similarly expressed in all three of these texts: “and [he] shall bring them out of darkness into light; out of hidden darkness, and out of captivity unto freedom”; “he will bring them again out of captivity ... and they shall be brought out of obscurity and out of darkness”; “the eyes of the blind shall see out of obscurity, and out of darkness.”

20. See Matthew L. Bowen, “‘The Lord God Will Proceed’: Nephi’s Wordplay in 1 Nephi 22:8–12 and the Abrahamic Covenant,” *Interpreter: A Journal of Latter-day Saint Faith and Scholarship* 50 (2022): 51–70, <https://journal.interpreterfoundation.org/the-lord-god-will-proceed-nephis-wordplay-in-1-nephi-228-12-and-the-abrahamic-covenant/>.

This language all revolves around the agentic role that Moses fulfilled in delivering Israel out of Egypt (“this prophet shall deliver my people out of Egypt in the days of thy bondage,” JST Genesis 50:24), but it also anticipates a future figure who would play a similar role who would be named Joseph (JST Genesis 50:33; 2 Nephi 3:15; see further below).

Of course, Joseph Smith never lived to see the complete gathering and latter-day redemption of Israel — a work which remains ongoing on both sides of the veil and a work in which he continues as an active participant.²¹ However, Joseph did translate and bring forth “the book” whose words the deaf would hear and which would cause “the eyes of the blind [to] see out of obscurity, and out of darkness” (Isaiah 29:18). He did establish a church whose members would be given power to “bring it forth out of obscurity and out of darkness” (D&C 1:30) and in which would gather a people sufficient to lay the foundation for the complete gathering of Israel.

Nephi foresaw that “after they [the house of Israel] were restored they should **no more** [lō’ yôšîpû] be confounded, **neither should they** be scattered **again** [wēlō’ yôšîpû]” (1 Nephi 15:20; cf. 1 Nephi 14:2; Ether 13:8).²² Although Israel had been “scattered again,” in fulfillment of the prophecy of Joseph in Egypt, the prophetic and seeric work of Joseph Smith has ensured that the spiritual blessings and conditions will prevail such that Israel shall never be “scattered again.” Here again, Nephi’s use of Isaianic language²³ echoes the name Joseph and perhaps does so in interaction with the prophecy of Joseph in Egypt.

“And His Name Shall Be Called Joseph”: The Centrality of Joseph’s Name in Joseph’s Prophecy

The centrality of the name Joseph in the canonical text of Genesis is clear from the examples cited at the beginning of this study. This centrality receives even greater emphasis in the JST Genesis text with Joseph explicitly prophesying that the future seer would be named Joseph:

21. See especially D&C 138:57.

22. See Matthew L. Bowen, “‘They Shall No More Be Confounded’: Moroni’s Wordplay on Joseph in Ether 13:1–13 and Moroni 10:31,” *Interpreter: A Journal of Latter-day Saint Faith and Scholarship* 30 (2018): 91–104, <https://journal.interpreterfoundation.org/they-shall-no-more-be-confounded-moronis-wordplay-on-joseph-in-ether-13-13-and-moroni-1031/>.

23. Ibid.

JST Genesis 50:33	2 Nephi 3:14–15
And that seer will I bless, and they that seek to destroy him shall be confounded; for this promise I give unto you; for I will remember you from generation to generation;	And thus prophesied Joseph [<i>yôsēp</i>], saying: Behold, that seer will the Lord bless; and they that seek to destroy him shall be confounded; for this promise, which I have obtained of the Lord, of the fruit of my loins, shall be fulfilled. Behold, I am sure of the fulfilling of this promise;
and his name shall be called Joseph [<i>yôsēp</i>], and it shall be after the name of his father; and he shall be like unto you ; for the thing which the Lord shall bring forth by his hand shall bring my people unto salvation .	and his name shall be called after me ; and it shall be after the name of his father. And he shall be like unto me ; for the thing, which the Lord shall bring forth by his hand, by the power of the Lord shall bring my people unto salvation .

The identification of the future raised-up seer as one who would be named *yôsēp* is even more explicit in JST Genesis 50:33 than in the text of 2 Nephi 3:15. The language of the JST Genesis text suggests that the Lord explicitly told Joseph the name of the latter-day seer: “and his name shall be called Joseph [i.e., *yôsēp*].” The Book of Mormon text reflects Joseph relaying this same information without the direct use of his name: “and his name shall be called after me [i.e., *yôsēp*].” All of this seems to suggest that Joseph, at some point, recorded and relayed this information referring to himself in the first person.

“And He Shall Gather My People”: Moses as Antetype for the Future “Joseph”

The typological pairing of Moses’s and the future Joseph’s prophetic and seeric roles is established in JST Genesis 50:27–32, before the latter’s naming in JST Genesis 50:33. In JST Genesis 50:34–35, Moses’s specific prophetic role in gathering Israel and the relationship of the prophetic-seeric role of writing the divine word to the former is made clear in JST Genesis 50:34–35. Moses’s “writ[ing] the word of the Lord” represents a vital aspect of his “gathering” Israel. Writing the word of the Lord as a part of gathering, of course, has implications for the latter-day Joseph. A comparison of JST Genesis 50:34–35 and 2 Nephi 3:17 bring some additional, significant details into focus:

JST Genesis 50:34–35	2 Nephi 3:17
And the Lord sware unto Joseph that <i>he would preserve his seed forever</i> , saying,	And the Lord hath said:
I will raise up Moses [<i>mōšeh</i>],	I will raise up a Moses [Egyptian, a begotten (son); Hebrew <i>mōšeh</i> , i.e., a puller]
and a rod shall be in his hand , and he shall gather together my people , and he shall lead them as a flock, and he shall smite the waters of the Red Sea with his rod [Hebrew <i>maṭṭēhū</i> ; Egyptian <i>mdw=f</i>]	and I will give power unto him in a rod ;
And he shall have judgment, and shall write the word [Hebrew <i>dābār</i> ; Egyptian <i>mdw/md.t/mt.t</i>] of the Lord.	and I will give judgment unto him in writing.
And he shall not speak many words [Hebrew <i>dēbārīm</i> ; Egyptian, <i>mdwt</i>]	Yet I will not loose his tongue, that he shall speak much, for I will not make him mighty in speaking .
for I will write unto him my law by the finger of mine own hand.	But I will write unto him my law, by the finger of mine own hand;
And I will make a spokesman [Hebrew <i>dibber</i> ; Egyptian <i>mdwtj</i> ,] for him, and his name shall be called Aaron.	and I will make a spokesman for him.

In a roundabout way, Nephi refers to the prophetic oath, “the Lord sware unto Joseph that he would preserve his seed forever, saying: I will raise up [a] Moses,” in 2 Nephi 25:21: “Wherefore, for this cause hath the Lord God promised unto me that these things which I write shall be kept and preserved, and handed down unto my seed, from generation to generation, **that the promise may be fulfilled unto Joseph** [*yôšēp*], **that his seed should never perish as long as the earth should stand**” (2 Nephi 25:21). Nephi recalls this oath in immediate conjunction with his exegetical use of Isaiah 11:11 and Isaiah 29:14 in 2 Nephi 21:17 as an onomastic wordplay on the name Joseph: “And the Lord will set his hand again [*yôšīp*] the second time to restore his people from their lost and fallen state [quoting Isaiah 11:11]. Wherefore, he will proceed [*yôšīp* or *yôšip*] to do a marvelous work and a wonder among the children of

men [quoting Isaiah 29:14]."²⁴ The Lord's prophetic oath would not only require a Moses to "gather" Israel and "write the word of the Lord," but also a latter-day seer — a Joseph — to gather Israel, to re-"add" ancient scripture, and to bring forth modern scripture, including divine law (see, e.g., D&C 42).

The Lord's first gathering of Israel in ancient Egypt begins with his commanding Moses, "Go, **and gather** [*wē'āsaptā*] the elders of Israel **together**" (Exodus 3:16), a commandment that Moses and Aaron fulfilled together: "And Moses and Aaron went and **gathered together** [*wayya'aspū*] all the elders of the children of Israel" (Exodus 4:29). The Hebrew text here employs the same key verb, *āsap*, so closely connected to Joseph, his name, and the family gathering scenes in Egypt detailed in the Joseph narrative cycle (Genesis 37–50).

It is worth noting here the slight textual variance between JST Genesis 50:34 ("I will raise up Moses") and 2 Nephi 3:17 ("I will raise up a Moses").²⁵ In either case, underlying texts would very likely have read identically, since a Semitic/Hebrew original would have lacked an indefinite article. The Book of Mormon rendering, "a Moses," helps us see that the name Moses can function as a substantivized participle or even as a title. Michael P. O'Connor notes that the Hebrew form *mōšeh* constitutes a "pseudo-active-participle form," suggesting the meaning "puller."²⁶ This datum squares with the Lord's promise to Moses in Moses 1:25, "thou shalt be made stronger than many waters," and the concept of Moses baptizing or "pulling" Israel through Red (or Reed)

24. See more recently Bowen, "Onomastic Wordplay," 255–73; see also Bowen, "He Shall Add," 2–4.

25. Robert F. Smith argues that this is both indefinite and superlative, since it refers back to the Moses listed in 2 Nephi 3:9–10, and that the Egyptian indefinite article was used to indicate this second mention of Moses was "uniquely" the same, *w^f Mš* "a Moses (literally), uniquely Moses, one and only Moses." Robert F. Smith, *Egyptianisms in the Book of Mormon and Other Studies* (Provo, UT: Deep Forest Green Books, 2020), 39, https://books.google.com/books?id=y4IdzgEACAAJ&newbks=1&newbks_redir=0&hl=en. Smith cites to Alan Gardiner, *Egyptian Grammar*, 3rd rev. ed. (London: Oxford University Press, 1957), 78 [§97], 194 [§262.1 superlative]; James P. Allen, *Middle Egyptian: An Introduction to the Language and Culture of Hieroglyphs* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2010), 2:41 [§4.9], 103–104 [§9.4 end].

26. M. O'Connor, "The Human Characters' Names in the Ugaritic Poems: Onomastic Eccentricity in Bronze-Age West Semitic and the Name Daniel in Particular," in *Biblical Hebrew in Its Northwest Semitic Setting: Typological and Historical Perspectives*, ed. Steven E. Fassberg and Avi Hurvitz (Winona Lake, IN: Eisenbrauns, 2006), 270n7.

Sea in the Exodus.²⁷ The biblical text employs an etiology that suggests a passive meaning for the name of Moses — i.e., “pulled” or “drawn”: “And she called his name Moses [*mōšeh*]: and she said, Because I drew him [*mēšītiḥú*] out of the water” (Exodus 2:10). However, the Hebrew etiology betrays a consciousness of the Egyptian origin of Moses — “begotten” from Egyptian *ms(i)*, “beget” (cf. Rameses, Tuthmosis, Ahmose, etc.) — in its use of birth imagery that depicts Moses being pulled from or “begotten” from water, evocative of amniotic fluid.

Even earlier, JST Genesis 50 makes clear that Moses’s name — like Joseph Smith’s personal name — was foreknown and foreordained: “For a seer will I raise up to deliver my people out of the land of Egypt; and he shall be called Moses. And by this name he shall know that he is of thy house; for he shall be nursed by the king’s daughter, and shall be called her son” (JST Genesis 50:29). Nathan Arp, noting the clear connection between Exodus 2:10 and JST Genesis 50:29, also noted the evident wordplay on Moses in terms of “son”: “It is fitting that Joseph, who knew Egyptian, would prophesy of Moses and include an Egyptian pun.”²⁸

It is further possible that the versions of Joseph’s prophecy preserved in JST Genesis 50 and 2 Nephi 3 both preserve the echoes of another Egyptian pun. The phrases “and **a rod** shall be in his hand ... and he shall smite the waters of the Red Sea with **his rod**” (JST Genesis 50:34) along with “and I will give power unto him in a **rod**” (2 Nephi 3:17) are immediately juxtaposed with “and [he] shall write **the word** of the Lord ... And he shall not speak many **words**” (JST Genesis 50:35) and “Yet I will not loose his tongue, that he shall **speak** much, for I will not make him mighty in **speaking**” (2 Nephi 3:17). In terms of an Egyptianism, the wordplay would turn on the Egyptian lexeme *mdw*, which as a noun means both “rod” and “word” and as a verb means to “speak.”²⁹ If valid, such a wordplay would operate very similar to the Egyptianistic wordplay on “rod” and “word” in 1 Nephi 11:25, “And it came to pass that I beheld that **the rod of iron**, which my father had seen, was **the word of God**,” and 1 Nephi 15:23–24, “And they said unto me: What meaneth the **rod**

27. See, e.g., Matthew L. Bowen and Jeffrey M. Bradshaw, “A Literary Masterpiece: Many-Great Waters and Moses’ Mission to Baptize,” *Book of Moses Essay #43, Pearl of Great Price Central* (website), <https://www.pearlofgreatpricecentral.org/a-literary-masterpiece-many-great-waters-and-moses-mission-to-baptize>.

28. Nathan Arp, “Joseph Knew First: Moses the Egyptian Son,” *Interpreter: A Journal of Latter-day Saint Faith and Scholarship* 32 (2019): 196, <https://journal.interpreterfoundation.org/joseph-knew-first-moses-the-egyptian-son/>.

29. Raymond O. Faulkner, *A Concise Dictionary of Middle Egyptian* (London: Oxford University Press, 1999), 122. Hereafter cited as *CDME*.

of iron ...? And I said unto them that it was the **word of God**; and whoso would hearken unto the word of God, and would hold fast unto it, they would never perish." It is also Nephi who states that "**by his** [Moses's] **word** the waters of the Red Sea were divided hither and thither"³⁰ and that "Moses, **by his word** according to the power of God which was in him, smote the rock, and there came forth water" (1 Nephi 17:26, 29).³¹ The Hebrew term for "rod" in the exodus narratives is *maṭṭēh* — a term also attested in the collocation *maṭṭēh* [*hā*] *ʾēlōhīm*, "rod of God" (Exodus 4:20; 17:9) which parallels the Egyptian expression *mdw-ntr* ("word of God," "divine decree," "sacred writings")³² — may constitute a loanword from Egyptian *mdw*,³³ if not derived from Hebrew *nāṭā* (Qal, "reach out," "spread out," "stretch out"; Hiphil, "stretch out," "spread out," "extend, bestow").³⁴ For Nephi, the "rod" and the "word" were interchangeable and this seems to have been rooted in the polysemy of Egyptian *mdw*. The possibility that Nephi thought to connect the "rod of iron" with the "word of God" when he had a vision of the tree of life because of the similar Egyptianistic wordplay evident in Joseph's story on the brass plates is an intriguing one.

Notably, both versions of Joseph's prophecy also conclude with the promise, "And I will make a **spokesman** for him" which also appears to add to the wordplay. The Hebrew term used for "spokesman" in the Exodus account is *dibber*, a formation from the same root as the verb *dābar*, "speak," and the noun *dābār*, "word," "thing." This term corresponds semantically to the Egyptian *mdw*-derived word *mdwty*, "talker" or "speaker."³⁵

Just as Moses in his seeric role gathered, delivered, and preserved Israel through the event of the Exodus with the help of Aaron as "spokesman" (*dibber*,³⁶ JST Genesis 50:35; Exodus 4:16; JST Exodus

30. Matthew L. Bowen, "What Meaneth the Rod of Iron?," *Insights* 25, no. 2 (2005): 2–3, <https://scholarsarchive.byu.edu/insights/vol25/iss2/3/>.

31. *Ibid.*

32. *CDME*, 122.

33. J.M.A. Janssen, "Égyptologie et Bible," in *L'Ancien Testament et L'Orient* (Louvain: Publication Universitaires de Louvain, 1957), 40; R.J. Williams, "Egypt and Israel," in *The Legacy of Egypt*, ed. John R. Harris (Oxford: Clarendon/Oxford University Press, 1971), 263.

34. Ludwig Koehler and Walter Baumgartner, *The Hebrew and Aramaic Lexicon of the Old Testament*, vol. 2 (Leiden, NDL: Brill, 2001), 692–93.

35. *CDME*, 123.

36. Exodus 4:16: "And he [Aaron] shall be thy spokesman [*dibber*] unto the people: and he shall be, even he shall be to thee instead of a mouth, and thou shalt

7:1; 2 Nephi 3:17), Joseph Smith as seer would accomplish much of the initial work of the gathering and restoration of Israel with Sidney Rigdon functioning as a “spokesman” and scribe in writing the word:

And it is expedient in me that you, my servant Sidney, should be a spokesman unto this people; yea, verily, I will ordain you unto this calling, even to be a spokesman unto my servant Joseph. And I will give unto him power to be mighty in testimony. And I will give unto thee power to be mighty in expounding all scriptures, that thou mayest be a spokesman unto him, and he shall be a revelator unto thee, that thou mayest know the certainty of all things pertaining to the things of my kingdom on the earth. (D&C 100:9–11)

This revelation describes Joseph Smith’s and Sidney Rigdon’s interrelationship in language reminiscent of the biblical descriptions of the relationship between Moses and Aaron.

Here we recall that the rendition of the prophecy of Joseph in Egypt in 2 Nephi 3 drew an additional parallel between Moses’s seeric/prophetic role and that of the latter-day Joseph. Just as Aaron functioned as a spokesman for Moses, the latter-day, raised-up seer named Joseph would also have a “spokesman”:

And the Lord said unto me also: I will raise up unto the fruit of thy loins; and I will make for him a spokesman. And I, behold, I will give unto him that he shall write the writing of the fruit of thy loins, unto the fruit of thy loins; and the spokesman of thy loins shall declare it. And the words which he shall write shall be the words which are expedient in my wisdom should go forth unto the fruit of thy loins. And it shall be as if the fruit of thy loins had cried unto them from the dust; for I know their faith. (2 Nephi 3:18–19)

Joseph’s prophecy echoes the meaning of the name Ephraim (“doubly fruitful”) in the collocation “fruit of thy loins” as a designation for Joseph’s descendants, including Ephraim’s descendants. The “spokesman of thy loins,” as a Josephite-Ephraimite descendant would be given the gift of “writ[ing] the writing” of Joseph’s descendants to Joseph’s latter-day descendants as part of the divine translation process that would enable “the words” to “go forth” to those descendants. Moses “gather[ed] together [the Lord’s] people as a flock” with “his *rod*” (JST

be to him instead of God.”

Genesis 50:34), even the “*rod of God*” (Exodus 4:20, 17:9) — a Pharaonic image — with Aaron as spokesman. A latter-day “Joseph” would gather together the Lord’s people with the word of God, written as dictated by the seer himself and even preached by scribes as “spokesm[e]n” (JST Genesis 50:35).

On one level, this prophecy was fulfilled by Oliver Cowdery in his scribal work for Joseph Smith during the process of the Book of Mormon’s divine translation. However, it was also fulfilled by Sidney Rigdon in his service to Joseph as both a scribe and a spokesman. In each instance, these spokesmen were instrumental in “writ[ing] the word of the Lord,” preaching that word, and enabling it to go forth to gather the Lord’s people.

Former and Latter-day Prophets and Seers: The Framing of JST Genesis

The relationship between the prophecy of Joseph in Egypt (JST Genesis 50) and the revelation to Moses in JST Genesis 1/Moses 1:41 has been obscured by the canonization of the latter in the Book of Moses, where it has been severed from its JST Genesis context. Both prophecies bookend or frame the JST Genesis text as a self-contained literary unit. Both allude to, and even play on, the name “Joseph,” pointing to the restorative work that the raised-up seer would accomplish. The Vision of Moses (Moses 1), which stands at the head of JST Genesis, includes the Lord’s prophetic promise to Moses:

- A And in a day when **the children of men** shall **esteem my words as naught**
 B and **take** many of them **from** the book which thou shalt write,
 C behold, I will raise up **another like unto thee**;
 B' and **they shall be had again**
 A' among **the children of men** — among as many as shall **believe**. (Moses 1:41)

With respect to the JST Genesis text, this chiastic prophetic promise hints at the name *Joseph* (in terms of the meanings of *’āsap* and *yāsap*) as the one explicitly named in JST Genesis 50, and constitutes the first pairing of Moses’s and the future Joseph’s seeric/prophetic roles. This pairing in JST Genesis 50 recurs ahead of the Pentateuchal narrative’s intense focus on the life, leadership, and lawgiving of Moses.

Conclusion

The thematic Joseph wordplay that begins with Rachel's double-etiology in Genesis 30:23–24 using the verbs *ʾāsap* (“gather,” “take away”) and *yāsap* (“add,” “increase,” “do [something] again”) and which recurs on both verbs through the late chapters of the Joseph Cycle (Genesis 37–50 and Exodus 1:8–10), also extends to the Moses 1 and JST Genesis 50 textual restorations. Joseph's prophecy that the house of Israel, “shall be scattered again; and a branch shall be broken off, and shall be carried into a far country” (JST Genesis 50:25) alludes to Jacob's final blessing upon him (see especially Genesis 49:22) and plays on the name Joseph in at least two ways. First, the phrase “they shall be scattered again” suggests the iterative divine action implied in the name Joseph — “may he [God] add,” “may he do [something] again” — a jussive verb form from the causative stem of *yāsap*. Second, the passive verb form of “scatter” as an antonym of “gather” recalls the etiological association of Joseph's name with the Hebrew verb *ʾāsap*. The repetition of the collocation “fruit of my loins/fruit of thy loins” (JST Genesis 50:24, 26–27, 30–31) recalls Jacob's blessing Joseph as a “fruitful son/bough” with “fruitful daughters/branches” (Genesis 49:22) and particularly the name Ephraim (“doubly fruitful”), adding a distinctive onomastic flavoring to this prophecy of what Joseph's descendants through Ephraim and Manasseh would accomplish (cf. also D&C 133:26–34).

Moreover, Joseph's prophecy that Moses would “gather together my people” (JST Genesis 50:24) anticipates the similar role that the future raised-up seer named “Joseph” would fulfill. The pairing of Moses's and the future Joseph's roles at the beginning and the ending of JST Genesis (Moses 1:41 and JST Genesis 50) suggests that understanding Moses's prophetic and seeric roles as gatherer of Israel and one called to “write the word of the Lord” in order to gather Israel is necessary also to understand Joseph Smith's prophetic and seeric roles.

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“I WILL COME TO YOU”: AN INVESTIGATION OF EARLY CHRISTIAN BELIEFS ABOUT POST-ASCENSION VISITATIONS OF THE RISEN JESUS

Timothy Gervais

Abstract: *While later Creedal Christians have come to view “the Ascension” recorded in the first chapter of Acts as a conclusive corporeal appearance of the Resurrected Lord, earliest Christians do not appear to have conceived of this appearance as “final” in any temporal or experiential sense. A careful investigation of canonical resurrection literature displays a widespread Christian belief in continued and varied interaction with the risen Lord relatively late into the movements’ development. Stringent readings of Luke’s account of the Ascension in Acts suggesting that Christ will not return until his second coming fail to consider the theological rhetoric with which Luke conveys the resurrection traditions he relied on in composing his account. Analysis of Luke’s narrative displays that his presentation of these traditions is shaped in a way to stress the primacy of the apostolic Easter experiences in establishing the apostles as authoritative “witnesses” in the early church over and against possible competing authoritative claims stemming from purported experiences with the risen Lord.*

The thesis of this work loosely mirrors an observation made by Francois Bovon in his commentary on the Gospel of Luke: “The idea that there was an ultimate limit to the appearances of the Risen One does not come from the earliest stage of Christianity.”¹ Indeed, it is difficult to find in the earliest Christian literature any definitive conclusion to these “more extravagant manifestations of religious experience.”² Such observations suggest that earliest Christians anticipated continued interaction with the risen Lord relatively late into the movement’s development. Furthermore, early Christians do not seem to have considered Christ’s

resurrection appearances recorded at the end of each gospel as final in any temporal or experiential sense. As Larry Hurtado has rightly noted, rather than the Easter appearances signaling a conclusion to the resurrected Jesus's earthly ministry, early Christians appear to have had a "powerful sense of revelation" associated with the figure of the risen Lord *after* resurrection morning, which was "perceived by recipients to have a new quality and *frequency* in their lives."³

The narrative structure of the endings of the gospels of Mark, Matthew, and John all readily attest to this expectation of continued interaction with the resurrected Jesus. While Luke's depiction of "the Ascension"⁴ in Luke-Acts may appear more definitive in its closure, a careful survey of Luke's collective narrative reveals an expectation of continued interaction with the resurrected Jesus similar to the other gospels. However, Luke appears to have recounted the early Christian resurrection traditions he received in a manner best suited to convey a unique hierarchical theology surrounding the activities of the risen Jesus.⁵ Luke's narrative seems to suggest a primacy of the apostolic Easter experience for establishing the tangible physical reality of the resurrection, while correspondingly implying that resurrection appearances to other early Christians served a variety subordinate purposes.⁶ Central to this reading is Luke's apparent understanding of the Ascension as an event that signaled the risen Lord's final appearance to the *collective body* of the eleven remaining apostles. Despite this understanding, Luke does not appear to be arguing for a final *general* appearance of the resurrected Lord, or even that those who encountered the risen Lord after this point experienced him in a fundamentally different way. While Luke's Ascension has come to be viewed by many Christians as "the solemn close of the post-Resurrection appearances,"⁷ involving a "change of [Christ's] state,"⁸ a careful investigation of Luke's account and other canonical texts reveals that earliest Christians (including Luke) did not view the Ascension as a decisive close to Christ's post-mortal interaction with his mortal followers. Indeed, apart from a particularly stringent reading of Luke's account, it is difficult to find evidence that early Christians believed in any sort of "final appearance" of the risen Lord. These observations, coupled with a variety of additional literary evidence, suggest that earliest Christians may have viewed physical interaction with the resurrected Lord as an ongoing occurrence long after what has come to be termed "the Ascension."

Early Christian Expectations

Perhaps no evidence is more indicative of early Christian attitudes toward post-resurrection visitations of Christ than the sheer number of early documents devoted to recording such experiences. From the first several centuries of the Christian movement, well over thirty documents survive that purportedly relate experiences with the resurrected Jesus.⁹ The impressive nature of this number is compounded when one considers that many such texts record multiple encounters with the risen Lord.¹⁰ While it is true that a significant portion of these texts represent a particular ideology whose relationship to Christianity has been widely debated (Gnosticism),¹¹ it should also be noted that nearly a third of the documents recording experiences with the resurrected Lord come from the biblical canon, and a substantial portion of the remaining non-canonical texts do not seem to be explicitly tied to a particular ideological group.¹² The significance of the collection of post-resurrection accounts being so widely represented is that belief in corporeal manifestations of the risen Christ appears to have encompassed a myriad of early Christian groups, and seems to be a unifying theme on which all agreed to varying extents.

Although it appears that early Christians generally accepted that the risen Lord continued to minister to the early Church after his resurrection, the purported theological content of those visits varies widely among the preserved documents. However, a broad survey of surviving post-resurrection materials highlights several consistent themes that early Christians may have considered valid reasons for Christ's post-resurrection manifestation. The surviving literature preserves four predominant purposes for which the risen Lord returned: 1) to validate his resurrected state,¹³ 2) to expound the true meaning of scriptural passages,¹⁴ 3) to commission missionaries and stimulate the missionary impulse of the Christian movement,¹⁵ and 4) to convey new doctrine or to clarify teachings.¹⁶ While there is a fifth reason that appears to have gained later acceptance in the Christian movement, it is uniquely associated with the figure of Paul and relates to the calling and commissioning of a previously uncalled apostle. While this purpose may not seem noteworthy to many modern readers of the New Testament (considering Paul's remarkable influence on the development of Christianity), Paul's contemporaries may not have accepted this claim as readily. This may explain why Paul's *apostolic authority* seems to have been repeatedly challenged by his opponents in Galatia and Corinth,¹⁷ but his critics do not seem to question the authenticity of his experience

with the risen Lord. While early Christians would have accepted that the risen Lord could appear to his followers, it seems as though the commissioning of an “apostle” may not have been initially viewed as an accepted reason for Christ to return. Indeed, Paul is singularly unique among people described in all surviving resurrection literature in utilizing a resurrection appearance as a claim to apostolic authority. While other individuals who were not of the original Twelve had experiences with the resurrected Lord (Ananias, James the brother of Jesus, Hermas, etc.), there is no evidence that these individuals utilized their experiences in an attempt to claim *apostolic* authority.¹⁸ While there is some evidence that James’ prominence in the early Church derived from his experience with the risen Lord,¹⁹ James is typically portrayed as holding a position of authority in the church distinct from those of the apostles.²⁰

The surviving resurrection literature can be separated into three major categories. The first are documents that claim to record interactions that take place immediately following Christ’s crucifixion and subsequent resurrection. These “Easter appearances” make up a significant portion of the extant materials and have several unique features that set them apart from other accounts. Perhaps most significantly, these accounts are primarily concerned with establishing the corporeal nature of the resurrected Christ and nearly always describe the “coming to faith” of Christ’s closest disciples. Additionally, such accounts often trace early Christian exegesis of Old Testament scripture back to the risen Lord, while defending the missionary impulse of the Christian community. Furthermore, these accounts often describe an imbue ment of power upon the original apostles (or a promise of such as in Luke’s account) and a commissioning of them as chosen vessels to carry the gospel message to the world.

The second significant category of texts are those that relate what modern interpreters might call the “visionary” experiences of the author. While it is often difficult to distinguish a “vision” from what was experienced by some of the disciples during the Easter experiences,²¹ these accounts are most easily identified by their apocalyptic or eschatological content.²² Such experiences often deal with the enthronement of Christ, or include visions of his second coming, and are thus distinguishable from the present and corporeal experience of the apostles on Easter. These accounts also tend to emphasize in a more striking manner than the Easter experiences the discontinuity of the resurrected body.²³ While some of these accounts are easily identifiable as “visionary” experiences, many of the accounts begin in such a way that the visionary nature

of the experience is ambiguous and might easily be construed as an experience similar to those experienced by the disciples during the Easter manifestations. This ambiguity often blurs the line between this "visionary" group of accounts and the third group of accounts that are "non-visionary" post-Ascension accounts of Jesus.

The third group of accounts is the primary topic of this work. These are accounts that record experiences that purportedly took place after Christ's enthronement, but still share many of the same features as the Easter accounts. Perhaps no experience is more paradigmatic of this category than Paul's call on the road to Damascus. Although Luke's portrayal of Paul's experience has disguised its similarities to the pre-Ascension experiences on Easter morning, a careful investigation of Luke's account in conjunction with Paul's letters reveals that the experience was not dissimilar to that of the apostles. As such, interpretations of Luke's account of the Ascension in Acts 1 as a final bodily appearance of the risen Lord will be shown to be incompatible with early Christian understandings of the same.

The New Testament Witness

The incongruencies of the gospel endings have long been a thorny subject for the Christian community.²⁴ While each ends in a similar fashion, with the risen Jesus making an appearance to validate his resurrected state, each presents the story in a distinct and often temporally irreconcilable fashion:

Contrast Mark's frightened women fleeing the empty tomb with Matthew's great commission from the mountaintop in Galilee with Luke's account of the disciples walking back to Jerusalem with John's mysterious final appearance by the seashore. The mood, the dramatic shape of the ending, varies radically from one to another.²⁵

Despite these seeming incongruities, Christians by and large have resisted attempts to reconcile these histories for the purpose of establishing a unified narrative.²⁶ The reason for this apparent resistance is at least in part because "the way [each gospel] talk[s] about the relation of text, history, and reader gets lost if one tries to impose such a single perspective."²⁷ Placher is correct in asserting that the multiplicity of the gospel narratives paradoxically provides the clearest picture of early Christian beliefs about the resurrected Christ.

Indeed, it seems as though the single most important theme of the endings of the gospels is that Christ was risen and continued to appear to many of his followers after his resurrection. These appearances are simultaneously personal²⁸ and corporate,²⁹ powerful³⁰ and mundane.³¹ The united force of these varying experiences is that Christ has risen, he can and does appear to both individuals and the corporate leadership of the church, he provides power and companionship despite his death on the cross, and he can come to his disciples at any time and in any place.³² While differing in presentation, the endings of the gospels present a unified voice: the risen Christ is still involved in the affairs of the fledgling Christian movement, personally and physically directing its efforts despite his place at the right hand of the Father. In each case, and in unique ways, the gospel authors describe to the reader the early Christian expectation that the resurrected Lord has interacted and will continue to interact with the church, leaving the “when” and “where” a matter of personal discovery. As Placher describes it, “These narratives invite their readers to find themselves living in the world of the narratives.”³³

Pre-Ascension Accounts

As has been discussed above, pre-Ascension accounts found in the canonical gospels typically appear to serve the very specific function of validating the corporeal nature of Christ’s resurrected state. The risen Christ is often touched, eats food, and walks with those he appears to in a manner similar to his pre-crucifixion interactions. While this is true for the majority of pre-Ascension accounts, there are several appearances recorded in the Gospel narratives that do not easily fit this formula. In particular, Christ’s post-resurrection appearance to Mary, the account of the disciples on the road to Emmaus, and Christ’s appearance to a group of disciples at the sea of Tiberius cannot easily be construed as serving this function. These accounts are important to the overall thesis of this work because they display narrative similarities to the post-Ascension accounts found in Acts. By establishing some common themes of the pre-Ascension canonical accounts, it will lay a groundwork for properly understanding the post-Ascension visitations of Christ recounted by Luke in the Acts of the Apostles and by Paul in his letters.

Mark

Like all of the gospel narratives, Mark’s account of the empty tomb begins with a group of women disciples going to the sepulcher on the first day

of the week.³⁴ As these women near the tomb, they see that the stone covering the mouth has been rolled away (Mark 16:4). Entering, they "saw a young man sitting on the right clothed in a white robe."³⁵ No more identifying features are given, and despite no claims to be such, the man is obviously depicted as a heavenly messenger.³⁶ Seeing that the women "were greatly astounded,"³⁷ the young man attempts to console them: "Do not be alarmed; you are looking for Jesus of Nazareth, who was crucified. He has been raised; he is not here. Look, there is the place they laid him" (Mark 16:6). The messenger then informs the women that they should tell the disciples and Peter that Christ will meet them in Galilee just as he promised (Mark 16:7).³⁸ Mark's curious phrasing that the women should tell "his disciples and Peter," may reflect the authoritative primacy Peter experienced in the early church as the first disciple to be called (Mark 1:16–18), the first to recognize Jesus's messiahship (Mark 8:29), and perhaps the first male disciple to receive a resurrection appearance.³⁹ Rather than joyously rushing to tell the disciples, the text says that the women "fled"⁴⁰ "trembling and bewildered"⁴¹ and that they "said nothing to anyone."⁴² Scholars generally agree that based upon available manuscript evidence, Mark's narrative originally concluded immediately following Mark 16:8.⁴³ Thus, the earliest recoverable ending of Mark's narrative concludes with the statement that the women were afraid, enigmatically concluding with the explanatory particle "for" (γάρ).⁴⁴

Because of the "the sheer implausibility" of the "astonishing abruptness" with which Mark's narrative closes, "a long tradition of distinguished scholars [have] even posit[ed] ... a lost final page of the original Gospel."⁴⁵ For the most part, speculative suggestions of this type have been rightly avoided, as the abruptness of the ending at 16:8 coincides well with Mark's characteristic rapid style and the equally abrupt beginning of the Markan narrative.⁴⁶ Additionally, the "fear" with which the women flee from the tomb is consistent with Mark's presentation of the human response to the numinous throughout the gospel.⁴⁷ Furthermore, because the earliest Christians would have been familiar with a variety of oral traditions about visitations of the resurrected Lord, "the ending is not abrupt when viewed as a proclamation in the midst of a Christian community which had often heard the resurrection stories, and no doubt understood them as the sequel to Mark 16:8."⁴⁸ The assurance of the angel found in Mark 16:7, that the disciples would see the resurrected Jesus in Galilee,⁴⁹ would then not have been viewed as incomplete to an early Christian reader, as the promise of a visit from the

risen Lord had already been vindicated by several resurrection traditions already in circulation. Indeed, the angels' promise that "there you will see him" most likely refers to the same tradition of resurrection appearances cited by Paul in 1 Corinthians 15, traditions that were well established at the time of Mark's writing. Rather than recounting these appearances, Mark places no limits on the number of visits that were experienced by the disciples or by the women. As Luke Timothy Johnson has observed, "Because Mark declares Jesus to be alive and ready to appear but does not attach his appearing to any specific times and places in the past, he leaves open for his readers the imaginative possibility of new encounters with the risen one."⁵⁰ Mark's abrupt ending ought then to be viewed as something of a theological statement: while the Lord has indeed been raised, his appearance to the community of Christian believers is not restricted in either time or space. As such, Mark wishes to convey to his readers the distinct possibility of future appearances of the risen Lord, while expertly contextualizing those that had already occurred at the time of his authorship.⁵¹ These unique characteristics of the earliest gospel arguably render it the one most narratively open to continued interaction with the risen Lord.

Because the original ending of Mark at 16:8 only alludes to the possibility of future resurrection appearances, scholars generally agree that the subsequent verses (16:9–20) appear to be a later scribal attempt to explicitly reconcile Mark's account to the resurrection appearances recorded in the other gospels. These additional verses are generally referred to by scholars as "The Longer Ending":

This twelve-verse ending was probably added to a copy of Mark sometime in the late 2nd or early 3rd century ce. It is not found in the earliest or most dependable Greek manuscripts, and while it appears in many others, it is often marked with asterisks or critical notes indicating its secondary status. It appears to be composed of a mixture of elements from the other three Gospels and Acts.⁵²

This longer ending includes an appearance to Mary Magdalene (Mark 16:9), an appearance to two disciples reminiscent of Luke's account of the road to Emmaus (Mark 16:12), and a climactic appearance to the eleven while they are eating (Mark 16:14).⁵³ The composition nears its conclusion with a revised account of Luke's Ascension depicted in Acts 1, as the risen Lord is "taken up into heaven and [sits] on the right of God."⁵⁴ Despite this enthronement, the risen Lord is depicted as being actively involved in the proclamation of the gospel after his

Ascension, as the apostles "went out and proclaimed in all directions while the Lord worked together with them."⁵⁵ Similarities between the longer ending of Mark and many of the apocryphal acts written during the second century suggest early Christians may have understood this reference to be a contextualization of a variety of alleged post-ascension physical manifestations to both the apostles and other believers. This longer ending, when read as an independent literary work, thus provides additional evidence of a strong post-resurrection appearance tradition relatively late into the second century. As Cadwallader has noted, "Even though we ought not confuse the various endings to Mark's Gospel with the original Gospel composition ... they also testify to the diversity ... of the variety of experiences of [the] resurrection."⁵⁶

Matthew

The literary dependence of Matthew on the gospel of Mark has been well established.⁵⁷ It was probably composed in the latter fourth of the first century CE⁵⁸ and represents one of the most influential gospels, as it has been "the Gospel most used by the church in its worship."⁵⁹ Although Matthew depends upon Mark for a significant portion of its narrative material, Matthew's portrayal of the discovery of the empty tomb and of the post-resurrection appearances of Jesus are significantly different than its predecessor. Despite this, Matthew, like Mark, preserves the ubiquitous early Christian tradition of post-resurrection appearances of Christ.

Matthew is the only canonical gospel to place its witness to the resurrection between accounts of active attempts to prevent or discredit claims that the Lord has risen.⁶⁰ "Precautions are taken to ensure that what has been entombed stays entombed (27:62–66). When these do not succeed, lies are purchased (28:11–15)."⁶¹ Matthew's narrative of "what actually happened" thus stands in stark contrast to the contrivances of those who would thwart the gospel message through any means possible. By setting his narrative against this backdrop, Matthew's narrative actively challenges alternative explanations of the empty tomb, and in many ways lays a theological foundation for other post-resurrection accounts of Jesus to be taken equally as seriously as his own recorded events.

Similar to Mark's account, Matthew's narrative also begins with a group of women disciples traveling to the tomb early on the first day of the week (Matthew 28:1). Matthew's depiction of the event quickly diverges from Mark's account by stating that only two women approached

the tomb, omitting Salome who is mentioned only in Mark.⁶² The women, rather than coming upon the empty tomb, this time approach just as an angel of the Lord is descending from heaven (Matthew 28:2). In conjunction with the arrival of this heavenly messenger, a great earthquake occurs, and the guards, in a stroke of irony, become “as dead men.”⁶³ Like in Mark, the angel attempts to provide comfort to the women⁶⁴ and instructs them to “go quickly and tell his disciples” that “he was raised from the dead. And behold, he is going before you to Galilee; you will see him there” (Matthew 28:7). Matthew’s account, like Mark’s, has the angel provide the women with a limited mission to the apostles, something that is notably absent in both John and Luke’s later accounts. While the women in Matthew’s story still leave the tomb “quickly with fear,”⁶⁵ this time their fear is coupled with “great joy,”⁶⁶ and they immediately run to tell his disciples (Matthew 28:8). As the women are traveling to tell the disciples, suddenly, “Jesus met them” (Matthew 28:9 KJV). Matthew’s account is the only one that depicts the women touching the risen Lord, as they “held his feet and worshipped him.”⁶⁷ While the longer ending of Mark and the ending of John both attest to a tradition of Mary Magdalene as the first resurrection appearance to take place, Matthew is the only one that conveys an additional tradition of a resurrection appearance to “the other Mary” presumably “Mary the mother of James” mentioned in Mark 16. It might be argued that the “others” gathered with the eleven in Luke’s account included the women, but Luke’s account decidedly emphasizes the eleven’s experience in touching the savior. Like the angel, Jesus tells the women not to be afraid and that they should carry the message to “my brothers” and that they will see him in Galilee (Matthew 28:10).

Matthew’s account of Jesus’s appearance to the women concludes with them continuing on their way to tell the eleven what has occurred (Matthew 28:11). The eleven then go to Galilee to the mountain where Jesus had said he would meet them (Matthew 28:16). The text does not specify the method by which Jesus approached or appeared but instead abruptly states that “when they saw him, they worshipped him, but some doubted” (Matthew 28:17). The text also does not say why or which of the eleven doubted that it was actually him, although there is some sense that Jesus may have been approaching on foot and the doubt came as they looked at the form from a distance.⁶⁸ This interpretation matches Matthew’s previously muted description of Jesus “meeting” the women on their way from the tomb. While Matthew has a penchant for describing heavenly manifestations (such as the angel descending at the

tomb) with glorious detail, in contrast, his description of the risen Lord is remarkably mundane. The risen Lord receives no glowing or glorious descriptions and instead appears much like the earthly Jesus. By so doing, Matthew suggests to the reader the accessibility of the risen Lord by placing him more fully in the physical realm of mortals than in the heavenly realm of the divine.

Matthew concludes his narrative with the risen Lord promising that "I am with you always, to the end of the age" (Matthew 28:20 NRSV). In the context of early Christian beliefs regarding the resurrected Lord, it is quite probable that this last phrase was taken as a literal promise by the risen Lord that he would continue to appear to his followers continuously or repeatedly until the "end of the age."⁶⁹ The "end of the age" seems most likely to be a reference to the *Parousia*, the future end of time at which the Messiah would climactically return and begin his reign over the whole earth. Matthew thus articulates an early Christian expectation that the risen Lord would continue to physically interact with his disciples while remaining hidden from the world until his second coming. By closing his narrative with this implicit promise of future appearances, Matthew reminds readers of the earthly Jesus's earlier promise: "For where two or three are gathered together in my name, there am I in the midst of them" (Matthew 18:20). Furthermore, as the scene closes with the risen Lord still present amongst his disciples, Matthew reemphasizes the resurrected Jesus's status as "Emmanuel," or "God with us," a subtle reference to the declaration of the angel to Joseph found in Matthew 1:23–24. This emphasis of the abiding presence of the resurrected Christ is a unique aspect of the Matthean narrative and stands somewhat in contrast to the perceived closure of the resurrected ministry found in Luke-Acts.

Luke

Luke's account of Jesus's ministry and subsequent post-resurrection appearances is undoubtedly the one that presents the "smoothest narrative coherence."⁷⁰ As such, it should come as little surprise that it has perhaps had the greatest impact on interpreting the endings of the other gospels.⁷¹ While Luke's account shares significant themes with the other gospels, Luke portrays events in such a way as to best articulate his unique theological perspective. Indeed, "Luke is no mere chronicler of events; rather, he is set on persuading his audience that his interpretation of recent events is reliable."⁷² This assertion is supported by the fact that Luke's account seems to be in direct response to other individuals'

attempts to record the events of Jesus's life.⁷³ It is not unreasonable to suggest Luke may have been somewhat dissatisfied with the previous accounts he had read and thus undertook his articulation of the gospel message to more clearly articulate its cohesive significance. If one accepts the scholarly consensus that Luke is literarily dependent upon Mark, the differences in presentation between Luke's account and Mark's may be indicative of those aspects of Christ's post-mortal ministry that Luke found most important. Luke seems primarily concerned with showing that the risen Lord is the force behind the apostle's mission to all the world and is also the driving force behind the new spirit filled church that is the hallmark of Luke's accounts. Because the authority of the apostles is so important to Luke's account in Acts, Luke seems to carefully guard against granting a tangible manifestation of the risen Lord to any but the authority figures of the early Church. As such, Luke's account is devoid of the appearance to Mary found in both Matthew and John's account (as well as the longer ending of Mark). While Luke certainly grants the revelatory validity of other appearances of the risen Lord (e.g., road to Emmaus), he seems to focus his narrative on the Savior's appearance to the apostles, while limiting the authoritative force of other accounts.

Luke begins his account with the story of the women discovering the empty tomb (Luke 24:1–9). Unlike Matthew and Mark, the reader is unaware who these women are until later in the narrative, and Luke's account appears to encompass the experiences of more women disciples than the other gospels (Luke 24:10).⁷⁴ Like Mark's account, the women come upon an already empty tomb (Luke 24:2). After entering and seeing that the tomb is empty, they "were much perplexed" (Luke 24:3–4). Two angels appear to the women to explain the import of the empty tomb (Luke 24:4–7). Luke conspicuously leaves out any instruction by the angels that the women are to communicate the events with the apostles, depicting their sharing of the experience to be their own volition (Luke 24:10). Unlike Matthew's account, Luke does not relay any of the resurrection traditions involving the women disciples having a vision of the risen Lord. Additionally, Luke's account further distances the establishment of veracity of the resurrection from the testimonies of the women by relaying that the apostles themselves disbelieve the women and that "their words seemed to them as idle tales, and they believed them not" (Luke 24:11).

While Luke's omission of any appearances of the risen Lord to the women is curious and has certainly resulted in a fair number of polemical

readings, Luke primarily seems to omit the appearances for the purpose of narrative cohesion:

Luke, [does] not deny [the women's] participation in the events. [He does] however, create a crescendo that builds from the empty tomb, witnessed by women, to the appearance to the eleven disciples.⁷⁵

Luke's narration of the events can then be read at least partially as an attempt to articulate the fundamental Christian claim that the reality of the resurrected Lord is established by the witness of the apostles, not by the various testimonies of individuals who may have also had an experience with the risen Lord. As such, a highly personal appearance to Mary Magdalene (or appearances to other women) that was later vindicated by the experience of the corporate body of the eleven might seem to Luke a redundant witness, one that clouds one of the primary purposes of his narrative. While Luke certainly does not preclude other visitations, his emphasis is on the importance of the apostle's witness in establishing their authority in the early church.

After the episode of the empty tomb, Luke narrates one of the most iconic post-resurrection traditions of Jesus: the disciples on the road to Emmaus. The account states that on "the same day" of the discovery of the empty tomb, two apostles (we will learn one's name is Cleopas from verse 18) are traveling to a village outside of Jerusalem called Emmaus (Luke 24:13). Like other accounts the risen Lord seems to approach the disciples in an unremarkable fashion (Luke 24:15). As is characteristic of many accounts of the risen Lord, the disciples do not at first recognize him (Luke 24:16). With a hint of irony, the risen Jesus asks the disciples what they are discussing and allows them to relate their feelings about his own recent death (Luke 24:19–24). The disciples curiously state that "some of those who were with us went to the tomb and found it just as the women had said; but they did not see him" (Luke 24:24 NRSV). While Luke does not expressly recount any early Christian traditions about the risen Lord's appearance to the women in his earlier narrative, it is possible that his phrasing here still preserves his acknowledgement of such a tradition. The structure of the sentence by which "some of those with us" (τινες τῶν σὺν ἡμῖν) went to the tomb and "found the place as the women had said" (καὶ εὑρον οὕτως καθὼς αἱ γυναῖκες εἶπον) informs the reader that those who went to the tomb did so for the primary purpose of confirming the testimony of the women. As such, the corresponding δὲ (but) found in the next clause of the sentence may denote a portion of the women's testimony that was unable to be

verified. If so, the phrase “but him they did not see” (αὐτὸν δὲ οὐκ εἶδον) would stand in contradistinction to the women’s own experience and may preserve in Luke’s account the tradition of the appearance of the risen Lord to the women at the tomb. This reading reinforces the idea that although Luke was aware of the resurrection appearances to the women, he did not narrate the events in order to more clearly signal to the readers of his account the importance of the apostolic experience with the risen Lord.

After upbraiding the disciples for their unbelief, Christ, “beginning with Moses and all the prophets, interpreted to them the things about himself in all the scriptures” (Luke 24:27 NRSV). As the disciples near their destination, the risen Christ makes as if he is going to continue on the way, but the disciples urge him to spend the evening with them (Luke 24:28–29). The risen Lord consents, and as the disciples recognize him while he is breaking bread, he vanishes from their sight (Luke 24:30–31). The disciples immediately get up and return to Jerusalem to share these things with the apostles, but upon arrival, their story is preceded by the eleven’s assertion that the Lord had already appeared to Peter (Luke 24:33–34). The fact that the eleven assert to these disciples that “the Lord is risen indeed, and hath appeared to Simon” (Luke 24:34 KJV), before the disciples recount their own experience with the risen Lord, stresses for the reader the primacy of the witness of the apostles in asserting that the Lord has risen. It also serves the purpose of establishing a hierarchy of appearances with the appearance to Peter and then to the eleven taking precedence over any personal experiences that individuals might have.

Luke’s portrayal of the disciples on the road to Emmaus is central to the overarching thesis of his two works: that the Spirit is the primary means of God’s interacting with the Church, especially to its ordinary members. While it is unlikely that Luke wishes to discount the religious experiences of any early Christians who may have interacted with the risen Lord, his narrative places distinct boundaries on both the frequency of such events and the authoritative import of such events. As such, Luke’s narrative of the road to Emmaus stresses for the reader that the shared experience of the disciples provides important keys for understanding how the risen Lord is primarily experienced within the Christian community of his own day. The story of the road to Emmaus ought then to be read as if the reader was the unnamed disciple.⁷⁶ The disciples list three means by which they identified the risen Lord, and these serve as Luke’s guidelines to the Church on how Christ’s continued

presence is primarily experienced. Luke suggests that the risen Lord may be found through a witness of the Holy Spirit ("did not our heart burn within us when he spoke to us on the road," Luke 24:32 KJV), the words of the scriptures ("when he opened the Scriptures to us?" Luke 24:32 KJV), and in the sacramental meal ("he had made himself known of them in the breaking of the bread," Luke 24:35 KJV).

Although Luke appears to have crafted the Emmaus narrative to better convey the authority of the apostles and the role of the Holy Spirit in the early church, this is certainly not to say that Luke has invented the story for his own aims. Indeed, the narrative has all the hallmarks of an orally circulated tradition and appears to predate Luke's composition.⁷⁷ It would then appear that Luke plucked from the circulating traditions a well-known episode involving early Christians who were not religious authorities, and who typified the average disciple of Christ who may claim a charismatic experience. Luke then placed and shaped the story to allow the reader to see that the charismatic experiences of early Christians ought to be viewed as subservient to the authority granting experiences of the apostles, and especially of Peter. In Luke's day this may have stood as a firm indictment of any individual or group who might have attempted to claim some sort of alternative ecclesial authority from a more recent manifestation of the risen Lord.⁷⁸ This matches Dunn's assertion that "authority in the primitive church was primarily charismatic in nature"⁷⁹ and, as such, could easily be challenged by appeals to alternative charismatic experiences.

Luke further emphasizes the unique nature of the apostolic experience as he continues his narrative. Just as Cleopas and the unnamed disciple are relating their experience, their story is again superseded by a more impressive manifestation of the risen Lord (Luke 24:36). It is thus not happenstance that Luke portrays this as happening "while they were saying this."⁸⁰ Everyone present is "filled with terror" because they "thought they were seeing a spirit."⁸¹ In order to dispel such thoughts, the risen Lord invites them to "see my hands and my feet; it is I myself. Touch me and see: a spirit has neither flesh nor bones, which as you see, I have."⁸² To further solidify his corporeal nature, the risen Lord asks if they have any food, takes what he is given, and eats it in the presence of the disciples (Luke 24:41–43). Luke highlights the corporeality of the risen Lord in a more emphatic fashion than in the experience of the disciples on the road to Emmaus. The risen Lord is immediately identifiable by all present, unlike the unrecognizable form seen by the disciples on the road. Additionally, the risen Lord allows the disciples

to touch his resurrected body, something that also did not occur in the Emmaus account. Finally, the eating of a meal with the eleven here stands in stark contrast to how Jesus vanished after breaking the bread at Emmaus. Luke's message seems clear: although the Emmaus disciples whom we are to identify ourselves with are presumably witnesses to the experiences being portrayed here, the emphasis is on the unique authority granting experience to the eleven mentioned in verse 33. In essence, Luke is establishing that the experience of ordinary Christians with the corporeality of the risen Lord primarily comes through the witness of the apostles. Christ stresses this fact with his emphatic statement that "you are witnesses of these things" (ὁμεῖς μάρτυρες τούτων, Luke 24:48), again, perhaps in opposition to claims by others in Luke's day that they too have experienced the risen Lord and as such also have been granted some measure of authority.

Luke concludes his gospel account with the Lord leading the group a short distance out of Jerusalem to Bethany where he blesses them (Luke 24:50). While in the process of blessing them, "it happened that he left them and was carried up into heaven."⁸³ While many have viewed the beginning of Acts as merely a more detailed account of this same event, the differences between the two accounts are not easily reconcilable, especially given the fact that they are written by the same author and presumably for the same audience. The two accounts are better understood as two distinct interactions with the risen Lord.⁸⁴ However, it is significant to note that Luke is the only gospel writer to conclude his account with Jesus physically leaving his apostles. It seems that Luke wishes to stress for his readers that the risen Christ will not always be physically present to the early Church, a note he highlights by relating the departure of Christ to cap his narrative.

As has been shown, Luke conveys the resurrection appearances of Christ in a manner distinct from Mark and Matthew, perhaps in an effort to theologically limit authority granting resurrection appearances to those associated with the apostles at Easter. While Luke's principal emphasis on the experiences of the apostles over and against personal resurrection manifestations in some ways must be viewed as a product of Luke's later composition date, an analysis of John (the latest of the gospels), shows that this emphasis is not necessarily indicative of the wider Christian sentiment in the early church.

John

John is widely considered the latest of the gospels and, correspondingly, the one that most consistently portrays Jesus in divine language.⁸⁵ While even the most casual of readers can detect a difference between the "fourth gospel" and those that comprise the synoptic tradition, it is curious how radically different the gospel of John portrays the resurrection appearances than its predecessor in Luke. Whereas Luke wishes to carefully contain appearances of the risen Lord and associate them with a specific time in the church's past, John returns again to a broader conception of Jesus's post-resurrection activity found in Mark and Matthew, but in many ways pushes the narrative of Jesus's post-resurrection activity beyond the scope of even those gospels.

The first difference one notices between John and Luke is the return of the appearance of Jesus to Mary Magdalene. The account begins with Mary approaching the empty tomb, and seeing the stone rolled away from the door, Mary rushes back to Peter and the other apostles and tells them the alarming discovery (John 20:1–2). Peter and "the other disciple" run to the tomb to verify for themselves Mary's troubling claim (John 20:3–6). Upon seeing the empty tomb, the other disciple "believed," and both he and Peter return to their homes (John 20:8). The distraught Mary, however, remains outside the tomb weeping (John 20:11). As she is crying Mary bends down to look into the tomb and sees "two angels in white, sitting where the body of Jesus had been lying, one at the head and the other at the feet" (John 20:11–12 NRSV). These two angels address her and ask why she is crying (John 20:13). Mary seems unimpressed by the presence of the two heavenly messengers, receives no comforting message, and only acknowledges their presence to tell them that "they" (presumably someone with malicious intent) "have taken away my Lord, and I do not know where they have laid him" (John 20:13 NRSV). As though to emphasize her seeming indifference to the heavenly manifestations before her, Mary turns around without hearing anything more from these remarkable messengers (John 20:14). By depicting Mary's interaction with the angels in such a brief fashion, John focuses the narrative forcefully on the appearance of the resurrected Jesus, not on the manifestation of the angelic messengers.

As Mary turns around, she is met by the risen Lord but is unaware that it is him (John 20:14). Jesus asks her the same exact question as the angels: "Woman, why are you weeping?" this time adding, "Whom are you looking for?" (John 20:15 NRSV). Mary, unaware that she is speaking to the risen Lord and assuming that she is speaking to the gardener, asks

him if he knows where the body of Jesus is (John 20:15). Jesus responds by saying her name, and upon hearing her name spoken by the risen Jesus, Mary recognizes that it is him (John 20:16). In contrast to her reaction to the appearance of the heavenly messengers, Mary is much more joyful at the appearance of Jesus and attempts to touch or hold him (John 20:16–17). Jesus intriguingly rebuffs Mary by stating that he has “not yet ascended to the Father” (John 20:17 NRSV). This in many ways seems to be similar to what Luke attempts with his portrayal of the disciples on the road to Emmaus: a definitive separation of those post-resurrection visits that are enacted to establish his resurrected state and those that are personal. However, John’s narrative does reestablish Mary’s role as a messenger to the apostles, as the risen Lord gives her specific instructions on what to communicate to the eleven (John 20:17).

As the remaining eleven disciples are gathered in a room on the evening of the same day, they too are visited by the resurrected Lord (John 20:19). Like in other accounts, the resurrected Jesus appears to the apostles despite the inhibitions of locked doors and solid walls (John 20:19). Ostensibly because Jesus has by this time “ascended to the father,” the risen Lord proceeds to validate his resurrected state by allowing the apostles to observe his hands and side (John 20:20). John’s account is thus unique amongst the gospels in that it explicitly places the “Ascension” or enthronement of Christ on the same day as the resurrection. Other later Christian literature, such as the *Epistle of Barnabas* and the *Gospel of Peter*, also preserves a tradition of ascension/enthronement occurring the same day as the resurrection.⁸⁶ Consequently, it appears that in the minds of early Christians, nearly *all* post-resurrection appearances of Christ were viewed as “post-Ascension” or “post-exaltation” appearances. Indeed, John’s account suggests that it is only after his “ascension” that Christ is truly able to minister in a resurrected form to the apostles at all.

John continues his narrative by depicting the risen Lord bestowing the Holy Ghost through his life-giving breath upon those that are gathered (John 20:22).⁸⁷ Jesus then leaves the disciples, although the method of his departure is not stated, and the reader is informed that this meeting was devoid of Thomas, one of the original Twelve (John 20:24). When the group narrates the account to Thomas, he famously states, “Unless I see the mark of the nails in his hands, and put my finger in the mark of the nails and my hand in his side, I will not believe” (John 20:25 NRSV). Eight days later, this time with Thomas present, the Lord appears again within the closed room and repeats the process of allowing Thomas to validate his resurrected state by touching his resurrected (and ascended)

body (John 20:26–28). John's narrative is brought to a climactic close by the important words of Jesus: "Have you believed because you have seen me? Blessed are those who have not seen and yet have come to believe" (John 20:29 NRSV). Placher has noted that this platitude most likely is meant to indicate those reading the gospel.⁸⁸ John makes clear to his readers through the words of the resurrected Jesus that belief should always predicate a charismatic experience like seeing the risen Lord. However, John does not place any limits upon such experience anywhere in his narrative. John's narrative concludes that "Jesus did many other signs in the presence of the disciples, which are not written in this book" (John 20:30), a distinct allusion to additional post-resurrection appearances.

John further states that he has written these things that "you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that believing you may have life in his name" (John 20:31 KJV). Earlier in John's gospel, Jesus stated that "I am the way, and the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me" (John 14:6 NRSV). In essence, John has formulated the gospel in such a way as to suggest that receiving the risen Jesus is akin to a promise of eternal life. Earlier in the gospel, Jesus stated that even though he is going to "prepare a place for you, I will come again and will take you to myself" (John 14:3 NRSV). Additionally, Jesus stated, "I will not leave you comfortless: I will come to you" (John 14:18 KJV). Not simply a promise of post-resurrection visits to the apostles, Jesus also states that "they who have my commandments and keep them are those who love me; and those who love me will be loved by my Father, and I will love them and reveal myself to them" (John 14:21 NRSV). Seemingly confused as to what Jesus was insinuating, Judas (not Iscariot) asked, "Lord, how is it that you will reveal yourself to us, and not to the world?" (John 14:22 NRSV). Jesus answers that if a man keeps his commandments, Jesus and the father will "make our home with him" (John 14:23 NRSV). Jesus reiterates that he will visit those he loves by stating, "You heard me say to you, 'I am going away, and I am coming to you.' If you loved me, you would rejoice" (John 14:28 NRSV). Those who love Jesus would rejoice at these words presumably because Jesus would visit them after his resurrection and Ascension. In addition to the above passages, John 16:15–20 has also been identified as a promise of "postresurrectional communion with the risen Jesus" by several scholars.⁸⁹ These passages serve to establish a central theme of John's gospel: that the risen Lord continues to be present and active amongst true believers. Despite being the latest of the gospels written, John is

perhaps the most explicit in articulating the early Christian expectation of continued interaction with the risen Lord. In some ways, the themes found in the gospel of John can be read as “course corrections” for the Christian church that may have arisen during the time between Luke’s gospel and the writing of John’s account. Whereas Luke’s account is more definitive in its closure of post-resurrection appearances and emphasizes the primacy of the Apostolic experience with the risen Lord, John reestablishes “in the post-resurrection situation the horizontally unstructured relationship which characterized discipleship of the earthly Jesus.”⁹⁰ John is thus reemphasizing to the early Christian reader the ongoing theological conviction that every true follower of Christ may come in contact with the risen Lord regardless of their authoritative position or the passage of time.

Like the gospel of Mark, John too has both a shorter and a longer ending. For John, most scholars agree that chapter 21 was added later onto the text of John as it now stands.⁹¹ As with the longer ending of Mark, the most important consideration for the purposes of this paper is that the addition was most likely written by a single author and as such represents an independent literary unit. Additionally, it is important to note that the literary composition appears more recent than rest of the fourth gospel. This, however, does not mean the tradition it preserves also exists in the same temporal relationship to the original ending. Most intriguing is the fact that such a story has been appended onto the end of a complete narrative and yet gained widespread acceptance. It is possible that this is primarily because the theology of the fourth gospel is such that an additional manifestation of the risen Lord was widely considered a consistent addition to the narrative.

The account opens with a statement that implies some amount of time has passed since the previous visitation: “After these things Jesus manifested himself again to the disciples.”⁹² The appearance is not one that has any correlate in the synoptic tradition and takes place “by the sea of Tiberias” (John 21:1). The episode most certainly takes place after the Johannine conception of Jesus’s Ascension, and, given Luke’s insistence that the apostles remained in Jerusalem until the Spirit had been given, this account probably relates a tradition that purportedly occurred after Luke’s conception of the Ascension depicted in Acts 1. The account begins with Peter and six other disciples making the determination to go fishing, presumably a return to their old professions (John 21:2–3). The efforts of the disciples are decidedly unfruitful as they fish all night but catch nothing (John 21:3). Once again, Jesus’s appearance is decidedly

plain, as he stands on the shore with no fanfare and, as is often the case, unrecognizable (John 21:4). In an episode reminiscent of Luke 5:1–7, the Lord tells his disciples to cast the net on the right side of the boat, which results in a remarkable number of fish being caught (John 21:6). Like the breaking of the bread at Emmaus, or the speaking of Mary's name, this act makes Jesus immediately recognizable to them (John 21:6–7). The disciples make their way to the shore (Peter via a quick swim) and are instructed by Jesus to bring some of the fish to him so that they can have breakfast (John 21:7–12). Curiously, "none of the disciples dared ask him, 'who are you?' for they knew it was the Lord."⁹³ It is unclear why the disciples would wish to ask "who are you," as by this point in the narrative they have recognized who he is, and according to the account this was the third time that Jesus had appeared to the apostles (John 21:14). An alternative translation might render the question as "what are you?" (Σὺ τίς εἶ) and might reference a curiosity as to the Lord's current state after having been gone from the disciples for a significant period of time. Whatever the case, it seems as though the disciples were not expecting this manifestation of the risen Lord, whereas other appearances in the Galilee were predetermined by him and thus anticipated. The previous suggests that a prolonged period of absence may have occurred, and the episode thus probably preserves an appearance tradition independent of the Easter traditions. The risen Lord again eats with the disciples, but this time the eating does not seem to serve the function of validating the Lord's resurrected state. This seems to indicate, at least in the view of the author of John 21, that subsequent appearances of the resurrected Lord continued to involve his corporeal Easter form, and that his mode of interacting with his apostles had not fundamentally changed despite the passage of time. After the disciples and the Lord conclude their meal, the Lord and Peter exchange their now famous dialogue of love and its relationship to the care of the flock (John 21:15–19). Like Matthew and Mark, the story concludes with the risen Lord still present as both Peter and John follow Christ to an unknown destination (John 21:19–23). Again, this narrative detail seems to emphasize to the reader that Christ is still present to his community and has not been taken away in any final or decisive fashion. Even if members of the community do not now see the Lord, they are at least left with the definitive sense that such an appearance could happen again at any time and in the same fashion as the previous appearances. The author of the second ending of John concludes his narrative with an evocative statement as to the scope of Christ's post-resurrection activity: "But there are also many things which Jesus did;

if every one of them were written down, I suppose that the world itself could not contain the books that would be written” (John 21:25 NRSV). The context of this statement makes clear that the author is referring to those deeds perpetuated by the risen Lord in particular. As such, it is a reiteration of the early Christian tradition of repeated and ongoing interaction with the risen Lord. Painter has rightly noted, “From [John’s] perspective Jesus continues to teach after the resurrection and in a way not limited by the ascension.”⁹⁴

Gospels Conclusion

“For all the confusing chronology, for the manifest variations in tradition, the one thing upon which all four evangelists are agreed is that the tomb of Jesus was empty.”⁹⁵ I would add to the assertion of Albright and Mann that all of the gospels also agree upon a wide and varied tradition of post-resurrection visitations. That the gospel endings cannot be easily reconciled is a powerful witness to the pervasiveness of varied traditions of post-resurrection ministrations of the risen Lord. From the gospel narratives alone, we have accounts of at least two women who claimed to have seen the risen Lord (Mary Magdalene and the other Mary), several unnamed disciples (see Luke’s account of Emmaus and subsequent ascension), and several unique and independent resurrection appearances to the apostles. Any attempt to then read the gospels as retellings of one easily refutable resurrection appearance ignores the ubiquity of early Christian witnesses to the resurrection. The gospel endings ought then to be read as independent narratives that reflect multiple traditions of visitations of the resurrected Lord, rather than competing views of a few singular events.

All but Luke’s account narratively imply the plausibility of continued interaction with the risen Lord. Mark anticipates any number of visitations in his shorter ending, while the author of the longer ending reports multiple visits and then associates the missionary success of the apostles with the continued presence and interaction of the risen Jesus after his enthronement. Matthew’s account records the experiences of two women who see and touch the risen Jesus, and then closes with the resurrected Lord promising to be with his followers to the end of the age. John’s narrative concludes with an otherwise unknown manifestation of the risen Lord at the Sea of Tiberias and follows with an assertion that all the books in the world could not contain the number of ministrations of the risen Lord to his disciples. Even though Luke’s gospel is more restrictive of post-resurrection appearances of Christ, the narrative still

assumes a vibrant and robust post-resurrection tradition. For example, Luke's gospel relates an appearance of Jesus to two disciples on the road to Emmaus, references a visit to Peter, and also recounts the risen Lord appearing to the eleven and an unknown number of other disciples. While Luke omits a narrative recounting of the women disciples' experience with the risen Lord, he appears to acknowledge its existence in the reference found in the Emmaus account. Luke's emphasis on the Easter experience of the eleven and subsequent focus on the role of the spirit in the early church is contextualized by the later account of John. John follows Luke's lead in emphasizing the eleven's experience of touching the resurrected Lord as an important aspect of their call as apostles. Additionally, Luke and John both end with the promise of the Holy Spirit (John 20:22, Luke 24:49; cf. Acts 1:4–5, 8), whereas the earlier gospels promise Jesus himself as a presence. However, like the earlier gospels, John reemphasizes the ongoing role of the resurrected Lord in the affairs of his disciples. While acknowledging the contributions of Luke's account in establishing the Christian theological concepts of Apostolic witness and the role of the Holy Spirit in leading the church, John reminds followers of Christ that the risen Lord stands ready to interact with all true believers at any time and in any place.

It would then appear that the earliest accounts of Jesus's post-resurrection ministry more readily articulate expectations of continued interaction with the risen Lord. The rhetorical shape of Luke's later account seems primarily concerned with articulating a hierarchy of visitations through which the charismatic experiences of early Christians are constrained within the limits of Luke's theological framework. The later account of John, however, seems to question the rigidity of Luke's demarcation of appearances of the risen Lord between those to the apostles and those to ordinary believers.⁹⁶ However, John shares some of the same theological outlook as Luke about the significance of the Easter visits being uniquely associated with the apostles' privilege of touching the risen Lord.

Post-Ascension Accounts

As has been established, the gospel authors appear to have accepted the risen Lord's ability and willingness to continue to manifest himself to his followers for an unconstrained period of time following his resurrection. However, this claim in and of itself is incomplete in establishing the premise of this paper. In order to assert that early Christians continued to expect interactions with the risen Lord after

the Ascension in a fashion similar to what was experienced prior to that event, additional evidence must be considered. We therefore turn to an investigation of Luke's highly influential account found in the Acts of the Apostles. This is our only canonical narrative source for definitive accounts of post-Ascension visitations of the risen Lord, primarily because the Ascension as a distinct theologically significant event seems to be a uniquely Lukan concept. As such, Luke's portrayal of each of these accounts reflects the Lukan position that manifestations of the risen Lord after the Ascension fundamentally differ in purpose than those experienced by the apostles during the Easter series of manifestations. A careful reading of Acts displays several instances of post-Ascension manifestations of the risen Lord that conform to this understanding. The most important of these accounts is undoubtedly Paul's Damascus experience. Because we have brief claims surrounding Paul's experiences from his own letters, a careful corroboration of the accounts will allow us to see how Paul's description of the event most readily aligns itself with the earliest traditions extracted from the gospel narratives of Mark, Matthew, and John. As such, rather than allowing Luke's account to dictate the reading of Paul's letters, one must take care to ensure that Luke's account is read through the lens of the combined witness of the three independent gospels and Paul's letters. Indeed, while it is apparent Luke wishes to present resurrection experiences that occurred after the Ascension in a manner distinct from those prior, the stark difference of experience between the Easter accounts and those after the Ascension seems to be a byproduct of a particularly stringent reading of Luke's account. Corroboration of Luke's account with other early Christian documents, not least of which are Paul's own letters, seems to suggest the earliest Christians maintained a more fluid conception of post-Ascension interaction with the risen Lord.

Acts

Perhaps no work has been more influential in shaping traditional Christian understandings of the post-Ascension activities of the resurrected Lord than Luke's narrative of the Acts of the Apostles. Written as a sequel to the Gospel of Luke,⁹⁷ it shares remarkable continuity in both literary and theological themes with its predecessor.⁹⁸ Luke's account was written at a time when the early Christian community faced both external and internal threats. As such, like Luke's gospel, the narrative of Acts seems carefully designed to respond to issues faced by the early Christian community. One such threat may have been individuals claiming

competing ecclesiastical authority from charismatic experiences with the risen Lord. As such, Luke's portrayal of experiences of the resurrected Jesus after the first chapter of Acts is decidedly different than his portrayal of the Easter experiences of the apostles. Comparison of the account of Paul's experience as it is portrayed in its three references in Acts and as it is portrayed in Paul's own letters also yields interesting discontinuity.

Luke seems to shy away from ascribing a physical appearance of the risen Lord to anybody but the original apostles after the Easter appearances. Whereas appearances prior to Luke's depiction of the Ascension are described in bodily terms, thereafter they are more spiritual. The notable exception to this general trend appears to be that of Stephen, but as Stephen's experience comes at the time of his death and involves "an opening of heaven" it would appear that Luke did not view such an experience as being a danger to the authority of the apostles (Acts 7:55–56). As such, Luke's delineation between experiences before and after the Ascension does not seem to be one of fundamental experience, but instead seems to be a distinction between those that convey Apostolic authority and those that do not. Although Luke obviously subscribes to the early Christian belief of continued interaction with the risen Lord, Luke portrays interactions with the risen Lord differently between the manifestation of the Easter Lord and his post-Ascension appearances to Paul, Stephen, and Ananias.

Luke begins the narrative of Acts by providing a brief summary of the ending of his gospel (Acts 1:1–3). Scholars have variously debated the extent of the summary, with the most assertive arguing that the entirety of verses 1–11 are just a recapitulation of the gospel narrative couched in different terms. However, the dissimilarities between the two accounts are too great to ascribe simply to a difference of presentation, especially considering their shared authorship. Bovon has noted the differences between the two accounts of the Ascension:

[Luke] designates the location in two different ways. In Luke 24:50 he directs attention to Bethany, and in Acts 1:12 to the Mount of Olives. Although he pays no attention to chronology in Luke 24 (the readers always think they are following the events of an endless Easter day), Luke explains in Acts 1:3 that forty days have elapsed. While Christ faces the disciples in Luke 24 to bless them, in Acts 1 he turns his back on them without a gesture of comfort. Whereas in the Gospel the blessing maintains the link between the one who leaves

and those who stay behind (hence their joy), in Acts Christ is taken abruptly from the disciples, who are so disconcerted that it takes two angels to help them recover.⁹⁹

What is then typically read as a restatement of the end of Luke's previous account of Acts actually only goes as far as the end of verse two and concludes with the verb ἀνελήμφθη "he was taken up." Verse 3 and on convey an entirely new resurrection appearance, one that presumably takes place after Christ's initial ascension recorded at the end of Luke's gospel. Luke states that Jesus had instructed his apostles "after his suffering by many infallible proofs for forty days."¹⁰⁰ The phrase used to denote Christ's appearance to his disciples "ὄπτανόμενος αὐτοῖς" can be literally translated "being seen by them." While there is some debate as to whether Luke's forty days should be taken in a literal or figurative sense, the Greek seems to imply that Jesus's presence amongst the disciples was intermittent and involved multiple comings and goings.¹⁰¹ The force of the phrase probably indicates to the reader that Luke does not view these apostolic appearances as "visionary." The entirety of the purpose of these visits seems to be summed in the phrase "οἷς καὶ παρέστησεν ἑαυτὸν ζῶντα" literally "to whom also he presented himself living" (Acts 1:3). Luke's primary purpose in relating this account seems to be a validation of Christ's resurrected state; the forty-day period certainly provides such. Luke recounts a Pauline summary of this visit: "And for many days he appeared to those who came up with him from Galilee to Jerusalem, and they are now his witnesses to the people" (Acts 13:31). Interestingly, Luke does not include in this quotation Paul's claim that he was also a witness to the resurrection as Paul does in 1 Corinthians 15:8. Luke's depiction of Christ's intermittent ministry also focuses on the fact that a purpose of the resurrected Lord's manifestation was to provide "instructions through the Holy Spirit to the apostles he had chosen" (Acts 1:2 NRSV), with Luke curiously depicting the Spirit as an integral part of the resurrection appearances. This would suggest that Luke does not view the conveyance of the Holy Spirit at the day of Pentecost as an inhibitor to further manifestations of the risen Lord, as the Holy Spirit appears to be a key feature of Luke's descriptions of Christ's post-resurrection manifestations (Acts 1:2; Luke 24:32). Like in other accounts, Christ eats with his apostles (Acts 1:4), another indicator of the corporeal nature of this visit to the chosen apostles.

While Jesus is speaking to his apostles, one of them asks if Jesus is going to establish the kingdom at that moment (Acts 1:6). While the answer may be obvious to modern readers, this question is entirely valid

within the context of early Christian experience, as it seems as though the early Church initially may have expected Jesus to triumphantly return quite soon after his death (the *Parousia*). However, Luke apparently wishes to make evident that not every post-resurrection appearance of Christ will be in conjunction with the coming of the *Parousia*. Jesus's answer that the timing of his return is not a bit of knowledge that is fit for the apostles to know is a quick rebuttal (Acts 1:7). Jesus then asserts again that they are to be his witnesses in all the nations. The apostles will be able to achieve this mission because of the promise of power that will be given to them by the Holy Spirit (Acts 1:8). Jesus is then taken up into heaven in a cloud, a method of ascension common to heroes in Greco Roman literature, and also reminiscent of the "cloud of Gods glory" in the Old Testament accounts.¹⁰² It seems obvious that Luke envisions Jesus's physical body as accompanying him into the heavenly sphere, a fact that indicates Luke does not necessarily wish to suppress expectations of Christ's continued manifestation in corporeal form. As the apostles are standing looking up into heaven, two men dressed in white appear and ask the apostles why they are staring up into heaven (Acts 1:10). The answer to the question seems abundantly obvious: the apostles are staring longingly after their risen Lord and wishing for his immediate return. The sense of loss is emphasized by the threefold repetition of the phrase "into heaven" (Acts 1:11). The angels attempt to comfort the apostles by telling them that "the same way in which he was taken up, he will return" (Acts 1:11). While this has traditionally been read by the church as a prophecy regarding Christ's second coming, the context of the response when read in conjunction with Luke's desire to separate appearances of Christ from the coming of the *Parousia* seems to imply that this may also reference future visitations of the resurrected Jesus to his apostles not connected with his second coming.

After the Ascension, the group of apostles returns to Jerusalem, and the narrative proceeds to give an account of the selection of Matthias to replace the deceased and disgraced Judas. After recounting Judas's grisly death, Peter asserts that "one of the men who have accompanied us during all the time that the Lord Jesus went in and out among us, beginning from the baptism of John until the day when he was taken up from us — one of these must become a witness with us to his resurrection" (Acts 1:21–22 NRSV). Peter's suggestion is somewhat opaque. Ostensibly one of the individuals in attendance at the meeting is to be selected and ordained to the same status as the original eleven. While certainly there were many who had "accompanied" the eleven "during all the time that the Lord

Jesus went in and out,” it is unclear how any of these individuals could be “a witness to his resurrection,” in having been present “when he was taken up from us.” The text of Acts makes clear that the Ascension that occurred on the Mount of Olives and that Luke just narrated occurred only in the presence of those eleven who Jesus had chosen in his mortal ministry.¹⁰³ The answer to the question readily presents itself when considering that Luke recounts a visit and an Ascension in his gospel that was attended by individuals other than the apostles (Luke 24:33–50). Luke’s gospel places this first ascension at Bethany, a town located on the Mount of Olives (Luke 24:50). It is not unreasonable to suggest Matthias may have been present at this first Ascension. Peter makes it clear that the new apostle is to be considered on the same standing despite not being present at the most recent Ascension. Correspondingly, the Ascension at Bethany is clearly seen as an event capable of bestowing apostolic witness upon the observer. Thus, what many readers view as the decisive end of the gospel of Luke is really just one example of what Luke believed to be multiple instances of individuals observing Christ’s ascent into the heavenly realm. Because Luke records two Ascensions, both of which are capable of bestowing apostolic witness, it seems that even Luke viewed the Ascension in a somewhat fluid fashion. The remainder of Luke’s account supports this reading, as it is rife with additional visitations of the risen Lord.

Luke repeatedly emphasizes in his narrative that the apostles are those that have “seen and heard,” and are God’s witnesses to the world.¹⁰⁴ Luke’s emphasis on the role of the apostles as witnesses of the resurrection displays his desire to carefully distinguish between the authority granting Easter appearances and other similar but non-authority-granting charismatic experiences. A peculiar account in Acts that may illustrate Luke’s unique understanding of the Easter accounts is found in Acts 5:19–20. Just prior to this account, the apostles had been thrust into prison by the High Priest and the Sadducees (Acts 5:17–18). As the Twelve were in prison, the text states that “the angel of the Lord opened the prison doors at night and escorted them out.”¹⁰⁵ The term “angel of the Lord” (ἄγγελος Κυρίου), has a long line of usage in the Greek Septuagint as a “form expressing divine epiphanies and is often a circumlocution for God.”¹⁰⁶ Early Christians often interpreted the phrase in the Old Testament to denote the pre-incarnate Christ.¹⁰⁷ While nearly every modern translation renders the term “an angel of the Lord,” it could also be rendered “The angel of the Lord” or “The Lord’s Angel.” While this distinction may seem superfluous, there is some precedence of Luke

using the term "angel" to denote a person's spiritual entity.¹⁰⁸ The use of the term here becomes very ambiguous when the individual delivers a message that the apostles are to "go, stand in the temple and tell the people the whole message about this life" (Acts 5:20 NRSV). The words of the heavenly messenger are most intelligible when placed on the lips of the resurrected Lord, otherwise the statement is somewhat cryptic. Additionally Luke seems to make a distinction between an "angel of God" and the "angel of the Lord" throughout his narratives although the difference is not entirely apparent.¹⁰⁹ Luke does use the term angel to denote when God appears to Moses in a burning bush despite the fact that the narrative found in the Old Testament says God appeared to Moses.¹¹⁰ There is also some ancient precedence for taking this particular Angel as a manifestation of the risen Lord designed to establish his corporeality.¹¹¹ Because the passage does have the "angel of the Lord" interacting with the world in a corporeal fashion, it would certainly blur the distinction Luke attempts to make between the pre-Ascension and post-Ascension appearances of Christ. As such, Luke may have attempted to emphasize that this was a manifestation of the risen Lord not intended to convey the reality of the resurrection by using the same construction he uses to denote Peter's spiritual and post-mortal entity (Acts 12:15). Additionally, there is evidence of other early Christian documents having their Christophanies adjusted to be more theologically suitable by substituting an angel or a martyr in the place of Christ.¹¹² As such, it is possible that this text has been adjusted somewhat either by Luke or a later editor to better match Luke's theological aims. While it may be unwise to suggest that every use of the phrase "angel of the Lord" in Luke's account denotes a resurrection appearance of Jesus, there are several striking parallels between events Luke ascribes to the "angel of the Lord" in Acts and other events that occur in the apocryphal Acts of the Apostles that are ascribed to the risen Lord himself.

The next appearance of the risen Lord recorded by Luke occurs in Acts 7:55–56 and caps the famous martyrdom of Stephen. While Stephen sees the risen Lord in a distinctly corporeal fashion, the visitation takes place at the end of Stephen's life, leaving no room for the manifestation to be construed as one granting apostolic authority. As such, Luke's portrayal of the event is uncharacteristically visual, whereas those events that Luke wishes to contrast with the Easter experiences of the apostles focus predominantly on the auditory content of the experience. This rhetorical move allows Luke to stress the difference in purpose of the pre- and post-Ascension manifestations of Christ, with those after the

Ascension being primarily for the purpose of conveying messages or comfort instead of establishing the physical reality of the resurrected Christ.

Stephen had just delivered a powerful speech that accused the Sanhedrin of unlawful behavior (Acts 7:53). The governing body was infuriated and “ground their teeth at him” (Acts 7:54 NRSV). Unfazed by their apparent anger, the account states that Stephen, being full of the spirit, and “gazing into heaven saw the glory of God and Jesus standing at the right hand of God.”¹¹³ Seemingly to reinforce the actuality of the event, Luke has Stephen state to the audience in the very next verse, “I see the heavens opened and the Son of man standing at the right side of God.”¹¹⁴ The verb used by Stephen to state that he “sees” is *θεωρέω*, which means “to look at, or gaze upon.” The verb occurs 58 times in the New Testament with 21 of those occurrences being uses by Luke in his gospel or in Acts. Notable references include those watching Jesus on the cross including the hostile Jewish rulers,¹¹⁵ the disciples fearing that his apparition was a ghost after the road to Emmaus,¹¹⁶ the Lord telling the disciples that “a spirit does not have flesh and blood as you see me have,”¹¹⁷ and Peter addressing the crowd stating that “the man whom you see is now healed.”¹¹⁸ That Stephen is able to see the risen Lord while those surrounding him do not highlights the personal nature of the visitation, and allows Luke to recount the visual experience without attempting to delineate between it and the easter appearances. In Lukan theology, the Lord appears to those who need his assistance and who have the Holy Spirit. Those who do not have the Holy Spirit either do not see him (Acts 7:54–57, 9:7) or are injured in some manner by his glory, as in the instance of Paul (Acts 9:8–9).

Paul’s experience with the risen Lord on the road to Damascus is perhaps the most famous non-Easter appearance of Christ. Luke’s initial portrayal of Paul’s experience in Acts 9:3–7 focuses on the auditory content of the experience while omitting details about what Paul may have visually experienced. This auditory emphasis is consistent with Luke’s attempts to theologically distinguish between the apostolic Easter appearances and other early Christian experiences with the risen Lord. Unfortunately, this emphasis has resulted in confusion as to whether Paul saw the risen Lord or just experienced an auditory conversation amid a blinding light. The experience is referred to twice more in the text of Acts during speeches given by Paul (Acts 22:6–21, 26:12–18) and briefly by Paul in Galatians and 1 Corinthians. In each of these non-narrative accounts, Paul more obviously describes the event as a visible manifestation of

the resurrected Lord, which he believes grants him authority equivalent to the other apostles.¹¹⁹ This stands in contrast to the reticence with which Luke treats Paul's claims to apostolic authority. Indeed, Luke's hesitation to suggest that Paul's experience was equivalent to the Easter experiences in many ways appears to reflect a general early Christian consensus. Only Paul uses his experience with the resurrected Lord as a defense of apostolic authority. Other early Christian resurrection accounts that depict the conveyance of authority are almost exclusively tied to Christ's own handpicked apostles. Rare instances of appearances to non-apostolic figures (i.e., the Shephard of Hermas, Ananias, Mary Magdalene, the Damascus disciples), are distinct from accounts of the Easter appearances to the apostles and are never used to lay claim to apostolic authority. Luke's auditory emphasis thus may reflect an attempt to theologically constrain Paul's experience to one that granted an important personal mission, while avoiding the dangerous precedent of portraying the event as an Apostolic resurrection witness.

Luke's first reference to Paul's experience in Acts 9:3–5 begins with Paul traveling with companions to Damascus, ostensibly to continue his fervent persecution of those who follow "the way."¹²⁰ As he is traveling, "a light out of heaven shone around him."¹²¹ As Paul is encompassed by this light, he falls to the ground and hears a voice speaking to him (Acts 9:4). As is characteristic of Luke's portrayal of post-Ascension manifestations, Luke focuses his description of the event on the auditory content of the experience while minimizing the visual aspects. In this way the reader does not confuse this resurrection account as one designed to establish Christ's corporeal resurrection and thus establish Paul as an apostolic witness. The first indication that Paul may actually have had a visual experience like that of the apostles rather than solely an auditory experience is Luke's assertion that those traveling with Paul "heard the voice but saw no one" (Acts 9:7 NRSV). Presumably this statement is to distinguish their experience from Paul's own as he heard a voice *and* saw an individual. While this observation may not be conclusive, corroboration with other accounts of Paul's experience suggest visual aspects of Paul's experience were omitted in Luke's narrative account, and thus indicate that Luke's preoccupation with the auditory content of the vision may be for his unique theological purposes.

Paul and his companions continue their journey to Damascus, but Paul has been stricken blind from his experience (Acts 9:9). The three days during which he cannot see may be symbolic of the three days during which Christ laid in the tomb, a time during which no one saw

the resurrected Jesus. As Paul approaches Damascus the narrative takes a sudden shift to a man named Ananias. The text records an experience Ananias' had with the risen Lord that Luke also seems to portray in distinct fashion. Rather than receiving a message from an angel or from the Holy Spirit, the text states that "the Lord addressed [him] in a vision."¹²² The term "vision" (ὁράματι) is somewhat difficult to render. It is problematic because, apart from one other canonical instance, it is used entirely in Acts. The only other use in the New Testament occurs in Matthew 17:9 when Jesus uses the term in reference to his experience on the Mount of Transfiguration. The literal translation of the word is "that which is seen, visible object, sight,"¹²³ and may refer to an experience received while either awake or asleep. C. K. Barrett has noted, "The Lord spoke to him in a vision; that is, the Lord (evidently Jesus; see V. 17) was both seen and heard."¹²⁴ As it stands, there appears to be no textual reason to assert that Ananias experienced anything fundamentally different than the apostles on Easter, except that the experience does not appear to have included an invitation to eat with or touch the risen Lord. Luke's inclusion of the term "vision," thus functions as a literary marker to the reader, denoting that the experience is different in scope than the experience of the apostles.

Ananias appears to recognize the risen Jesus immediately and converses with him for a relatively lengthy period of time (Acts 9:10–15). Again, Luke's description of the risen Lord is nonexistent, and the account focuses primarily on the auditory portion of the event, presumably in an effort to downplay its similarities to the experience of the apostles at Easter. In speaking with the Lord, Ananias is told to find Paul and restore his sight (Acts 9:12). Ananias follows the instructions given to him and, as he is blessing Paul, asserts that "Jesus appeared to you on the way" (Acts 9:17). Here the word reverts to the aorist passive participle ὀφθεῖς of the verb ὁράω. Speaking of "ὀφθεῖς," the aorist passive form of the verb, O'Collins has written:

[we have] various examples not only of the risen Christ "appearing" (as in 1 Cor 15) but also of "appearances" of angels (e.g., Luke 1:11; 22:43; Acts 7:30–35), and of Moses and Elijah at the transfiguration (Mark 9:4; Matthew 17:3). [We then understand] *ōphthē* ... to mean "Christ appeared," "became visible," "showed himself," or "let himself be seen ... Apart from one reference to an Old Testament theophany (Acts 7:2) and the appearance of a Macedonian in a night vision to Paul (Acts 16:9), the central role of *ōphthē* in the New Testament

comes in reference to appearances of Christ in the aftermath of his resurrection (Luke 24:34; Acts 13:31; 1 Cor 15:5, 6, 7, 8). In short, *ōphthē* was used to identify visionary experiences of the risen Christ.¹²⁵

Contextualizing the verb used here to describe Paul's vision with other instances of its use throughout the New Testament seems to make clear that this was a visible manifestation similar to those manifestations of the risen Lord prior to the Ascension:

Clearly linked with this Christophany language are the many references to "seeing" the risen Christ: for instance, "he [the risen Christ] is going before you into Galilee; there you will see [*opsesthe*] him" (Mark 16:7; see Matt 28:7, 10). "Seeing" him on the mountain, the eleven disciples adored him (Matt 28:17). ... Thomas comes to faith because he has "seen" the risen Christ; those are blessed who come to faith without having "seen" Christ, as the original witnesses did (John 20:29; see 1 Pet 1:8). Likewise, Paul (in 1 Cor 9:1) implies that the Corinthians have not experienced what he has experienced: his "seeing" (the risen Lord) should be distinguished from any other "coming to faith." When the New Testament refers to some of the first disciples experiencing the risen Christ, the language of "seeing" predominates. Their decisive experience of the risen Christ came through seeing him.¹²⁶

In short, Paul and Ananias' use of the verb *ὁράω* corresponds well to other uses of the same verb throughout the New Testament to denote corporeal manifestations of the risen Lord. As such, while Luke focuses on the auditory content rather than the visual aspects of these events, it does not appear as though Paul experienced something fundamentally different than the Easter experiences of the apostles. While Paul's experience is couched in more heavenly trappings than the Easter experiences (e.g., the light shining from heaven), he still appears to have seen the risen Lord in a visual manifestation with an audible message in a manner consistent with the Easter experiences.

The next post-Ascension account recorded by Luke comes in Acts 16:7. Like the previous accounts, the passage minimizes the visual aspects of the experience. Paul and Silas have been traversing "the region of Phrygia and Galatia" because they were "forbidden by the Holy Spirit to speak the word in Asia" (Acts 16:6 NRSV). "When they had come opposite Mysia, they attempted to go into Bithynia," but notably this

time rather than being stopped by the Holy Spirit, the party is stopped by “the Spirit of Jesus,” who “would not allow them to do so.”¹²⁷ The “Spirit of Jesus” (τὸ πνεῦμα Ἰησοῦ) is contrasted over and against the Holy Spirit, insinuating that this force was a distinct entity preventing them from going in a particular direction. Contextualized against other manifestations of the Lord recorded by Luke it would seem plausible that this again represents a post-Ascension manifestation of the risen Lord. Luke’s particular hesitance to describe this experience in visual terms may derive from the fact that it occurred to two individuals at once and thus comes dangerously close to a corporate religious experience like those experienced by the apostles at Easter.

Luke records another appearance of the risen Lord to Paul in Acts 18:9. The text says that “the Lord spoke to Paul in the night through a vision.”¹²⁸ As in Acts 9:10, the word for vision is again ὁράματος and denotes a visible object. However, as is characteristic of Luke’s accounts of post-Ascension manifestations of the risen Lord, no description of the visual aspects of the experience are given. Luke focuses instead on the auditory content of the experience, which includes the Lord telling Paul, “Do not be afraid” (Μὴ φοβοῦ) “because” (διότι) “I am with you” (ἐγὼ εἰμι μετὰ σοῦ, Acts 18:10). The Lord’s promise to Paul that “I am with you” is strikingly reminiscent of the same promise given to the apostles at the end of Matthew’s gospel (ἐγὼ μεθ’ ὑμῶν εἰμι, Matthew 28:20), and also consistent with the portrayal of the Lord’s involvement in the preaching of the word found in the longer ending of Mark (Mark 16:20).

Luke gives an additional description of Paul’s Damascus experience in Acts 22:6–21. The account has subtle differences but maintains the same overall message and feel as the previous narration. One notable difference is that the narrative is more explicit in stating that Paul has indeed seen the risen Lord. Perhaps unsurprisingly, the two accounts of Paul’s Damascus experience in Acts that quote Paul (Chapter 22 and 26) are far more explicit in claiming a visual experience with the risen Lord than Luke’s narrative portrayal of the event in Acts 9. Paul states in Chapter 22 that “those who were with me saw the light but did not hear the voice of the one who was speaking to me” (Acts 22:9). Additionally, as Paul is recounting the words of Ananias, Ananias states that Paul has seen “the Righteous One” or alternatively “the Upright One” (perhaps a reference to Christ’s risen state) and received “a message from his own mouth.”¹²⁹ Significantly, Ananias states that Paul “will be his witness to all the world of what you have seen and heard” (Acts 22:15).

Paul has one of the more striking post-Ascension experiences in Acts 23:11. Here, Luke states, "That night the Lord stood near to him."¹³⁰ The Lord then delivers to Paul a message of comfort and predicts that he will testify in Rome (Acts 23:11). This particular experience does not match Luke's typical portrayal of post-Ascension manifestations but is in many ways paradigmatic of earliest Christian accounts of interactions with the risen Lord. Lacking the heavenly trappings of the Damascus experience or the "visionary" designation of Luke's other accounts, the Lord is mundane in his appearance and appears suddenly. Additionally, the Lord appears for a remarkably simple purpose: to provide comfort to Paul in a time of fear.

The final experience with the risen Lord recorded in Acts is the third and final Lukan account of Paul's Damascus experience. The account differs in several fundamental aspects from the previous two renditions. Most notably, Jesus himself states to Paul, "I have appeared to you for this purpose, to appoint you to serve and testify to the things in which you have seen me and to those in which I will appear to you" (Acts 26:16 NRSV). It is fitting that Paul's final experience with the risen Lord is perhaps the most explicit in the narrative. The risen Lord leaves no doubt as to what Paul experienced by stating that he has "appeared" (ὤφθην) to Paul and appointed him to be a witness. The grammatical structure of this appearance is identical to the one described by Luke in his gospel of the risen Lord appearing to Peter (ὤφθη Σίμωνι), utilizing the aorist passive of the verb ὀράω and placing the recipient of the experience in the dative case (Luke 24:34). Paul's own description of Peter's experience in 1 Corinthians 15:5 utilizes the same construction (ὤφθη Κηφᾶ), and here Paul's visionary experience is described by the risen Lord in identical terms as the formative Easter event (ὤφθην σοι, Acts 25:16). Luke's hesitation to describe Paul's experience in the same terms as the original eleven curiously dissipates near the end of Acts. This seeming shift is no doubt deliberate. Luke's portrayal of post-Ascension manifestations of the risen Lord seems designed to protect against authority granting experiences of the risen Lord after the Easter accounts. While Luke supports Paul and his gentile mission, one can get a sense from Paul's letters that not everyone accepted his claim to apostleship. Even Luke is definitively vague about Paul's status as an "apostle" per se, typically reserving the title for the corporate Twelve.¹³¹ As such, one can imagine how much more staunchly Luke might attempt to prevent individuals from claiming authority from heavenly manifestations of the risen Lord than he did of Paul. Luke's narrative of the missionary efforts of Paul

might then be read as Luke's validation of Paul's status as a true apostle. For Luke, the divine approval of Paul's mission has been expressed through the signs and wonders that have accompanied Paul throughout the narrative, and these are a better indication of Paul's apostolic authority than his claim to any sort of charismatic experience with the risen Lord. Just as the mission to the gentiles was validated in some ways by "signs and wonders,"¹³² so too has Paul been validated as an apostle. As such, it is only after the reader has seen the Lord's validation of Paul throughout Luke's narrative and Paul is about to give his own life for the testimony of Jesus that Luke definitively grants Paul the title of "witness." Indeed, in the first account of Paul's experience, the risen Lord only provides Paul with instructions to follow, omitting any reference to his newfound status as a witness to the nations (Acts 9:4–6). In speaking to Ananias, the Lord seems to make Paul's status as a witness to the nations depend on how Paul responds to these instructions in the face of persecution: "I myself will show him how much he must suffer for the sake of my name" (Acts 9:16 NRSV). In Luke's second description of the event, Paul's call as a witness is placed on the lips of Ananias and also couched in future terms: "You will be his witness to all mankind."¹³³ It is only in the final narrative of the event that the Paul is specifically told by the Lord that he has received a call to testify to the world: "For I have appeared to you for this purpose, to appoint you to serve and testify to the things in which you have seen me and to those in which I will appear to you" (Acts 26:16 NRSV). Luke articulates the narrative in a way that best conveys his own theological understanding of certain events. James Dunn has called this Luke's "stylizing of both material and history," which is perhaps a fitting description of Luke's narrative presentation of post-Ascension appearances of the risen Lord and in particular Paul's experience on the road to Damascus.

Pauline Literature

We turn now to the earliest textual accounts of interactions with the risen Lord, as Paul's letters to the Galatians and 1 Corinthians represent two of the earliest Christian documents extant. While Luke is careful in his presentation of the visual nature of Paul's experience, Paul is unambiguous in his claims of having seen the resurrected Lord. Correspondingly, Paul asserts that this experience carries the same apostolic weight as those experiences given to the eleven at Easter. Additionally, Paul appeals to a long tradition of post-resurrection (and often post-Ascension) visitations of Christ as a support for his own

experience granting apostolic authority. Paul also utilizes his experience on the Damascus road as a defense of his construal of the gospel message. Curiously, Paul devotes remarkably little attention to defending the authenticity of his experience, and what few critiques of Paul we can deduct from his letters are remarkably devoid of attacks on his actual experience. As such, the plausibility of Paul's claim of seeing the risen Lord does not appear to be the primary issue for Paul's critics. Instead, their critiques seem centered on whether such an experience granted apostolic authority. As has been noted previously, such a claim is entirely unique to Paul and may have been viewed as incongruous with generally accepted purposes for which the risen Lord may appear.

Galatians

The Epistle to the Galatians is one of three New Testament texts that relate Paul's revelatory experience on the road to Damascus, and one of two composed by Paul himself.¹³⁴ In order to best understand Paul's reference to his Damascus experience in Galatians, a few observations about the occasion of the letter are in order. In some or all of the churches established by Paul in the Galatian region, individuals seem to have begun to preach a "Jewish" form of Christianity. Paul identifies these individuals as "trouble-makers" (τράσσοντες, 1:7; 5:10) and "agitators" (ἀναστατοῦντες, 5:12). Foremost amongst the oppositional stances taken by these "trouble-makers" was the belief that Christian converts must also adhere to the mandates of Torah, most specifically the requirement of circumcision. Because the "gospel" preached by Paul was at fundamental odds with salvific restrictions associated with Torah observance, Paul viewed the efforts of his opponents as wholly incompatible with his own message.¹³⁵ It seems that, in an effort to discredit Paul's claims about circumcision, these "Judaizing" opponents cast direct aspersions on Paul's apostolic authority. As such, a significant portion of the Galatian text is employed in a defense of Paul's apostleship, as well as a rejection of the theological premises of his opponents. Although Galatians is inherently spare regarding details of what Paul experienced on the road to Damascus, Paul's understanding of the *import* of that event is made abundantly clear in the epistle. Most importantly, Paul claims in unambiguous language that his experience qualified him for the same apostolic status as others who had experienced the risen Lord.

Reference to Paul's "call"¹³⁶ on the road to Damascus becomes explicit in only a few places in the Galatian text (1:1, 11–12, 16). Paul lays claim to direct authority from the risen Lord by labeling himself as an

apostle in the very first words of the epistle (Παυλος ἀπόστολος). The general usage of ἀπόστολος in the New Testament is in reference to an individual who possesses a special commission from Christ. When Paul uses the term in reference to himself, he is in essence laying claim to authority identical to those ἀπόστολοι who were commissioned by Christ during his earthly life¹³⁷ and subsequent post-resurrection appearances (Matthew 28:16–20). Paul claims that his apostleship was “neither from man nor through man”¹³⁸ but “through Jesus Christ.”¹³⁹ Paul goes further when he asserts that his authority was derived “through Jesus Christ and God the Father who raised him from the dead.”¹⁴⁰ From this phrase we are able to assume that Paul viewed his apostolic authority as uniquely tied to the actuality of his experience with a corporeally resurrected Christ.

Paul’s brief allusion to his call discussed above serves as a precursor to two more references to the event later in the same chapter. In verses 11–12, Paul employs his experience with the resurrected Lord as a defense for his particular theological claims.¹⁴¹ Paul states that he received his interpretation of the gospel message “through revelation of Jesus Christ.”¹⁴² In verse 16, Paul states that God saw fit to “reveal his son in me” (ἀποκαλύψαι τὸν υἱὸν αὐτοῦ ἐν ἐμοί) “in order that” (ἵνα) “I might proclaim him in the nations” (εὐαγγελίζωμαι αὐτὸν ἐν τοῖς ἔθνεσιν, Galatians 1:16). Significantly, nearly all of Paul’s own claims about his own experience with the risen Lord parallel the salient features of the Easter visits to the apostles. Paul claims that he received a special commission to preach the gospel to the world from a visible resurrected Lord. Additionally, Paul claims that his understanding of the gospel derived primarily from his experience with the risen Jesus, a claim that mirrors Luke’s account of the apostles receiving pivotal scriptural exegesis from Jesus himself. As such, Paul is not merely claiming a “visionary” experience with the risen Lord but seems instead to be intentionally describing an analogous experience to those of the original apostles. Contrary to Luke’s account where the glory of the risen Lord is stressed along with an auditory rebuking of Paul’s previous endeavors, Paul emphasizes his unique commission to be a witness to the nations and that he too experienced the risen Lord in such a manner that he was able to authoritatively proclaim the risen Lord’s resurrected corporeal state.

1 Corinthians

Like Galatians, 1 Corinthians is another of Paul's well authenticated and relatively early letters.¹⁴³ Throughout 1 Corinthians, Paul seems primarily concerned with reestablishing a lost sense of unity amongst the Corinthian saints. To do so, Paul provides doctrinal council on a variety of different theological topics, including the resurrection in chapter 15. However, as was the case in Galatia, there seem to have been present in the Corinthian community individuals who challenged Paul's apostolic authority and thus also his authority to adjudicate these matters of doctrinal debate.¹⁴⁴ The nature of the challenge again seems to be primarily associated with Paul's use of the title "apostle," not necessarily a challenge of the validity of Paul's revelatory experience.¹⁴⁵ This is supported by Paul's own emphasis throughout the epistle, as he typically states his experience as an accepted fact and then argues for his apostolic credentials from that point. Thus, Paul and his opponents seem to differ primarily in relation to the implications of Paul's experience, not with the plausibility of the experience itself.

Paul opens the epistle much like his correspondence to the Galatians, emphatically claiming apostolic authority from Christ: "Paul, called to be an apostle of Christ Jesus by the will of God."¹⁴⁶ That Paul lists another individual (Sosthenes) as a co-sender of the epistle but does not ascribe the same apostolic status to him serves as a stark contrast to Paul's claim.¹⁴⁷ Paul then proceeds to provide council and exhortation to the Corinthians but returns to a defense of his apostolic authority later in chapter 9 when his argument demands such. In chapter 8, Paul has addresses the issue of eating meat that has been sacrificed to idols. The main thrust of his argument is that although eating idol-meat is not inherently sinful, an individual ought to be circumspect in their consumption of idol-meat so as not to cause those around them to falter in their faith.¹⁴⁸ The argument is interrupted briefly by a section of text in 9:1–3 designed to defend Paul's status as an apostle.

Paul's apostolic defense is striking in its simplicity. He begins with a series of four rhetorical questions, each anticipating an affirmative answer.¹⁴⁹ The first question, "Am I not free?" (Οὐκ εἰμι ἐλεύθερος) serves to tie Paul's defense of his apostleship into the topic of the previous verses, that of freedom.¹⁵⁰ The second and third questions, "Am I not an apostle?" (οὐκ εἰμι ἀπόστολος) and "Have I not seen Jesus our Lord?" (οὐχὶ Ἰησοῦν τὸν κύριον ἡμῶν ἑώρακα), serve as mutually reinforcing statements and seem to be the most critical to understanding Paul's claim.¹⁵¹ By switching to the emphatic form of the negative (οὐχὶ), Paul

emphasizes the importance he places on his vision of the risen Lord.¹⁵² While this switch certainly displays Paul's belief that his vision should be sufficient evidence of his apostleship, Conzelmann rightly points out that a vision of the risen Lord would not in and of itself be constitutive of an apostolic call in the view of other Christians.¹⁵³ As has been noted, this perhaps might explain the criticism Paul receives regarding his use of the term. Regardless of other's opinions of his status as an apostle, Paul confidently states that he has "seen Jesus our Lord," apparently expecting this fact to be both widely known and widely accepted.¹⁵⁴ Because it seems as though Paul's opponents may not have accepted Paul's apostolic status (without rejecting his visionary experience), Paul reinforces his claim through an appeal to his missionary efforts in the fourth rhetorical question: "Are you not my work in the Lord?" (οὐ τὸ ἔργον μου ὑμεῖς ἔστέ ἐν κυρίῳ). By so doing, Paul makes any indictment of his own apostleship also an indictment of the community at Corinth.¹⁵⁵ He establishes this further in the next phrase: "If I am not an apostle to others, at least I am to you; for you are the seal of my apostleship in the Lord" (1 Corinthians 9:2 NRSV). Similar to the theme promoted by Luke in his depiction of Paul's efforts in Acts, Paul views his missionary success as additional evidence of his apostolic credentials. By stating that "at least I am to you," Paul is "certainly not renouncing his title for the areas outside the territory of his own mission but is securing the basis for his argument: *here* I am indisputably an apostle, hence I am an apostle. Your own existence is proof of it."¹⁵⁶ The concluding phrase, "This is my defense to those who would examine me" (1 Corinthians 9:3 NRSV), ought then to be read as an emphatic closure of the argument, not as an introduction to the following body of text.

Paul utilizes his experience with the risen Lord in much the same manner in Chapter 15. While the majority of readers tend to focus on Paul's use of a list of early Christian encounters with the risen Lord to defend the physical reality of Christ's resurrected body, Paul's initial rhetorical move is to include himself in a long line of witnesses of Christ's resurrected state, a list primarily comprised of apostles (1 Corinthians 15:5–8). The list makes clear that Paul sees no fundamental difference of experience between his own manifestation of the risen Lord and those granted to the apostles in the Easter visits. A careful investigation of the list of experiences also yields interesting information that will aid in understanding earliest Christian beliefs about the activities of the risen Lord.

Paul begins the chapter by informing the Corinthians that he is imparting to them "what I in turn had received" (1 Corinthians 15:3 NRSV). Scholars have taken this phrase to indicate that the following verses with their formulaic expressions of faith may preserve a pre-Pauline kerygmatic formula.¹⁵⁷ "That Christ died for our sins in accordance with the scriptures, and that he was buried, and that he was raised on the third day in accordance with the scriptures, and that he appeared to Cephas, then to the twelve" (1 Corinthians 15:3–5 NRSV). There is some debate as to whether this kerygmatic formula ended just after the phrase "and that he appeared to Cephas" (καὶ ὅτι ὤφθη Κηφᾶ) or whether it included "then to the twelve" (εἶτα τοῖς δώδεκα).¹⁵⁸ The majority of scholars maintain that the kerygmatic formula ends after the word Κηφᾶ, and that although the following phrase εἶτα τοῖς δώδεκα is uncharacteristic of Paul, it nonetheless represents a Pauline addition.¹⁵⁹ The appearance of Christ to Cephas noted here most likely refers to the same appearance referenced in Luke 24:34 during which the risen Lord appeared first to Peter prior to his appearance to the remaining eleven apostles. As was noted previously, the verb ὤφθη ("was seen" or "appeared") used to describe the appearance to Peter is the same verb used by Paul to describe his own experience with the risen Lord.

The appearance "to the twelve" mentioned in verse 5 does not find an easy correlate to a canonical account.¹⁶⁰ Paul's use of the phrase "the twelve" (τοῖς δώδεκα) is unique to this verse and wholly uncharacteristic of his writings.¹⁶¹ Those who argue that "εἶτα τοῖς δώδεκα" was part of the original kerygmatic formula often do so precisely because Paul's statement would be so unusual. The primary correlative issue arises when considering that if Paul was referencing one of the canonical accounts of a post-resurrection appearance to the apostles he more accurately would have used the number eleven to describe them.¹⁶² Rather than postulate that the "symbolic strength of the number" somehow overrode Paul's typical penchant for "meticulous accuracy,"¹⁶³ as well as his seeming aversion to the moniker, it seems likely that Paul is using the appellation quite intentionally.¹⁶⁴ This, however, does not necessarily entail that Paul is using the term "the twelve" in reference to the acknowledged authority group *en masse*. Instead, in light of the fact that Paul's list records four noncanonical experiences with the risen Lord (his own experience is the only appearance that can be reliably correlated to a narrative in the canon), it seems possible, if not probable, that this is a reference to another non-canonical visitation, one that might have occurred to the Twelve after the calling of Matthias.¹⁶⁵ This interpretation has ancient precedence: "Since

Judas was no longer present, some of the Fathers speculated the Twelve must have included Matthias (e.g., Origen, Chrysostom, Eusebius, Theophylact, and Photius.)¹⁶⁶ As such, it is another likely indication that earliest Christians did not have a conception of a “final appearance” of the risen Christ to his disciples and that the pool of widely accepted traditions relating manifestations of the risen Lord was much wider in the ancient world than those few experiences recorded in the canonical accounts.

Paul continues his list of witnesses with another non-canonical visitation: “Then he appeared to more than five hundred brothers at one time, most of whom are still alive, though some have died” (1 Corinthians 15:6 NRSV). While some have attempted to possibly connect this visionary experience with the day of Pentecost, it would be quite difficult to match Paul’s emphasis on the visual manifestations of the risen Lord with the account of Pentecost as it appears presently in Acts.¹⁶⁷ Whatever the experience entailed it appears clear that Paul is attempting to establish the historical and observable veracity of the Jesus’s resurrected state.¹⁶⁸ By stating such a large number, Paul precludes any interpretation of these experiences as merely “visionary.”¹⁶⁹ Paul emphasizes the availability of these witnesses to verify the experience by stating that although some of these witnesses have died, “most of [them] are still alive” (ἐξ ὧν οἱ πλείονες μένουσιν ἕως ἄρτι).¹⁷⁰

Paul records two additional extracanonical accounts in the following verse: “Then he appeared to James, then to all the apostles” (1 Corinthians 15:7 NRSV). The James mentioned here is almost certainly James of Jerusalem also known as James the brother of Jesus.¹⁷¹ James’ vision is recorded in the fragmentary Gospel of the Hebrews.¹⁷² Paul’s emphasis on “all the apostles” implies that Paul considers the group of apostles to be much larger than the Twelve.¹⁷³ This group might have included “missionaries, and some of them may even be the Seven mentioned in Acts 6:1–6.”¹⁷⁴ It might be noted that Stephen was one of the seven mentioned in Acts 6 and is the only one of the group to have a canonically recorded experience with the risen Lord.¹⁷⁵ However, as the recorded experience of Stephen comes as he is being stoned to death, it seems unlikely that this is the experience that Paul is purportedly referencing. The force of the statement seems to be implying that all apostles have seen the risen Lord, a point important to Paul’s own apostolic defense.¹⁷⁶ Indeed, the word order of the statement τοῖς ἀποστόλοις πᾶσιν “suggests that the emphasis falls on *the apostles*, not on *all*.”¹⁷⁷

Paul concludes this line of equal witnesses with reference his own experience: "Last of all, as to one untimely born, he appeared also to me" (Acts 15:8 NRSV). In reference to Paul's use of the phrase "last of all," Fitzmyer has rightly noted:

[Paul] is not trying to say that there were no further appearances of the risen Christ after him but is only explaining the sense of the gen. "of all," as he puts himself at the bottom of the list, even though he claims to be an "apostle" of equal rank. It is best understood as an expression of humility.¹⁷⁸

Perhaps the most important bit of information we can glean from this list is that Paul "makes no distinction between the risen Christ's appearances to him (after Pentecost) and the appearances to others between the day of the discovery of the empty tomb and the Ascension."¹⁷⁹ "Paul added his own vision of Christ as the sixth to the list of five transmitted to him (1 Cor 15:8). That makes sense only if it were of the same type, that is, if it were a matter, in each instance, of the Christ who had already been exalted to God making his appearance."¹⁸⁰ Paul has thus unambiguously associated his own experience with the authority granting experiences of the apostles at Easter. Furthermore, Paul has claimed that the post-Ascension manifestations of the risen Lord to numerous individuals were experienced in fundamentally the same manner as the very first Easter appearance to Peter. As one of the earliest Christian authors, Paul's writings provide strong evidence that earliest Christians believed in a fluid and ongoing interaction with the risen Lord even after the event described in Acts that has come to be termed "the Ascension."

Conclusion

It seems apparent from our investigation that earliest Christians expected manifestations of the risen Lord from the first Easter appearance up through an unspecified, albeit relatively late period in the movements' development. In conjunction with this expectation, there appears to have been a wide variety of roles that the risen Lord assumed in earliest Christian communities, including comforter, exegete, giver and clarifier of doctrine, and director of missionary activities. While it is certainly outside the realm of this particular investigation, it would not be surprising to find that expectations of interactions with risen Lord dwindled with correlative proportion to the standardization of such processes in the early Church. It is perhaps after this standardization that

individuals began to view Luke's description of the Ascension as the cap of a "final appearance" of the risen Lord. Despite such interpretations, it would appear that Luke-Acts does not attempt to temporally limit interactions with the risen Lord or even articulate a change in experience of those who witnessed the risen Lord after the Ascension. Instead, Luke's narrative portrayal of post-Ascension interactions with the risen Lord stresses the difference of purpose between the Easter and post-Ascension appearances of Jesus. As such, Luke-Acts may be read as a narrative that seeks to combat claims to ecclesiastical authority derived from purported charismatic experience with the risen Lord by limiting and subjecting such experiences to the authority granting experiences of the apostles at Easter. Luke does not, however, appear to have attempted to theologically limit experiences with the risen Lord after the Ascension either temporally or experientially. It logically follows that earliest Christians did not view their religious experience as temporally unique. In fact, early Christians seem to have believed that God's "means of interacting and communicating with his creation and his people" had "come to focus on Jesus Christ in a complete and final way."¹⁸¹ Indeed, an individual who had perhaps travelled with the mortal Christ, listened to his teachings, and witnessed or at least heard of his death and subsequent resurrection would have had a distinct understanding of Christ's irreplaceable role in the administration and continuation of the movement. It should then come as no surprise that earliest Christians may have continued to expect corporeal manifestations of the risen Christ after the point that the later tradition may have marked as the cessation of theologically valid experiences with the resurrected Lord.

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Endnotes

1. Francois Bovon, *Luke 3: A Commentary on the Gospel of Luke 19:28–24:53*, Hermeneia Commentary Series, trans. James Crouch (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, 2012), 389.
2. James D. G. Dunn, *Jesus and the Spirit: A Study of the Religious and Charismatic Experience of Jesus and the First Christians as Reflected in the New Testament* (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1975), 3.
3. Larry W. Hurtado, *Lord Jesus Christ: Devotion to Jesus in Earliest Christianity* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2003), 71, emphasis added.
4. "The Ascension of Jesus" is a phrase used to describe the event during which the resurrected Jesus was taken up from among his Apostles as recorded in Acts 1:9–11. The phrase seems to have primarily derived from the English translation of the Vulgate section title for Acts 1:9–11: "*Ascensio Iesu*." Luke situates this event as taking place forty days (or, if his phrase is taken figuratively, a good long time) after Christ's resurrection from the dead. "After his suffering he presented himself alive to them by many convincing proofs, appearing to them during forty days and speaking about the kingdom of God." Acts 1:3 NRSV.
5. "By using these ascension accounts to form the link between his two volumes Luke would seem to indicate their significance for a proper understanding of his theology and purpose." John F. Maile, "The Ascension in Luke-Acts," *Tyndale Bulletin* 37 (1986): 29.
6. Resurrection appearances in early Christianity do not appear to have been reserved exclusively for Christ's original Apostles, nor enacted solely for the purpose of establishing Christ's resurrected state. In fact, experiences with the risen Christ in early Christian literature are often strikingly mundane in their apparent purpose, as the risen Lord conveys messages and otherwise interacts with individuals for reasons not traditionally viewed as necessitating a manifestation of the resurrected Jesus. While there are a host of non-canonical materials that support this claim, of particular note for this paper are the following appearances recorded in Acts: Jesus's appearance to Ananias for the purpose of sending him to Paul (9:10–15), the Lord comforting Paul (18:9), the

Lord warning Paul of impending danger (Acts 22:17–21), and the Lord strengthening Paul before his final journey to Rome (23:11). Early Christian literature also suggests these experiences often occurred to individuals who, as far as modern scholarship can deduce, exercised remarkably little religious influence over the development of the early Christian movement. The two disciples who experienced the risen Lord on the road to Emmaus are excellent examples of this phenomenon (Luke 24:13–35). Although one is mentioned by name (Cleopas in verse 18), there is very little information recorded in the early Christian tradition about this individual. Another example is Ananias in Acts 9:10–15 who sees the risen Lord but then drops from the narrative. Additionally, a number of those experiences recorded by Paul in 1 Corinthians 15 were given to individuals whose identities are otherwise unknown.

7. The *Oxford Dictionary of the Christian Church* states, “For Christians the Ascension marks the solemn close of the post-Resurrection appearances and signifies the rule of Christ in the present.” F. L. Cross, ed., “Ascension of Christ,” in *The Oxford Dictionary of the Christian Church*, 3rd rev. ed. (New York: Oxford University Press, 2005), 114.
8. “We also understand that Jesus’s ascension involves a change of state, as the curtain closes, not to open again until his return. The eye of our body cannot now see Jesus.” George C. Fuller, “The Life of Jesus, After the Ascension (Luke 24:50–53; Acts 1:9–11),” *Westminster Theological Journal* 56 (1994): 392. The Catholic Catechism on the Ascension states that “Jesus’s *final apparition* ends with the *irreversible* entry of his humanity into divine glory, symbolized by the cloud and by heaven, where he is seated from that time forward at God’s right hand. ... Christ’s Ascension marks the definitive entrance of Jesus’s humanity into God’s heavenly domain, whence he will come again (cf. Acts 1:11); this humanity in the meantime hides him from the eyes of men (cf. Col 3:3).” *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, 2nd rev. ed. (New York: Doubleday, 2003), 659, 665. Similar language is found in the Heidelberg Catechism: “Question 46: What do you mean by saying, ‘He ascended to heaven’? Answer: That Christ was taken up from the earth into heaven before the very eyes of his disciples and remains there on our behalf until he comes again to judge the living and the dead. Question 47: But isn’t Christ with us

until the end of the world as he promised? Answer: Christ is truly human and truly God. In his human nature Christ is not now on earth; but in his divinity, majesty, grace, and Spirit he is never absent us." *Heidelberg Catechism*, trans. Faith Alive Christian Resources, Christian Reformed Church in North America, 46–47, <https://www.crcna.org/welcome/beliefs/confessions/heidelberg-catechism#toc-god-the-son>. Statements such as these are paradigmatic of the theological understanding that has come to be associated with the Ascension. While most Christians would not argue that the risen Lord no longer interacts with his believers, the assumption is that those interactions take place in a fundamentally different manner than his interactions with his Apostles prior to the Ascension. Primarily, modern Christians tend to "spiritualize" visual experiences of the risen Lord after this point, classifying them as "visionary" experiences. An excellent example of a paradigmatic post-ascension interaction with the risen Lord are the now-famous visions of Julian of Norwich. See Julian of Norwich, *Revelations of Divine Love*, trans. Barry Windeatt (New York: Oxford University Press, 2015).

9. These documents include, but are not limited to, The Gospel of Matthew, The Gospel of Mark, The Gospel of Luke, The Gospel of John, The Acts of the Apostles, Galatians, 1 Corinthians, The Revelation of John, The Sophia of Jesus Christ, Gospel of Peter, Gospel of the Hebrews, Apocryphon of James, Shepherd of Hermas, Apocryphon of John, Gospel of Mary, Dialogue of the Savior, 2nd Apocalypse of James, Epistula Apostolorum, Acts of Peter, Acts of John, Acts of Andrew, Acts of Peter and the Twelve Apostles, The Book of Thomas the Contender, Coptic Apocalypse of Paul, Dialogue between John and Jesus, Letter of Peter to Phillip, Kerygmata Petrou, 1st Apocalypse of James, Gospel of Phillip, and The Freer Logion.
10. Of particular note are the apocryphal Acts of the Apostles. In many of these texts, the risen Jesus makes himself manifest to the protagonist of the story in a variety of ways at several places in the narrative. The canonical Acts of the Apostles also shares this same feature.
11. See David Brakke, *Gnostics: Myth, Ritual, and Diversity in Early Christianity* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2010). Gnostic teaching primarily derived from claims of "secret

knowledge” that had been given to various apostolic figures through a manifestation of the resurrected Lord. Interestingly, many texts from which Gnostics derived their theological views explicitly claim to be a record of post-Ascension visitations of the risen Christ. The Apocryphon of James is one such text. In the opening paragraphs of the document, James, the purported author, states that the following revelation had been given to him and Peter by the corporeal Jesus “after departing from us while we gazed after him. And five hundred and fifty days since he had risen from the dead.” See Francis E. Williams, translator, “Secret Book of James,” *Early Christian Writings* (website), <https://www.earlychristianwritings.com/text/secretjames.html>. Because patristic refutation of Gnostic beliefs is so well documented, some might assume that the Gnostic claim of post-Ascension visitations of Christ was far-fetched to early Christians and held little or no credence amongst “orthodox” believers. While the extent to which Gnosticism held sway in the early Church is debated, the movement was certainly large enough to pose a significant threat to the early Church. The fact that Gnostics could convincingly attribute many of their doctrines to post-Ascension appearances of the resurrected Lord implies that it was at least plausible to the majority of early Christians that resurrection appearances had continued to occur after the Ascension. Irenaeus himself recognizes the plausibility of the Gnostic claim: “[A]nd by means of their craftily-constructed plausibilities draw away the minds of the inexperienced and take them captive. . . . By means of specious and plausible words, they cunningly allure.” See Irenaeus of Lyons, *Against Heresies: Book I*, trans. Alexander Roberts and William Rambaut, *Early Christian Writings* (website), <https://www.earlychristianwritings.com/text/irenaeus-book1.html>. Irenaeus suggested that the purpose of his own work *Against Heresies* was “that men may no longer be drawn away by the plausible system of these heretics.” There was no doubt to Irenaeus that Gnostic texts were fabrications and that “these men falsify the oracles of God.” However, the Gnostic claim that Christ had continued to appear to the Apostles after the Ascension does not appear to be a particularly significant issue for Irenaeus. Indeed, despite the relative ease with which Gnostic texts and beliefs might have been refuted through an appeal to the Ascension as the end of corporeal manifestations of Christ, patristic refutation of Gnostic beliefs is curiously devoid

of attacks on the appearances of Christ in Gnostic sacred texts. Admittedly, Gnostics appealed to many of the same texts early Christians did in their development of doctrine. An attack on the Gnostic position would thus, in many ways, be an attack on the orthodox Christian position as well. However, critiques of Gnostic doctrine, especially those of Irenaeus, focus primarily on the form of Gnostic doctrine and the corrupted nature of their scriptural exegesis used to support it. Irenaeus seems to then have taken for granted the fact that the resurrected Christ had indeed communicated with the Apostles after his Ascension. Additional evidence of this comes from Irenaeus' repudiation of three particular Gnostic groups, the Valentinians, the Ophites, and the Sethians. Irenaeus lays out in detail the particular beliefs of each of these groups in the first book of his iconic work *Against Heresies*. After detailing the particular doctrines of these Gnostic groups, Irenaeus explains their interpretation of several canonical passages that allowed them to derive such beliefs from scripture. Irenaeus' methodology is such that he states a Gnostic belief and then points to a particular scripture or tradition that has been utilized to support the heretical idea. In the midst of detailing several instances of mistaken Gnostic scriptural interpretation, Irenaeus states that the Gnostics find evidence for their doctrine of the eighteen Aeons from the fact that "the Lord, conversed with His disciples for eighteen months after His resurrection from the dead." Although it certainly appears that the specific eighteen-month designation is a uniquely Gnostic claim, the rhetorical structure of the passage (with Irenaeus detailing a heresy and showing how it has been mistakenly validated in scripture or the tradition) suggests that a lengthier post-resurrection ministry of Christ was actually a tradition accepted at least by Irenaeus himself, if not by the Christian community at large. The significance of such a statement is that there seems to be, at least during the late second century, competing ideas about how long the resurrected Lord continued to minister to his Apostles after his resurrection. Whether or not Luke is to be taken literally on his "forty-day" ministry of Christ, the eighteen-month tradition preserved by Irenaeus appears to be a competing early Christian view in regard to the length Christ's post-resurrection activities.

12. Achtemeier, Green, and Thompson have noted a variety of texts that record post-resurrection appearances of Christ that received

significant circulation in the early Church but were not Gnostic. These include The Gospel of the Hebrews, The Gospel of Peter, Shepherd of Hermas, a variety of apocryphal Acts, and several non-canonical apocalypses. See Paul J. Achtemeier, Joel B. Green, and Marianne Meye Thompson, *Introducing the New Testament: Its Literature and Theology* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2001), 596.

13. Modern readers are typically most familiar with this reason. Many visits preserved by the canonical gospels are of this type and many of the extracanonical materials also convey similar themes. Even Gnostic documents that are theologically resistant to a bodily resurrection of the risen Lord often depict the Lord appearing for the purpose of explaining the nuances of his resurrected state to his followers. Thus, even those documents that argue against a bodily resurrection of Christ often depict the risen Lord as returning to Earth to in some way demonstrate the characteristics of his resurrected body.
14. This is a theme preserved by Luke in his gospel in 24:25–27 and 44–47. Significantly, other non-canonical texts also depict the risen Lord as explaining certain passages of scripture. The early Church thus intriguingly traces much of the creative exegesis that is at the very heart of the Christian faith directly to the resurrected Jesus.
15. Consider for example the great commission found in Matthew 28:16–20. While this may seem like an obvious outgrowth of the gospel message to modern Christians, it may not have been so apparent to Christ's followers shortly after his death. Whereas the mortal Jesus was somewhat exclusive in his teaching only to Israel, the risen Jesus opens the missionary efforts to the world. His Apostles who just days before had fled from the Jewish authorities and hid in fear, were then instructed to go out on a public mission in which they would encounter significant opposition. There can be no doubt, then, that this particular aspect of the risen Lord's post-resurrection instructions was not mundane or self-evident to the early church, but instead seem to have been viewed as one of the most important aspects of Christ's post-resurrection activities. One needs only contrast a similar group like the Qumran community to the early church to see how significant this theme was to the post-resurrection appearances of Christ.

While both the Christian movement and the Qumran community were eschatological and apocalyptic, one remained predominantly reclusive while the other developed into an evangelical movement. For similarities between the early Christian movement and the Qumran community, see Dunn, *Jesus and the Spirit*, 162–63. Nearly every document that preserves a manifestation of the risen Lord depicts him as instructing the recipient to share the message they have received with other individuals. Even in those accounts that preserve “secret teaching” traditions, the risen Lord provides the individual with a qualified mission in which they are to share the message they received with the worthy or elect.

16. While many modern individuals may assume the conveyance of new doctrine is a predominantly extra-canonical theme of the resurrected Lord’s post-mortal activities, there is considerable evidence of this in the canonical materials as well. Consider for example Christ’s descent into Hell described in 1 Peter 3:18–20 and 4:6. While the canon is silent as to when this doctrine was communicated to the early church, the extra-canonical Gospel of Peter traces it to an appearance of the risen Lord shortly after he is resurrected and departs from the tomb. For additional examples of extracanonical accounts that attempt to establish new doctrine, see Wilhelm Schneemelcher, introduction to *New Testament Apocrypha* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 1990), 1:228–31.
17. See James A. Kelhoffer, *Conceptions of “Gospel” and Legitimacy in Early Christianity* (Tubingen, Germany: Mohr Siebeck, 2014).
18. Paul however is not shy in ascribing such authority to others. Notably Paul classifies James as an apostle in Galatians 1:18–19 and again in 1 Corinthians 15:7. Additionally, in 1 Corinthians 15, Paul’s list of “apostles” is significantly more inclusive than the original Twelve and seems to suggest that Paul is utilizing the term in a manner distinct from traditional conceptions to denote an individual who had received a manifestation of the risen Lord.
19. See John Painter, *Just James: The Brother of Jesus in History and Tradition* (Columbia, SC: University of South Carolina Press, 1997).
20. See Acts 15.
21. For example, Mary Magdalene’s experience as recorded in the Gospel of John, or the disciples on the road to Emmaus as recorded

in the Gospel of Luke. In each of these accounts, the risen Lord is merely seen and doesn't present his resurrected body for inspection as he does in other Easter accounts.

22. See for example the canonical Book of Revelation. The heavenly and eschatological content of the account make it fairly easy to distinguish from those accounts recorded in the gospels in which the risen Lord is present to his disciples in a corporeal fashion rather than those same individuals being taken up to, or being privileged with a vision of, the heavenly realm.
23. Even those accounts found in the canonical gospels often stress the discontinuity of Christ's resurrected body from the mortal Jesus. In his resurrected state, Jesus can appear in closed rooms (John 20:19; 20:26; and Luke 24:36) and is often unrecognized by even his closest followers (John 20:14; and Luke 24:16). However, these visionary accounts often stress the discontinuity in much more radical fashions. Perhaps most notably is the ability of the risen Lord to shapeshift into a variety of forms as in *The Shepherd of Hermas*.
24. "Having four different stories of Jesus's ministry is at least inconvenient, and their inconsistencies lead beyond inconvenience to embarrassment and potential scandal." William C. Placher, *Narratives of a Vulnerable God: Christ, Theology, and Scripture* (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 1994), 87.
25. Placher, *Narratives*, 90.
26. "With very rare exceptions, Christians have respected the distinctness of the four different Gospels. One should not take this for granted." Placher, *Narratives*, 87.
27. Placher, *Narratives*, 88.
28. Consider for example John's account of the risen Lord's visit to Mary in John 20:11–17. The entire purpose of this visit seems to be to console the weeping woman and reflects a set of resurrection appearances whose purpose seems remarkably personal.
29. Consider Jesus's appearance to "the eleven, and them that were with them" in Luke 24:33–53. While not in the gospels, Paul's account of the experience of the "500" in 1 Corinthians 15 is also an excellent example of the risen Lord appearing to a significant group of early Christians.

30. John's account of the risen Lord conferring the Holy Spirit on the Apostles found in John 20:22–23 is an excellent example of this. Additionally, the depiction of the risen Lord at the sea of Tiberius in John 21 has elements of the powerful Christ.
31. The incredibly quotidian nature of the risen Lord partaking in meals with the disciples (Luke 24:41–43; John 21:1–15) is a remarkable aspect of these accounts and certainly has symbolic significance that reflects early Christian understandings of the accessible nature of the resurrected Lord.
32. This is reflected in the suddenness with which the risen Lord often enters these narratives. Additionally, emphasis on the fact that the Lord enters into the locked rooms in which the disciples are staying is also a powerful symbol of the risen Lord's ability to come wherever he pleases.
33. Placher, *Narratives*, 102.
34. "When the sabbath was over, Mary Magdalene, and Mary the mother of James, and Salome bought spices, so that they might go and anoint him." Mark 16:1 NRSV. See also Luke 24:10, Matthew 28:1, and John 20:1.
35. "εἶδον νεανίσκον καθήμενον ἐν τοῖς δεξιοῖς περιβεβλημένον στολὴν λευκὴν, καὶ ἐξεθαμβήθησαν." Mark 16:5.
36. The white clothing, his lack of apparent amazement at Jesus's resurrection, and the matter-of-fact statement that Jesus has been raised all point to a heavenly or divine manifestation (Mark 16:6). Scholars have identified this standard apocalyptic character as an "interpreting angel," a heavenly messenger that "interprets" the meaning of certain events by instructing the protagonist of the narrative.
37. ἐξεθαμβήθησαν.
38. This promise was previously recorded in Mark 14:28.
39. "In this particular commission, the sly addition of 'and to Peter' is probably a double entendre. On the one hand, the women are to announce the news *especially* to Peter, the first disciple to be called (1:16–18), the first to recognize Jesus's messiahship (cf 8:29), and the one who, in the near future, will be granted the first resurrection appearance." Joel Marcus, *Mark 8–16*, Anchor Bible Commentary Series (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2009), 1086. The

appearance to Peter is not reflected in the Markan narrative, but the tradition is well attested elsewhere in early Christian tradition including in Paul's resurrection appearance list recorded in 1 Corinthians 15:5–8.

40. ἔφυγον.
41. τρόμος καὶ ἔκστασις.
42. καὶ οὐδενὶ οὐδὲν εἶπαν.
43. *The New Interpreter's Study Bible* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 2003), 1844.
44. ἐφοβοῦντο γάρ “for they were afraid.”
45. Placher, *Narratives*, 90.
46. Robert P. Meye, “Mark 16:8 — The Ending of Mark's Gospel,” *Biblical Research* 14 (1969): 33–43.
47. Meye, “Ending,” 35.
48. *Ibid.*, 39.
49. Curiously, the Greek verb προάγει used in 16:7, which is typically translated “he is going,” can alternatively be translated “he will lead” with the object being the apostles. This alternative rendering may be preferable to many on theological grounds, allowing for a reconciliation of those gospels that have Jerusalem as the place of the first visit, as well as Luke's account of the “forty days.”
50. Luke Timothy Johnson, *The Writings of the New Testament: An Interpretation*, 3rd ed. (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, 2010), 150. See also Marcus, *Mark 8–16*, 1096.
51. Alan H. Cadwallader, “The Hermeneutical Potential of the Multiple Endings of Mark's Gospel,” *Colloquium* 43, no. 2 (2011): 141–42.
52. *New Interpreter's Study Bible*, 1844.
53. This third appearance, while sharing some literary parallels with Luke, Matthew, and John, is the most distinct of the three detailed in the longer ending of Mark.
54. ἀνελήμφθη εἰς τὸν οὐρανὸν καὶ ἐκάθισεν ἐκ δεξιῶν τοῦ θεοῦ. Mark 16:19.
55. ἐκεῖνοι δὲ ἐξελθόντες ἐκήρυξαν πανταχοῦ τοῦ κυρίου συνεργοῦντος. Mark 16:20

56. Cadwallader, *Hermeneutical Potential*, 146.
57. Warren Carter, "The Gospel According to Matthew," introductory essay in *The New Interpreter's Study Bible* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 2003), 1745.
58. Ibid.
59. Johnson, *Writings*, 165.
60. E. Carson Brisson, "Matthew 28:1–10," *Interpretation* 65, no.1 (January 2011): 72.
61. Ibid.
62. This is a point of divergence for all four gospel narratives. Mark states that three women went to the tomb: the two Marys and Salome (Mark 16:1). Matthew states that only the two Marys went to the tomb (Matthew 28:1). John states that only Mary Magdalene came to the tomb (John 20:1). Luke omits Salome in favor of Joanna but states that there were other women accompanying the two Marys and Joanna (Luke 24:10).
63. ἐγενήθησαν ὡς νεκροί. The irony comes from the fact that these living guards have figuratively died while the crucified Christ has in reality been made alive. Matthew 28:4.
64. Matthew 28:5 "Do not be afraid ..."
65. ἀπελθοῦσαι ταχὺ ἀπὸ τοῦ μνημείου μετὰ φόβου.
66. χαρᾶς μεγάλης.
67. αἱ δὲ προσελθοῦσαι ἐκράτησαν αὐτοῦ τοὺς πόδας καὶ προσεκύνησαν αὐτῷ. Matthew 28:9.
68. Note how the apostles "see" him before Jesus "came to them." Matthew 28:18.
69. See the following particularly instructive essay: Mark Harris, "The Coming and Goings of the Son of Man: Is Matthew's Risen Jesus 'Present' or 'Absent'? A Narrative-Critical Response," *Biblical Interpretation* 22 (2014): 51–70.
70. Placher, *Narratives*, 89.
71. This is most certainly true with the ending of Mark, as it is quite possible that the longer ending of Mark is entirely a result of the disparity between Mark's shorter ending and the ending of Luke's gospel. Additionally, because Luke is the only author to

articulate the risen Lord's ascent into heaven modern readers of the New Testament are canonically conditioned to place the same cap on the end of each of the other gospel narratives under the assumption that they detail events that occurred sometime before the Ascension recorded by Luke. As such, Luke's gospel (and in addition Acts) has often been the lens through which the endings of the other gospels are interpreted.

72. Joel B. Green, "The Gospel According to Luke," introductory essay in *The New Interpreter's Study Bible* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 2003), 1848.
73. "Since many have undertaken to set down an orderly account of the events that have been fulfilled among us, just as they were handed on to us by those who from the beginning were eyewitnesses and servants of the word, I too decided, after investigating everything carefully from the very first, to write an orderly account." Luke 1:1–3 NRSV.
74. Luke's account seems to make more women present at the tomb than the others as "this was Mary Magdalene, Joanna, Mary the mother of James, and the other women with them."
75. Bovon, *Luke* 3, 353.
76. "It is only logical that Luke's Christian readers identified with the disciples of Emmaus. They too have heard the word, understood the Scriptures, participated in the Lord's Supper, and perceived his presence." Bovon, *Luke* 3, 375.
77. "The story of the Emmaus meeting has the characteristics of this original oral literature. The story stands on its own; it is of limited size and involves only a few characters; in addition, it fulfills a function that goes beyond the episodic; when it is told, it nourishes the faith of the first communities." Bovon, *Luke* 3, 369.
78. While the scholarship of Robert Funk and the Jesus Seminar is often quite humorous in its minimalist and polemical readings of the New Testament text, there are some aspects of their work that are plausible when significantly tempered. One such assertion is that Luke's portrayal of the Ascension was invented to combat authoritative claims made by competing groups of early Christians who were utilizing charismatic experiences with the risen Christ to further their own ideological agendas. Funk's assertion that Luke invented the Ascension is undoubtedly unwarranted,

especially considering that Luke's own conception of the import of the Ascension does not match the description provided by Funk. However, as is displayed in later Gnostic literature, there were most certainly individuals and groups within early Christianity who may have appropriated the resurrection traditions for their own ideological aims. Consequently, Luke's emphasis on the primacy of the Apostolic witness to the resurrection may be in reaction to such splinter groups but was certainly not invented solely for that purpose.

79. Dunn, *Jesus and the Spirit*, 182.
80. Ταῦτα δὲ αὐτῶν λαλούντων αὐτὸς, Luke 24:36.
81. πτοηθέντες δὲ καὶ ἔμφοβοι γενόμενοι ἐδόκουν πνεῦμα θεωρεῖν. Luke 24:37.
82. ἴδετε τὰς χεῖράς μου καὶ τοὺς πόδας μου ὅτι ἐγώ εἰμι αὐτός: ψηλαφήσατέ με καὶ ἴδετε, ὅτι πνεῦμα σάρκα καὶ ὅστέα οὐκ ἔχει καθὼς ἐμὲ θεωρεῖτε ἔχοντα. Luke 24:39.
83. καὶ ἐγένετο ἐν τῷ εὐλογεῖν αὐτὸν αὐτοὺς διέστη ἀπ' αὐτῶν καὶ ἀνεφέρετο εἰς τὸν οὐρανόν. Luke 24:51.
84. "Because of the 'forty days' of Acts 1:3, several authors think that Luke 24:50–53 represents not the final ascension but the conclusion of an appearance scene. Acts 1 recalls other appearances and the ultimate ascension." Bovon, *Luke* 3, 410.
85. Richard Neitzel Holzapfel, Eric D. Huntsman, and Thomas A. Wayment, *Jesus Christ and the World of the New Testament* (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 2006), 126–28.
86. "The New Testament and the earliest Christian literature (roughly up to Justin and Irenaeus) know and confess an Easter exaltation of Christ. ... Early in the second century the *Epistle of Barnabas* invited people to celebrate Sunday, regarded as the eighth day, for the twofold reason that on this day Jesus 'arose from the dead, and appeared, and ascended into heaven.' The *Gospel of Peter* contains an extraordinary story of the resurrection, which amazed the guards at the tomb. Accompanied by two angels and followed by the cross, Christ comes triumphantly from the tomb. Here resurrection and exaltation occur together." Bovon, *Luke* 3, 408.
87. This is reminiscent of Christ's breath that grants life to Adam found in Genesis.

88. Placher, *Narratives*, 97–98.
89. Marcus, *Mark 8–16*, 1081.
90. Dunn, *Jesus and the Spirit*, 360.
91. Johnson, *Writings*, 466.
92. μετα ταυτα ἐφάνέρωσεν ἑαυτὸν πάλιν Ἰησοῦς τοῖς μαθηταῖς. John 21:1.
93. οὐδεὶς ἐτόλμα τῶν μαθητῶν ἐξετάσαι αὐτόν Σὺ τίς εἶ; εἰδότες ὅτι ὁ κύριός ἐστιν. John 21:12.
94. Painter, *Just James*, 178.
95. W. F. Albright, and C. S. Mann, *Matthew: A New Translation with Introduction and Commentary*, Anchor Bible Commentary Series (Garden City, NY: Doubleday, 1981), 360.
96. “John seems deliberately to turn his back on the increasing institutionalization and sacramentalism of his time, maintaining the Pauline link with the past without subordinating Spirit to tradition, and resolving the problem of the slackening of eschatological tension by individualizing worship rather than institutionalizing it. Perhaps John thus represents those who hanker after the direct relationship with Jesus which his disciples enjoyed during his ministry on earth.” Dunn, *Jesus and the Spirit*, 359–60.
97. The overwhelming consensus amongst New Testament scholars is that Luke and Acts were written by a single author to be read as a two-part work. This opinion is supported textually by the author’s own introduction: “In the *first* book, Theophilus, I wrote about all that Jesus did and taught... [Emphasis added].” Acts 1:1 NRSV.
98. “A variety of structural, stylistic, and thematic elements coalesce to convince nearly all contemporary scholars that Luke-Acts is a united witness within the NT canon.” Johnson, *Writings*, 188.
99. Bovon, *Luke 3*, 406.
100. “μετὰ τὸ παθεῖν αὐτὸν ἐν πολλοῖς τεκμηρίοις, δι’ ἡμερῶν τεσσεράκοντα” Acts 1:3.
101. C. K. Barrett, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Acts of the Apostles*, in the International Critical Commentary Series (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1994), 1:70.

102. Exodus 13:21; 16:10; 19:9; 34:5, Leviticus 16:2. The Greek word is νεφέλη and is used in each instance.
103. Luke describes those present on the Mount of Olives as "τοῖς ἀποστόλοις" a term Luke uses almost exclusively in reference to members of the original Twelve (Luke 6:13, Acts 1:26). This reference is further solidified when the group arrives at their lodging in Jerusalem and Luke states that the group consists of "Peter, and John, and James, and Andrew, Philip and Thomas, Bartholomew and Matthew, James son of Alphaeus, and Simon the Zealot, and Judas son of James." Acts 1:13.
104. Acts 1:8, 22; 2:32; 3:15; 4:20; 5:32; 10:39, 41; 13:31; 22:15; 23:11.
105. Ἄγγελος δὲ Κυρίου διὰ νυκτὸς ἤνοιξε τὰς θύρας τῆς φυλακῆς ἐξαγαγών. Acts 5:19.
106. Richard I. Pervo, *Acts: A Commentary* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2009), 142.
107. Susan R. Garrett, *No Ordinary Angel: Celestial Spirits and Christian Claims about Jesus* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2008), 248–49.
108. See Acts 12:15 when the early Christians hear Peter at the door and do not think it is him.
109. Compare the Angel of God found in Luke 12:8–9; 15:10; Acts 10:3; Acts 27:23 and the Angel of the Lord found in Luke 1:11; 2:9; Acts 5:19; 8:26; 12:7; 12:23.
110. See Acts 7:30, 35, 38.
111. The Venerable Bede stated in his commentary on Acts, "So that Thomas would not doubt that the Lord bore flesh and blood when he had seen him entering with the doors closed, behold, he himself, while he was still clothed in mortal flesh, made his departure with his companions though the doors were closed." Bede's interpretation seems to suggest that the risen Lord accompanied the Apostle's out of the prison in a parallel manner to the way he had appeared to the Apostles behind closed doors. Arator had a similar interpretation of the passage: "If anyone in addition considers Thomas, with his feeble heart, let him seek teaching from this: seeing that the closed door, being penetrated, admitted God then, is it astonishing if [Christ], in the flesh, approaches a gate in this manner, [he] whom a virgin bore, whom the unviolated womb

of his mother conceived? What reason, I ask, was there to take human flesh unless it was to resurrect it? Returning after that, he presents his side for a witness and teaches that the ashes of our body must be made new by the example of his own, proving they are his limbs by their wounds.” Interestingly, both interpreters seem to utilize this passage in some way to authenticate the resurrection of the Lord. Francis Martin, ed., *Acts*, vol. 5 of *Ancient Christian Commentary on Scripture: New Testament* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2006), 64.

112. M. R. James has noted one particularly striking example in the apocryphal Acts of Andrew. Because our only extant copy of the Acts of Andrew is communicated through a paraphrase of the work by Gregory of Tours it is unclear how much of the Acts has been adjusted by Tours or a previous individual. M. R. James states that at section 20 of the Acts, where Andrew is granted a vision of John and Peter, he is “sure that John in the latter part of this vision has been substituted by Gregory for Jesus. The echoes of the Acts of John and of Peter are very evident.” M. R. James, *The Apocryphal New Testament: Being the Apocryphal Gospels, Acts, Epistles, and Apocalypses* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1924), 344.
113. “ἀτενίσας εἰς τὸν οὐρανὸν εἶδεν δόξαν θεοῦ καὶ Ἰησοῦν ἐστῶτα ἐκ δεξιῶν τοῦ θεοῦ.” Acts 7:54.
114. “θεωρῶ τοὺς οὐρανοὺς διηνοιγμένους καὶ τὸν υἱὸν τοῦ ἀνθρώπου ἐκ δεξιῶν ἐστῶτα τοῦ θεοῦ.” Acts 7:55.
115. “θεωρῶν” Luke 23:35–43. See also Luke 23:48 when the crowd witnesses the signs of Jesus death “θεωρήσαντες.”
116. “θεωρεῖν” Luke 24:37.
117. “θεωρεῖτε” Luke 24:39.
118. “θεωρεῖτε” Acts 3:16.
119. 1 Corinthians 9:1; 15:5–9.
120. “τῆς ὁδοῦ ὄντας” Acts 9:2.
121. “αὐτὸν περιήστραψεν φῶς ἐκ τοῦ οὐρανοῦ” Acts 9:3.
122. καὶ εἶπεν πρὸς αὐτὸν ἐν ὁράματι ὁ κύριος. Acts 9:10.
123. Henry George Liddell and Robert Scott, *A Greek-English Lexicon*, rev. ed. (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1940), <https://www.perseus.tufts.edu/hopper/text?doc=Perseus%3atext%3a1999.04.0057>.

124. Barrett, *Acts of the Apostles*, 453.
125. Gerald O'Collins, *Christology: Origins, Developments, Debates* (Waco, TX: Baylor University Press, 2015), 52, 56.
126. Ibid.
127. καὶ οὐκ εἶασεν αὐτοὺς τὸ πνεῦμα Ἰησοῦ. Acts 16:7 NRSV.
128. Εἶπεν δὲ ὁ κύριος ἐν νυκτὶ δι' ὁράματος τῷ Παύλῳ. Acts 18:9.
129. ἰδεῖν τὸν δίκαιον καὶ ἀκοῦσαι φωνὴν ἐκ τοῦ στόματος αὐτοῦ. Acts 22:14.
130. Τῇ δὲ ἐπιούσῃ νυκτὶ ἐπιστὰς αὐτῷ ὁ κύριος. Acts 23:11.
131. As has been noted above, Paul is referred to as an Apostle only twice in Acts 14:4, and 14. This number is more striking when considering Luke uses the title 39 times total in Luke-Acts and Paul is the main protagonist of the narrative from Chapter 9 onward.
132. σημεῖα καὶ τέρατα. Acts 15:12.
133. ἔση μάρτυς αὐτῷ πρὸς πάντας ἀνθρώπους. Acts 22:15.
134. Paul's experience on the road to Damascus is explicitly discussed in Galatians 1, 1 Corinthians 9 and 15, and several times in Acts. While Paul may reference his experience in others of his epistles, they are less explicit in their portrayal of his encounter with the risen Lord, and as such will not be investigated at length in this work.
135. "I am astonished that you are so quickly deserting the one who called you in the grace of Christ and are turning to a different gospel — not that there is another gospel, but there are some who are confusing you and want to pervert the gospel of Christ. ... As we have said before, so now I repeat, if anyone proclaims to you a gospel contrary to what you received, let that one be accursed!" Galatians 1:6–9 NRSV
136. The similarities between Paul's account and accounts relating the calls of the Old Testament Prophets Isaiah and Jeremiah were noted by Krister Stendahl in his classic essay *Paul Among Jews and Gentiles*. In agreement with Stendahl's observations, Paul's experience will here be referred to as a "call" rather than a "conversion."
137. See Matthew 10.

138. οὐκ ἂπ' ἀνθρώπων οὐδὲ δι' ἀνθρώπου. Galatians 1:1
139. διὰ Ἰησοῦ Χριστοῦ Galatians 1:1.
140. διὰ Ἰησοῦ Χριστοῦ καὶ θεοῦ πατρὸς τοῦ ἐγείραντος αὐτὸν ἐκ νεκρῶν. Galatians 1:1.
141. “For I want you to know, brothers, that the gospel that was proclaimed by me is not of human origin; for I did not receive it from a human source, nor was I taught it, but I received it through a revelation of Jesus Christ.” Galatians 1:11–12 NRSV
142. δι' ἀποκαλύψεως Ἰησοῦ Χριστοῦ. Galatians 1:12
143. Hans Conzelmann, *1 Corinthians: A Commentary on the First Epistle to the Corinthians*, Hermeneia Commentary series (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1975), 2, 13; and Anthony C. Thiselton, *The First Epistle to the Corinthians: A Commentary on the Greek Text*, New International Greek Testament Commentary Series (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans, 2000), 31–32.
144. Paul goes to great lengths throughout the text to enunciate his claim to apostleship (1 Corinthians 1:1; 4:9; 9:1–3; 12:28–29; 15:7–9). This emphasis seems to be over and against individuals who are questioning that claim (9:2).
145. Joseph A. Fitzmyer, *1 Corinthians: A New Translation with Introduction and Commentary*, Anchor Bible Commentary Series (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2008), 353.
146. “ΠΑΥΛΟΣ κλητὸς ἀπόστολος Ἰησοῦ Χριστοῦ διὰ θελήματος θεοῦ,” 1 Corinthians 1:1.
147. Sosthenes is identified as ὁ ἀδελφὸς “our brother.” By being listed as a co-sender of the letter, Sosthenes is identified as some kind of authoritative figure to the Corinthian church. Despite the fact that both Sosthenes and Paul are “God’s servants, working together” (3:9) Paul identifies himself as an apostle in a way unique from the role that Sosthenes is fulfilling. It thus seems clear that Paul’s definition of the term “apostle” is uniquely tied to his experience with the risen lord.
148. “Therefore, if food is a cause of their falling, I will never eat meat, so that I may not cause one of them to fall.” 1 Corinthians 8:131 NRSV.
149. Russell B. Sisson, “Abductive Logic and Rhetorical Structure in 1 Corinthians 9,” *Proceedings EGL & MWBS* 26 (2006): 93.

150. Conzelmann, *1 Corinthians*, 152.
151. "[W]e understand *have not I seen Jesus our Lord?* as part of 'a unique foundational witness to a truth-claim about Christ' which is bound up with apostolicity." Thiselton, *Epistle*, 1201.
152. "Since the Damascus-road appearance ... seems to be so important to Paul, the alternation of the particles here may be deliberate for emphasis. *Jesus our Lord*. This relatively uncommon designation probably is to be associated with Paul's stress on the activity of the risen Lord." William F. Orr and James Arthur Walther, *1 Corinthians: A New Translation*, Anchor Bible Commentary series (New York: Doubleday, 1976), 237.
153. "In v 1b his claim to this standing is based on his vision of Christ (cf. Gal 1:12ff; 1 Cor 15:6ff). This is a conclusive argument, inasmuch as the receiving of a commission from the risen Lord is constitutive for the concept of apostleship — and yet again it is not conclusive, since it is obvious that not every vision confers this dignity." Conzelmann, *1 Corinthians*, 152.
154. Fitzmyer, *1 Corinthians*, 356.
155. Ibid.
156. Conzelmann, *1 Corinthians*, 152.
157. Fitzmyer, *1 Corinthians*, 541. See also Conzelmann, *1 Corinthians*, 251.
158. Fitzmyer, *1 Corinthians*, 549.
159. Ibid.
160. Because the gospels record multiple instances of the risen Lord appearing to the Apostles it would be extremely difficult to pinpoint to which of these instances Paul is referring. (Mark 16:14–20, Matthew 28:16–20, Luke 24:36–53, John 20:19–23, 20:26–30). Additionally, the fact that the statement is that Jesus appeared "to the twelve" and not "to the eleven" causes other interpretive issues.
161. "[T]his is the only place in the Pauline letters where *hoi dodeka* occurs. Paul never refers to them as such, even though this was already the stereotyped title in the early church for the original group of disciples that Jesus chose as his closest collaborators (Mark 3:14–19; Matt 10:1–4)." Fitzmyer, *1 Corinthians*, 550. "Paul uses the term the Twelve only here, preferring the term *the apostles*." Thiselton, *Epistle*, 1205.

162. Orr and Walther, *1 Corinthians*, 321.
163. Ibid.
164. Conzelmann, *1 Corinthians*, 257.
165. Acts 1:15–26. Conzelmann, *1 Corinthians*, 257.
166. Thiselton, *Epistle*, 1205.
167. “This appearance is not recorded elsewhere in the NT, and it has nothing to do with Pentecost (Acts 2), despite claims that it does. ... The event of Pentecost was not a Christophany, but an outpouring of the Spirit. No one knows whether the 500 refers to a group in Jerusalem or in Galilee.” Fitzmyer, *1 Corinthians*, 550. “The appearance to more than five hundred brothers at one time is mentioned nowhere else in the New Testament. The only other sizable groups mentioned in the other records are the hundred and twenty who met to elect a successor to Judas (Acts 1:15) and the unspecified number assembled at Pentecost (Acts 2:1). Since Paul never equates the reception of the Spirit with an appearance of the risen Christ, any identification of numbers here would be questionable.” Orr and Walther, *1 Corinthians*, 322.
168. See Fitzmyer, *1 Corinthians*, 550.
169. “[I]f this word excludes a possible reference to visionary experiences a temporal force is entailed, i.e., we should find it difficult to conceive of ‘upwards of 500 visions occurring at the same time and place.’” Thiselton, *Epistle*, 1205. See also Fitzmyer, *1 Corinthians*, 543
170. 1 Corinthians 15:6 NRSV. “Where does the emphasis lie, on their death, or on the fact that some are still alive? Probably the latter, because the implication is that they could still provide the testimony themselves.” Fitzmyer, *1 Corinthians*, 550–51.
171. Fitzmyer, *1 Corinthians*, 551. See also Thiselton, *Epistle*, 1207.
172. Fitzmyer, *1 Corinthians*, 551. Thiselton, *Epistle*, 1208.
173. Fitzmyer, *1 Corinthians*, 551.
174. Orr and Walther, *1 Corinthians*, 322.
175. See Acts 7:55–56.
176. “Then to all the apostles’: this sounds as if the circle of apostles was a closed one, and not identical with the circle of the Twelve. Who

is an apostle? The important thing is that *all* apostles have seen the risen Christ. This is accordingly definitive for the concept of an apostle. If he is thinking of a single appearance before them all, then Paul of course was not present. But indeed he is the straggler." Conzelmann, *1 Corinthians*, 258–59.

177. Thiselton, *Epistle*, 1208.
178. Fitzmyer, *1 Corinthians*, 552.
179. Ibid.
180. Ernst Haenchen, *John 2: A Commentary on the Gospel of John, Chapters 7–21*, trans. Robert W. Funk, Hermeneia Commentary Series (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1984), 214, <https://archive.org/details/1984-e.-haenchen-john-2.-a-commentary-on-the-gospel-of-john-chapters-7-21-hermeneia/1984%E.%20Haenchen%20-%20John%20A%20Commentary%20on%20the%20Gospel%20of%20John%20C%20Chapters%207-21%2C%20Hermeneia/>.
181. James D. G. Dunn, *Christology in the Making: A New Testament Inquiry into the Origins of the Doctrine of the Incarnation*, 2nd ed. (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans, 1989), xii.

VERBAL PUNCTUATION IN THE BOOK OF MORMON II — *NEVERTHELESS*

John Gee

Abstract: *One example of verbal punctuation that has a very clear pattern of usage in the Book of Mormon is the term nevertheless. It is used to draw a marked contrast between what the previous text would lead one to expect and what follows it. It is not clear what the ancient antecedent to the term might be and the English term and usage might be an artefact of the translation process. The frequency and usage of nevertheless in the Book of Mormon contrasts with the way that Joseph Smith's writings use it.*

Modern books use marks as punctuation to help structure the narrative. The Book of Mormon, being an ancient book, uses words as punctuation, rather than marks. Having established the existence of verbal punctuation in the Book of Mormon,¹ other individual items of verbal punctuation remain to be explored. I will examine one whose function in the Book of Mormon is clear, but whose other features are more complicated.

A Note on Methodology

In looking at verbal punctuation in the Book of Mormon, the following general method is employed.

1. The most important consideration is how a particular feature is used in the Book of Mormon text. All other considerations are secondary. Examples of usage are, whenever possible, drawn from every book in the Book of Mormon. This

1. John Gee, "Verbal Punctuation in the Book of Mormon I: (And) Now," *Interpreter: A Journal of Latter-day Saint Faith and Scholarship* 50 (2022): 33–50, <https://interpreterfoundation.org/verbal-punctuation-in-the-book-of-mormon-i-and-now/>.

provides the reader with multiple illustrations that cover the whole gamut of the text as well as a check on whether there are chronological developments within the Book of Mormon. To avoid too lengthy of a list, generally only one or two examples from each book are cited.

2. The Book of Mormon claims to be based on a language consisting of “the learning of the Jews and the language of the Egyptians” (1 Nephi 1:2). Therefore both Hebrew and Egyptian are considered in providing antecedents to the expressions in the Book of Mormon. Where possible, if the expressions occur in the Isaiah portions of the Book of Mormon, the corresponding Hebrew text serves as a guide to finding Hebrew equivalents. These can then be examined in the parts of the Hebrew Bible that claim to be pre-exilic to see if the Book of Mormon has Hebrew parallels. Proposed Egyptian parallels are less secure.
3. Because many claim that the Book of Mormon is not ancient; and that it came through the dictation of Joseph Smith, Joseph Smith’s usage from around the time of the Book of Mormon is also compared. Finding examples of Joseph Smith’s early usage, however, is a complicated matter. For the purposes of these studies, Stanford Carmack’s collection of early Joseph Smith documents (available through WordCruncher²) are used.³ These consist of ten early letters (from October 1829 to January 1833) and his 1832 history; they are documents that were written around the same time as the Book of Mormon and provide enough material to be

2. “WordCruncher: Search, Study and Analyze,” v.7.1.107 (Digital Humanities, Brigham Young University, 1991–2022), Windows 10, app by Jason Dzubak, James Rosenvall, and Monte Shelley, <https://wordcruncher.com>.

3. See the WordCruncher collection “Joseph Smith: Early Writings,” compiled by Stanford Carmack, in the WordCruncher Bookstore, <https://wordcruncher.com/library>. This collection has documents taken from the Joseph Smith Papers website (<https://www.josephsmithpapers.org>), with some modifications in spelling, punctuation, and paragraphing. The documents are: Letter to Oliver Cowdery, 22 October 1829; Letter to the Church in Colesville, 2 December 1830; Letter to Martin Harris, 22 February 1831; Letter to Hyrum Smith, 3–4 March 1831; Letter to Emma Smith, 6 June 1832; Letter to William W. Phelps, 31 July 1832; Letter to Emma Smith, 13 October 1832; Letter to William W. Phelps, 27 November 1832; Letter to Noah C. Saxton, 4 January 1833; Letter to William W. Phelps, 11 January 1833; and History, circa Summer 1832.

linguistically useful. Students of Joseph Smith have noted stylistic changes in his usage over time (indeed an example of these changes will be documented later in this article), and so it is important to narrow the scope of Joseph Smith's writings used to the time period when the Book of Mormon was dictated.

4. The Doctrine and Covenants presents a special case. Because the bulk of the Doctrine and Covenants dates early (88 of the sections were received by the end of 1832), it could, in theory, significantly expand the corpus of early material to compare to the Book of Mormon. The Doctrine and Covenants is excluded from consideration in this study for two reasons. The first, and most important, is that authorship of the Doctrine and Covenants is disputed similarly to the way the authorship of the Book of Mormon is disputed. Views of Doctrine and Covenants authorship may be simplified into three general camps: (i) those who believe that the Doctrine and Covenants represent the actual words of the Lord as He spoke them; (ii) those who believe that the Doctrine and Covenants represent the thoughts of the Lord in the phrasing of Joseph Smith; and (iii) those who believe that Joseph Smith is writing the Doctrine and Covenants and pretending that it is God talking.

The first two opinions are both held by faithful members of the Church; the last opinion is generally held by those who are not members of the Church. For those who hold the first opinion, including the Doctrine and Covenants in the corpus of Joseph Smith's early writings is wildly inappropriate since the words are believed to not be his. Rather than attempting to settle the issue in this case, it is better to bracket the issue by removing the corpus from consideration and limiting our explorations to material that is generally agreed to be either written or dictated by Joseph Smith.

The second reason to exclude the Doctrine and Covenants is that it has been heavily edited. As anyone who has looked at the early manuscripts of the Doctrine and Covenants knows, before it was published, many different hands edited

the dictated text in the manuscripts.⁴ This editing tended to expunge archaic features in the text (such as changing *thou* to *you*), although in an inconsistent fashion. The result is a linguistically mixed text that is unusable for analysis as published. Furthermore, while the editing appears in different hands, we do not know whether the editing is dictated by Joseph Smith and recorded in the hands of a scribe or editorial work by the scribe. Assumption of the former would mean that the published text would more likely conform to Joseph Smith's usage, but assumption of the latter would mean that the published text is corrupted away from what might be presumed to be Joseph Smith's usage. Either of these considerations (authorship or editing) dictates against using the Doctrine and Covenants to furnish examples of Joseph Smith's early usage. Those who wish to use the Doctrine and Covenants as reflecting Joseph Smith's early usage have a great amount of basic linguistic work to demonstrate that it is before they can do so.

Individual items of analysis may require appropriate adjustments to the methodology to handle special cases.

Examples of Book of Mormon Usage

Among the various examples of verbal punctuation in the Book of Mormon is the term *nevertheless*, which term occurs 177 times in the Book of Mormon. One of these usages, in 3 Nephi 19:26, is arguably incorrectly divided and should be the archaic expression *never the less*, meaning "not in any way less" or "by no means less."⁵ The function of the term *nevertheless* in the Book of Mormon is easy to explain. It functions as an adversative that serves to draw a distinction between what comes before and what comes after, where the contrast between what precedes and what follows is so stark that nothing that comes before would prepare the reader for what follows.

4. See *The Joseph Smith Papers—Revelations and Translations*, vol. 1, *Manuscript Revelation Books* (Salt Lake City: Church Historian's Press, 2010).

5. Royal Skousen, *The History of the Text of the Book of Mormon: Part Three: The Nature of the Original Language* (Provo, UT: Foundation for Ancient Research and Mormon Studies, 2018), 380–81; Skousen, *Analysis of Textual Variants of the Book of Mormon: Part Six: 3 Nephi 19–Moroni 10, Addenda* (Provo, UT: Foundation for Ancient Research and Mormon Studies, 2009), 3448–49.

The first example that occurs in the Book of Mormon illustrates this usage:

... having seen many afflictions in the course of my days,
nevertheless, having been highly favored of the Lord in all my
 days. (1 Nephi 1:1)

Saying that one had seen many afflictions would not necessarily lead one to conclude that one was highly favored of the Lord. Normally in the ancient world one would think that someone who is highly favored of a god would see fewer afflictions than one who is not. Nephi provides an explanation in that the afflictions took place “in the course of my days,” whereas the favor of the Lord occurred “in all my days.” In other words, the afflictions were sporadic while the favor was constant.

This usage is paralleled later in the text when Lehi tells his son, Jacob,

And behold, in thy childhood thou hast suffered afflictions
 and much sorrow, because of the rudeness of thy brethren.
Nevertheless, Jacob, my firstborn in the wilderness, thou
 knowest the greatness of God; and he shall consecrate thine
 afflictions for thy gain. (2 Nephi 2:1–2)

The term *nevertheless* can also structure the narrative, as it does in the so-called Psalm of Nephi:

Behold, my soul delighteth in the things of the Lord; and my
 heart pondereth continually upon the things which I have
 seen and heard.

Nevertheless, notwithstanding the great goodness of the
 Lord, in showing me his great and marvelous works, my
 heart exclaimeth: O wretched man that I am! Yea, my heart
 sorroweth because of my flesh; my soul grieveth because of
 mine iniquities. I am encompassed about, because of the
 temptations and the sins which do so easily beset me. And
 when I desire to rejoice, my heart groaneth because of my sins;
nevertheless, I know in whom I have trusted. My God hath
 been my support; he hath led me through mine afflictions in
 the wilderness; and he hath preserved me upon the waters of
 the great deep. (2 Nephi 4:16–20)

The text begins on a positive note that continues until the first *nevertheless* appears. It then changes to a negative mood until the second *nevertheless*. After that, it finishes in a hopeful mood. The term

nevertheless divides the text into three parts and marks the transition between the three sections.

The contrast can be used in something as mundane as a list:

Now the people which were not Lamanites were Nephites; *nevertheless*, they were called Nephites, Jacobites, Josephites, Zoramites, Lamanites, Lemuelites, and Ishmaelites. (Jacob 1:13)

Here Jacob notes that although for convenience he was going to combine the various groups into two categories, there were properly seven distinct groups related to lineage.

Behold, it is expedient that much should be done among this people, because of the hardness of their hearts, and the deafness of their ears, and the blindness of their minds, and the stiffness of their necks; *nevertheless*, God is exceedingly merciful unto them, and has not as yet swept them off from the face of the land. (Jarom 1:3)

One would expect that God would not extend his mercy to a people who was described as so stiff-necked as the Nephites were in the time of Jarom. He notes that contrary to expectations, God was still merciful to them and did not give them what they deserved. This may not have always been the case — as the examples of Ammonihah, the destruction at the time of the crucifixion, and the final days of Nephite civilization illustrate — but it clearly was here. In fact, the next usage in Omni demonstrates a counterexample:

Wherefore, the Lord did visit them in great judgment; *nevertheless*, he did spare the righteous that they should not perish, but did deliver them out of the hands of their enemies. (Omni 1:7)

The expectation is that when the Lord visited the Nephites in judgment, all the Nephites would have been destroyed. Contrary to that expectation, the righteous portion were spared.

And now Limhi was desirous that his father should not be destroyed; *nevertheless*, Limhi was not ignorant of the iniquities of his father, he himself being a just man. (Mosiah 19:17)

One would expect that since Limhi wanted his father to live, he either did not realize that his father was wicked or that he himself was wicked like his father. The situation was actually contrary to those expectations.

And it came to pass that they took him; and his name was Nehor; and they carried him upon the top of the hill Manti, and there he was caused, or rather did acknowledge, between the heavens and the earth, that what he had taught to the people was contrary to the word of God; and there he suffered an ignominious death. *Nevertheless*, this did not put an end to the spreading of priestcraft through the land. (Alma 1:15–16)

If the reader thought that the death of Nehor would have put an end to the problem of priestcraft, then the text hastens to assure the reader that that expectation will not be met, and this is marked by the use of the term *nevertheless*.

And there being but little timber upon the face of the land, *nevertheless* the people who went forth became exceedingly expert in the working of cement; therefore they did build houses of cement, in the which they did dwell. (Helaman 3:7)

The societal expectation was that houses were built of lumber, yet that group had little lumber available. (This indicates that the geographic region in which most of the Book of Mormon took place had an abundance of trees.) One would expect that this would prove difficult for people to find housing and that they might be reduced to tents. The use of *nevertheless* explains why this expectation was incorrect.

... they heard a voice as if it came out of heaven; and they cast their eyes round about, for they understood not the voice which they heard; and it was not a harsh voice, neither was it a loud voice; *nevertheless*, and notwithstanding it being a small voice it did pierce them that did hear to the center, insomuch that there was no part of their frame that it did not cause to quake; yea, it did pierce them to the very soul, and did cause their hearts to burn. (3 Nephi 11:3)

One expects that a small voice that was neither loud nor harsh would have little impact on a crowd conversing one with another. Contrary to that expectation, the voice was piercing and caused the multitude to quake and had a profound impact on them.

Therefore they did exercise power and authority over the disciples of Jesus who did tarry with them, and they did cast them into prison; but by the power of the word of God, which was in them, the prisons were rent in twain, and they went forth doing mighty miracles among them. *Nevertheless*, and

notwithstanding all these miracles, the people did harden their hearts, and did seek to kill them, even as the Jews at Jerusalem sought to kill Jesus, according to his word. (4 Nephi 1:30–31)

One expects that the three Nephites exercising miracles and rending prisons might have been treated the way Alma and Amulek had been (Alma 14:28–15:1), or that Nephi and Lehi had been (Helaman 5:49–51). Such, however, was not the case. Instead, the people tried to kill them, and the use of *nevertheless* signals that contrast.

... they did curse God, and wish to die. *Nevertheless* they would struggle with the sword for their lives. (Mormon 2:14)

One might expect that someone who wished to die would not bother to fight but would just surrender to death. The situation as Nephite civilization was destroyed was not according to what the reader might be led to expect.

For behold, ye shall be as a whale in the midst of the sea; for the mountain waves shall dash upon you. *Nevertheless*, I will bring you up again out of the depths of the sea. (Ether 2:24)

If one is told that mountain waves will be covering one, the expectation is that one would drown. The term *nevertheless* reassures that the Lord supported the Jaredites in their voyage.

Moroni does not use the term *nevertheless* in his own record (he does use it in Mormon 8:12). He is not drawing contrasts or highlighting ironies in the historical situation, because he is not dealing with historical situations other than a brief note on his own situation (Moroni 1:1–3).

These examples show that the term *nevertheless* is used in the Book of Mormon to show that matters were not as the text previously described might lead one to expect to be the case. Although it is used to draw contrasts on a smaller narrative scale, it can also be used to structure larger units of text.

Hebrew and Egyptian Antecedents

Finding a Hebrew or Egyptian antecedent of the term *nevertheless* is not as clear-cut as other examples of verbal punctuation. The term *nevertheless* appears only once in Isaiah portions of the Book of Mormon (2 Nephi 19:1 = Isaiah 8:23). Here it translates the Hebrew term *kî*. The Hebrew term *kî*, however, has a wide variety of usage. An adversative is

just one of the possibilities.⁶ It can also introduce an object clause,⁷ or direct narration,⁸ or be causal,⁹ conditional,¹⁰ asseverative,¹¹ temporal,¹² or consecutive.¹³

Hebrew *kî* has cognates in other Semitic languages, but those cognates do not necessarily have the same functions as Hebrew *kî*. We do, however, see some of the same functions in Ugaritic,¹⁴ Akkadian,¹⁵ and early Aramaic.¹⁶ Old and Middle Egyptian seem to have had no adversative particles except *swt*.¹⁷ Though Late Egyptian had two (*hr* and *hr-iw*),¹⁸ they are not used that way in Egyptian of the Third Intermediate Period¹⁹ or Demotic.²⁰ Coptic borrowed its adversative particles from Greek.²¹

6. E. Kautzsch and A. E. Cowley, *Gesenius' Hebrew Grammar* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1910), 500 §163.

7. Ibid., 491 §157b.

8. Ibid., 491 §157b.

9. Ibid., 492 §158b.

10. Ibid., 497 §159aa-bb.

11. Ibid., 498 §159ee.

12. Ibid., 502 §164d.

13. Ibid., 318 §107u, 505 §166b.

14. Gregorio del Olmo Lete and Joaquín Sanmartín, *A Dictionary of the Ugaritic Language in the Alphabetic Tradition* (Leiden, NLD: E. J. Brill, 2015), 417–19; Pierre Bordreuil and Dennis Pardee, *A Manual of Ugaritic* (Winona Lake, IN: Eisenbrauns, 2009), 59.

15. CAD K 316–20.

16. Rainer Degen, *Altaramäische Grammatik der Inschriften des 10.-8. Jh. v. Chr.* (Wiesbaden, DEU: Franz Steiner, 1969), 61, 63.

17. Elmar Edel, *Altägyptische Grammatik* (Rome: Pontificium Institutum Biblicum, 1964), 421; Alan H. Gardiner, *Egyptian Grammar*, 3rd ed. (Oxford: Griffith Institute, 1957), 174–89; James P. Allen, *Middle Egyptian* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2014), 213–21.

18. These are not listed in Jaroslav Černý, Sarah Israelit Groll and Christopher Eyre, *A Late Egyptian Grammar* (Rome: Biblical Institute Press, 1984), 142–53.

19. Karl Jansen-Winkeln, *Spätmittelägyptische Grammatik der Texte der 3. Zwischenzeit* (Wiesbaden, DEU: Harrassowitz, 1996), 206–17. Jansen-Winkeln does list *swt* as adversative (p. 216), but it is only attested once.

20. See Wilhelm Spiegelberg, *Demotische Grammatik* (Heidelberg, DEU: Carl Winters Universitätsbuchhandlung, 1925), 65–67, 184–92. Note that Spiegelberg's adversative *iiry* (p. 192) has been reanalyzed as a second tense converter.

21. Walter C. Till, *Koptische Grammatik* (Leipzig, DEU: VEB Verlag Enzyklopädie, 1978), 186; Bentley Layton, *A Coptic Grammar* (Wiesbaden, DEU: Harrassowitz, 2000), 180.

	Hebrew	Ugaritic	Akkadian	Aramaic
Direct Narration	<i>kî</i>	<i>k</i>	<i>ki</i>	
Causal	<i>kî</i>	<i>k</i>	<i>ki</i>	<i>ky</i>
Conditional	<i>kî</i>	<i>k</i>	<i>ki</i>	
Adversative	<i>kî</i>	<i>k</i>		
Asservative	<i>kî</i>	<i>k</i>		
Temporal	<i>kî</i>	<i>k</i>	<i>ki</i>	
Consecutive	<i>kî</i>	<i>k</i>		<i>kh</i>

These various uses of *kî* mean that it is not always translated with the same word or words in English. Thus, in the book of Isaiah in the King James Version, *kî* is translated in the following ways:

“for” (causal)	219 (65.6%)
“that” (object clause/direct narration)	36 (10.8%)
“because” (causal)	25 (7.5%)
“when” (temporal)	20 (6.0%)
“but” (adversative)	16 (4.8%)
“surely” (asservative)	3 (0.9%)
“forasmuch” (causal)	2 (0.6%)
“though” (adversative)	2 (0.6%)
“yea” (asservative)	2 (0.6%)
(not translated) (direct narration)	2 (0.6%)
“doubtless” (asservative)	1 (0.3%)
“even” (asservative)	1 (0.3%)
“if” (conditional)	1 (0.3%)
“neither” (adversative)	1 (0.3%)
“nevertheless” (adversative)	1 (0.3%)
“therefore” (consecutive)	1 (0.3%)
“yet” (adversative)	1 (0.3%)

There are seventeen different ways in which the King James translators translated *kî* in Isaiah. One of those is *nevertheless*. There are also other Hebrew expressions that the King James translators translated by *nevertheless*, including *’ak* (Leviticus 11:4, 36), *’epes kî* (Numbers 13:28), and *wa-* (Numbers 14:44), or *û-* (Exodus 32:34). Good translations do not necessarily have a one-to-one correspondence between words in the source language and words in the target language. The use of *nevertheless* would seem to be an artifact of the translation.

In the Book of Mormon, we have the following adversatives used:

but	993 times (64.0%)
neither	185 times (11.9%)

nevertheless	177 times (11.4%)
nor	143 times (9.2%)
yet	29 times (1.9%)
though	21 times (1.4%)
although	3 times (0.2%)
howbeit	1 time (0.1%) ²²
however	0 times (0%)

Thus, an examination of Hebrew usage shows that while the term *nevertheless* may be a translation of a particular ancient term, that ancient term might be translated in other ways within the Book of Mormon text and thus the usage of *nevertheless* within the Book of Mormon is an artifact of the translation into English.

Joseph Smith's Usage

Some claim that Joseph Smith wrote the Book of Mormon and others claim that he translated it into his own language,²³ so it is worth looking at the language of Joseph Smith's usage. If we look at Joseph Smith's usage from 1829 to 1832, we find the following adversatives used:

but	96 times (91.4%)
neither	6 times (5.7%)
although	1 time (1.0%)
nevertheless	1 time (1.0%)
nor	1 time (1.0%)
howbeit	0 times (0%)
however	0 times (0%)
though	0 times (0%)
yet	0 times (0%)

In his personal writings around the time the Book of Mormon was dictated, Joseph Smith does not use the variety of adversatives used in the Book of Mormon.

The one time that Joseph Smith uses *nevertheless* is in his 1832 History:

22. For usage of the phrase *how be it* in the Book of Mormon, see the discussion in Skousen, *The History of the Text of the Book of Mormon: Part Three: The Nature of the Original Language*, 365–67.

23. Grant Hardy, "Ancient History and Modern Commandments: The Book of Mormon in Comparison with Joseph Smith's Other Revelations," in *Producing Ancient Scripture: Joseph Smith's Translation Projects in the Development of Mormon Christianity* (Salt Lake City: University of Utah Press, 2020), 209.

... for many days I could rejoice with great Joy and the Lord was with me but could find none that would believe the hevny vision *nevertheless* I pondered these things in my heart²⁴

Unlike the Book of Mormon, the text following the use of *nevertheless* does not appear to be contrary to the expectations of the text before. Whether or not others believed him would seem to have no bearing on whether Joseph Smith pondered the events. Joseph Smith does not seem to use *nevertheless* the way it is used in the Book of Mormon.

Compare this use to Joseph Smith's later 1835–1836 journal:

but	144 times (62.1%)
nor	27 times (11.6%)
yet	21 times (9.1%)
although	14 times (6.0%)
however	10 times (4.3%)
neither	7 times (3.0%)
nevertheless	5 times (2.2%)
though	4 times (1.7%)
howbeit	0 times (0%)

The greatest change in Joseph Smith's frequency of usage between the two corpora is in the use of *nor*, *yet*, and *however*. In both the Book of Mormon and in Joseph Smith's writings at the time, *however* was not used. In the use of *nor*, Joseph Smith's 1835 frequency of usage is much more similar to that of the Book of Mormon than it is in his own writings at the time the Book of Mormon was written. Joseph Smith uses *yet* much more frequently in 1835 than he does when the Book of Mormon was written or than it is in the Book of Mormon.

In all of Joseph Smith's writings, the term *nevertheless* is used with much less frequency than it is in the Book of Mormon. When he does use it, he uses it in a way that differs from that of the Book of Mormon.

Conclusion

The term *nevertheless* is used in the Book of Mormon to draw a stark contrast between the text before and the text after. It is therefore used to structure the text, at least on the small scale. The use of the term *nevertheless* in the Book of Mormon does not have clear ties to antiquity

24. Joseph Smith, "History 1832, p. 2," in *The Joseph Smith Papers: Histories Volume 1: Joseph Smith Histories, 1832–1844* (Salt Lake City: The Church Historian's Press, 2012), 13, <https://www.josephsmithpapers.org/paper-summary/history-circa-summer-1832/3>.

and may be a creation of the translation process. It is used distinctively in the Book of Mormon, and this is in contrast to Joseph Smith's usage in his own writings.

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MOSES AS MIDWIFE: WHAT THE EXODUS BIRTH STORY TEACHES ABOUT MOTHERHOOD AND CHRIST

Becky Holderness Tilton

Abstract: *This work explores an alternative interpretation of the Exodus narrative as a metaphor for childbirth. Gleaning from Old Testament and Judaic sources, we find rich female birth and salvific imagery in the saga of the migration of the children of Israel and the Passover itself. This perspective of sacred childbirth, when coupled with traditional Christian interpretations of the first Passover, ultimately paints an enhanced picture of the Atonement of Jesus Christ.*

The Exodus account of the birth of the Israelite nation is an allegorical masterpiece, inspiring scripture and sacred worship the world over. The narrative acquaints us with the personal journey of Moses, from his ignominious beginning in a slave dwelling to his triumphant delivery of thousands from bondage — a tale venerated by Judaism, Islam, and Christianity alike. Though many iterations of the Exodus story focus on Moses as the heroic protagonist in the miraculous military victory over Egypt, the story can also be explored from a different vantage point: Moses as figurative midwife, delivering the children of Israel from the confines of the womb.

Childbearing in the time of the Exodus, as in any pre-modern period, was a perilous endeavor. According to conservative estimates, around one in three infants and one in forty mothers did not survive the birth process anciently.¹ Experienced midwives who could mitigate

1. Donald Todman, "Childbirth in Ancient Rome: From Traditional Folklore to Obstetrics," *Australian and New Zealand Journal of Obstetrics & Gynaecology* 47, no. 2 (2007): 82–85, <https://obgyn.onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/abs/10.1111/j.1479-828X.2007.00691.x>.

the dangers of childbirth held a prestigious place in early societies, as entire nations thrived or declined depending on their birth rates. The role of midwife is honored in several Old Testament texts where God is described as performing the duties of a midwife. God delivers a newborn (Job 10:18–19, 38:8; Isaiah 66:8–9), clothes it (Job 10:10–12, 38:8–9), and places it in its mother’s arms (Psalm 22:9–10).²

The concept of the Exodus as a birth metaphor has been cited by many contemporary Jewish scholars as well as medieval³ and renaissance-era⁴ Biblical commentators. Viewing the Exodus story from a childbirth perspective has the potential to illuminate many aspects of birth and motherhood that are perhaps underrepresented in traditional western religious thought. These sacred principles regarding birth nevertheless play an essential part in ultimate exaltation. The Exodus story resolutely champions the divine commission of women through the actions of its female cast. The story also entwines sacred motherhood with the redemptive mission of Jesus Christ through the symbolism of the migration of the children of Israel and the Passover itself.

The Women of the Exodus

Throughout the Exodus narrative, powerful women are portrayed in remarkable ways. The book of Exodus unfolds, as many stories do, with birth — and where there is birth, there are mothers. The fertile women of the family of Israel bore many children, outpacing the population growth of the Egyptians and causing national security concerns (Exodus 1:7–9). When the king of Egypt commanded midwives to slay newborn Israelite males, the midwives refused to comply. It was through the courageous actions of these midwives that the rebellion against Egypt began (Exodus 1:15–17). Moses’s mother Jochebed acted as protectress, risking

2. For a list of references to God as mother, midwife, and nursemaid, see Don C. Benjamin, “Israel’s God: Mother and Midwife,” *Biblical Theology Bulletin: A Journal of Bible and Theology* 19, no. 4 (November 1989): 115, https://www.researchgate.net/publication/249840367_Israel%27s_God_Mother_and_Midwife.

3. Rabbi Yitzchak Luria (The Holy Ari), 14th-century father of Kabbalism, proposes this idea. See Moshe Yaakov Wisnefsky, ed. and trans., “Exodus: Birth of the Soul,” *Chabad* (blog), *Chabad-Lubavitch Media Center*, https://www.chabad.org/kabbalah/article_cdo/aid/379810/jewish/Exodus-Birth-of-the-Soul.htm.

4. Rabbi Yisrael ben Eliezer [Baal Shem Tov], 16th-century founder of Hasidic Judaism, proposes this idea. See “Thirty-Six Aphorisms of the Baal Shem Tov,” Jewish History, *Chabad* (blog), *Chabad-Lubavitch Media Center*, https://www.chabad.org/library/article_cdo/aid/3073/jewish/36-Aphorisms-of-the-Baal-Shem-Tov.htm.

her life to hide her child with faith that he would be preserved from danger (Exodus 2:2–3), and Pharaoh's daughter became his adoptive mother (Exodus 2:5–10). Moses' wife Zipporah took upon herself the role of priestess when she administered the rite of circumcision to their son (Exodus 4:26).⁵ Moses' sister Miriam, who assists him in leading Israel, is described as a prophetess (Exodus 15:20).

Women shape the Exodus account as mothers, rebels, protectresses, nurturers, priestesses, and prophetesses. Unlike many other Old Testament histories that often depict women on the sidelines, these women are active participants in the salvation of Israel, moving the story forward in important ways. Their deeds indicate that rather than receiving direction from an outside authority, each acted under personal moral authority. According to Rav Avira's Talmudic commentary, "In the merit of the righteous women that were in that generation, the Jewish people were redeemed from Egypt."⁶

Egypt as the Womb

In addition to the compelling contributions of the individual female actors in the Biblical account, a broader theme of childbirth subtly permeates its pages. The Exodus story is widely regarded as the birth of the Israelite nation, the transformation of a subjugated family tribe into a sovereign people.⁷ As midwife or deliverer, Moses received heavenly help to guide the fledgling Israelites out of Egypt. In the Hebrew language, the word for Egypt is *Mitzrayim* (מצרים),⁸ which can be translated as a "narrow place" and may have reference to the birth canal. Related to *Mitzrayim* is the root "צר" (*tsar*), which, while it can mean "narrow straits," can

5. Genesis accounts portraying circumcision as a requisite for males entering the Abrahamic covenant — in fact, perhaps the *only* requisite for covenant males — underscore its religious necessity during the time of Zipporah (see Genesis 17:26). As such, I assert that this rite was a priestly obligation rather than a familial or medical obligation.

6. *The William Davidson Talmud*, Sotah 11b:4, Sefaria (website), <http://sefaria.org/Sotah.11b.4>.

7. Avivah Gottlieb Zornberg, "Maggid: The First Passover Story," in *Hebrew College Passover Companion*, ed. Rachel Adelman, Jane L. Kanarek, and Gail Twersky Reimer (Newton Center, MA: Hebrew College, 2020), 25, https://hebrewcollege.edu/wp-content/uploads/2020/03/Passover-Companion-2020_Digital.pdf.

8. Francis Brown, S. R. Driver, and Charles A. Briggs, *The Brown-Driver-Briggs Hebrew and English Lexicon* (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson Publishers, 2001), s.v. "מצרים," 595.

also mean “enemy” or “adversary.”⁹ A verb from a related root means “to suffer distress” and can refer to the distress of labor pains, as in Jeremiah 48:41 and 49:22, both mentioning “a woman in her pangs.”¹⁰

The dual *Mitzrayim* (מצרים) is derived from the singular *matsor* (מצור),¹¹ which is likely derived from *tsur* (צור), meaning “to bind, tie up, encircle.”¹² Though *Mitzrayim* may be related to the Israelites’ captivity or bondage in Egypt, this binding and encircling language may also describe enclosure in the womb. If so, the Exodus from Egypt may be viewed as a deliverance from the binding or constraint of the womb. The Book of Mormon might suggest a connection to Egypt with the idea of binding or bondage. Nephi₁ speaks of “the God of our fathers, who were led out of Egypt, out of bondage” (1 Nephi 19:10). References to both Egypt and “bondage” are also found in Mosiah 12:34 (quoting Exodus 20:2), Alma 29:12, and Alma 36:28. The latter passage is interesting, for it comes after Alma₂ describes his miraculous conversion and deliverance from the pains of hell, declaring several times that he has been *born of God* (vv. 5, 23, 24, and 26) and stating that God has delivered him and will still deliver him (v. 27). Then Alma₂ speaks of Egypt and bondage:

And I know that he will raise me up at the last day, to dwell with him in glory; yea, and I will praise him forever, for he has brought our fathers out of Egypt, and he has swallowed up the Egyptians in the Red Sea; and he led them by his power into the promised land; yea, and he has delivered them out of bondage and captivity from time to time. (Alma 36:28)

The parting of the waters of the Red Sea also brings strong birth imagery: the waters miraculously make way for the children of Israel, as amniotic waters make way for the birth of a newborn child.

When viewing Egypt as the confined place of the womb from which the Israelite nation is born, an interesting pattern emerges that reflects a woman’s journey from childhood to motherhood. Kabbalistic and contemporary Judaic teachings indicate that the first and final plagues

9. Brown, Driver, and Briggs, *Lexicon*, s.v. “צַר,” 865.

10. Brown, Driver, and Briggs, *Lexicon*, s.v. “צָרַר,” 865. Like *tsur*, *tsarar* (צָרַר) is principally translated as “to bind or treat with hostility.”

11. Brown, Driver, and Briggs, *Lexicon*, s.v. “מִצּוֹר,” 848. This word is used in 2 Kings 19:24, which in the KJV has “my feet have I dried up all the rivers of besieged places,” with *matsor* (מִצּוֹר) translated as “besieged places,” while the NASB20 (New American Standard Bible 2020) has “with the soles of my feet I dried up / All the streams of Egypt.”

12. Brown, Driver, and Briggs, *Lexicon*, s.v. “צוֹר,” [848].

act as bookends to the female reproductive process, possibly symbolizing menarche¹³ and childbirth, and it is the opinion of this author that this concept deserves exploration.

The first plague to afflict the land of Egypt was the transformation of the rivers and pools of water into blood, causing the fish to die and the water to become undrinkable (Exodus 7:19–21). This plague could have a metaphorical connection to female reproductive development.¹⁴ The primary sign of female maturation is a transformation of “water” to blood during first menstruation. When stripped to its essence, menstruation signals the death of potential life. One Talmudic commentary frames the first plague with these words: “God does all at once; kills and gives life at once, harms and heals at once. [God hears the prayers of] a woman on the birthing stool. . . . And all the waters in the Nile were turned to blood, and returned blood to water. Living flesh is turned to a corpse, and the corpse is returned to life. The staff is turned to a snake, and the snake is returned to a staff. The sea is turned to dry land, and the dry land is returned to sea.”¹⁵ These natural cycles of life and death are evident in a temporarily bloodied river that can no longer sustain life and in a womb outpouring undeveloped life, only to be restored and begin the cycle afresh.

The final plague to torment Egypt, or the first Passover, contains many parallels to the childbirth process. When Moses instructed the Israelite households to slaughter a young lamb and paint the doorposts of their dwellings with its blood, each family created a figurative womb, or place of safety (Exodus 12:5–7). The Israelites then gathered together in this sanctified space, and only covenant (or circumcised) males were allowed entrance (Exodus 12:44).¹⁶ They were commanded to stay in this protected place until a prescribed amount of time had passed (or they

13. *Menarche* is a term for the first occurrence of menstruation.

14. The correlation of the first plague with menarche was taught by Kabbalist Yitzchak Luria in the 14th century CE. See Moshe Wisniefsky (translator), *Apples from the Orchard: Gleanings from the Mystical Teachings of Rabbi Yitzchak Luria* (Malibu, CA: Thirty Seven Books, 2006), <http://www.yeshshem.com/ari-shemot-5779.htm>.

15. *Shemot Rabbah* is a Talmudic commentary of unknown authorship that is thought to have been compiled in the twelfth century CE *Shemot Rabbah*, 28:4, Sefaria (website), https://www.sefaria.org/Shemot_Rabbah.28.4?lang=bi.

16. The significance of the womb space being reserved for circumcised males may correlate with the strict observance of covenant-only sexual relations among the children of Israel, as portrayed in the story of Dinah (Genesis 34:1–26). Other sanctified spaces, such as temples, are also reserved for those in the covenant.

had come to term), after which they could emerge unharmed (Exodus 12:13, 22).

On the fateful morning following the first Passover, each Egyptian household mourned the death of their firstborn, who would not emerge from the dwelling alive, similar to an infant who had perished in the womb. Conversely, the firstborn of the Israelite families were spared, like an infant who survives birth (Exodus 11:4–6). From that time forward, Israelites were commanded to sanctify their firstborn,¹⁷ for they belonged to the Lord. The focal point of this practice appears to be the sanctification of the child rather than the mother. However, the inauguration of first motherhood and the wonder of birth are suggested by the story's use of phraseology such as "openeth the womb" and "openeth the matrix" (Exodus 13:2, 12). The command to sanctify the firstborn occurs in the Exodus text immediately following the Passover account and before the flight from Pharaoh, indicating a direct connection between the Passover event and firstborn sanctification. Ancient Israelites kept the custom of painting their doorposts with blood during each annual Passover celebration, a possible recreation of the sacred act of childbirth.

From the Hebrew terminology used to describe Egypt to the symbolic action of painting the door frame with blood, the Exodus story is infused with the metaphor of birth. In the words of Rabbi Dov Linzer:

The blood on the doorframe does more than protect. It also makes the house into the womb of the nation. ... The people will be pushed out of their houses, out of their protective womb, the next morning, but the birthing process will only be complete seven days later. It is then that the people will pass through the narrow straits of the split sea. It is then that they will exit the amniotic fluid, move down the birthing canal, and exit a new people on the other side. There will be a birth from the soft, cleansing water. They will be washed of the

17. In the Hebrew text, the word *bekor* (בכר) is used to distinguish the firstborn (see Brown, Driver, and Briggs, *Lexicon*, s.v. "בכור," 114). This word is used interchangeably to indicate a male firstborn child and a firstborn child who is either male or female. Many subsequent readings by Jewish and Christian scholars, including Joseph Smith, have emphasized the maleness of the firstborn, though the original text is ambiguous. As my interpretation attempts to emphasize motherhood rather than the gender of the first child, I have chosen to use language that is inclusive of both sons and daughters. When it comes to the Passover as a foreshadowing of the Atonement of Jesus Christ, does it matter that the Savior is male? While there is significance in His being a son, this significance is perhaps surpassed by His being the only begotten *child* of God.

blood and filth of the Egyptians, their umbilical cord will be cut, and they will be free to become a strong and independent nation.¹⁸

Once the Israelites had reached the safety of the far shore, Miriam led the women in a jubilee of song and dance, just as midwives rejoiced anciently when a child was safely born (Exodus 15:20).¹⁹ As a modern continuation of this tradition, many Jewish women throughout the Near East honor life's celebratory moments, including birth, with a distinctive piercing cry or ululation.²⁰ When the dangers of their confinement had passed, the children of Israel were then free to develop themselves as a sovereign people.

A lamentation of Moses recorded in the book of Numbers clearly invokes the childbirth metaphor. Moses, having been tasked with the leadership of the obstinate nation of Israel, writes these words: "Have I conceived this people? have I begotten them, that thou shouldest say to me, Carry them in thy bosom, as a nursing father beareth the sucking child, unto the land which thou swarest unto their fathers?" (Numbers 11:12). Moses appears to be reminding God that the conception, birth, and nurturance of the children of Israel is God's obligation and pleads for help in sustaining them. His language is that of a desperate midwife who must enlist the help of a mother to nourish a fledgling infant.

Redemption and Motherhood

The miracle of the Exodus is in the deliverance of thousands of enslaved families from physical bondage, a storyline that parallels the miracle through which the human family is spiritually delivered from sin and death, the Atonement of Jesus Christ. In order for someone who is enslaved to become free, he or she must be purchased, or redeemed, by someone who has the power to offer that freedom. Freedom from sin and death is offered by the Savior, Jesus Christ. Freedom from the

18. Dov Linzer, "Birthing a Nation," YCTorah Library, Yeshivat Chovevei Torah, <https://library.yctorah.org/2015/12/birthing-a-nation/>.

19. Danya Ruttenberg, "The Rebellion Began with Two Midwives," in *The Kveller Haggadah: A Seder for Curious Kids (And Their Grownups)*, ed. Elissa Strauss and Gabrielle Birkner (Las Vegas, NV: 70 Faces Media, 2019), 28.

20. Levi Y. Heber, "Additional Sephardic Circumcision Customs: The Customs of Sephardim and Oriental Jews at a Brit Milah," *Chabad* (blog), *Chabad-Lubavitch Media Center*, https://www.chabad.org/library/article_cdo/aid/144126/jewish/Aadditional-Sephardic-Circumcision-Customs.htm.

womb, another act of delivery and an absolute imperative for our eternal development, is offered by mothers.

According to the teachings of Jesus Christ, the redemption of mankind and the physical birth of mankind are linked together — emblematic of each other. See how beautifully redemption and motherhood are intertwined in a revelation given to the family of Adam. God teaches, “Inasmuch as ye were born into the world by water, and blood, and the spirit, which I have made, and so become of the dust a living soul, even so ye must be born again into the kingdom of heaven, of water, and of the Spirit, and be cleansed by blood, even the blood of mine Only Begotten” (Moses 6:59). Here God makes a clear connection between motherhood and redemption, associating the waters of motherhood with the waters of baptism, the blood of motherhood with the blood of the Savior.

Understanding the Exodus story as a birth story is not to discard the verity of the Atonement of Jesus Christ; rather, it enforces and enshrines the eternal act of redemption. There is no alternative route to receiving a physical body than being birthed by a woman. Likewise, Jesus Christ is the way, the truth, and the life: no man cometh unto the Father, but by (or through) Him (John 14:6). Exodus womb creation and birth reenactment may have a familiar feel to the many Christian groups that practice baptism. The words of a Catholic liturgy for the blessing of baptismal water evokes this connection elegantly: “... to the end that a heavenly offspring, conceived by sanctification, may emerge from the immaculate womb of this divine font, reborn a new creature: and may all, however distinguished either by sex in body, or by age in time, be brought forth to the same infancy by grace, their mother.”²¹ Indeed, each time a baptismal font is filled with water in preparation for immersion, a figurative womb is being created through which an initiate experiences spiritual rebirth (John 3:3–7).²²

According to Ilana Pardes’ *The Biography of Ancient Israel*, “The Israelites are delivered collectively out of the womb of Egypt. National

21. “Holy Saturday-Vigil,” Daily Mass, The Fatima Center, April 8, 2023, <https://fatima.org/fatima-messages/daily-mass/holy-saturday-vigil/>.

22. Though a Latter-day Saint audience may be more familiar with the baptismal imagery of death and resurrection (D&C 76:51, Romans 6:4), the understanding of being buried and rising with Christ does not nullify His teachings about baptism as a rebirth in Christ (Moses 6:59, John 1:12–13, 3:3–7). Birth and resurrection are necessary events for our ultimate exaltation, each representing a new beginning and a step toward godliness. What wisdom in God to use our human experiences with both birth and death to help illustrate the spiritual transformation of the baptismal covenant.

birth, much like individual births, takes place on a delicate border between life and death. It involves the transformation of blood from a signifier of death to a signifier of life. It also involves the successful opening of the womb, the prevention of the womb's turning into a tomb."²³ How like the miracle of birth is Christ's atoning sacrifice, each occurring on the border between life and death, where blood transforms from a sign of death to a sign of life, successfully opening a way beyond the tomb! This correlation may lead one to reconsider Gethsemane as a holy birthing place, where Jesus Christ acted as birthmother, shedding his blood to deliver each of us (John 1:12–13).

Conclusion

The Exodus narrative is a powerful place to discover the salvific elements inherent in the feminine, from the actions of the women in the story to the rebirth practices it evokes. The masculine and feminine stand side by side in Isaiah's description of the Lord going forth as a mighty man of war, crying and prevailing against his enemies, like a woman in labor (Isaiah 42:13–14). The influence of our western heritage perhaps makes us more comfortable adopting male role models like king, warrior, bridegroom and craftsman as symbols of God. However, a God patterned after exemplars such as mother, midwife, and nursemaid are prolific in Old Testament prophetic writings. As we seek a more complete knowledge of the Atonement of Jesus Christ, we do well to faithfully examine the salvific contributions made by women and encourage female perspectives to be part of the dialogue, for all are alike unto God (2 Nephi 26:33).

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23. Ilana Pardes, *The Biography of Ancient Israel: National Narratives in the Bible* (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 2000), 26.

A PROPHET, A CANDIDATE, AND A JUST CAUSE

Derek R. Sainsbury

Review of Spencer W. McBride, *Joseph Smith for President: The Prophet, the Assassins, and the Fight for American Religious Freedom* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2021). 269 pages, \$29.95 (hardcover).

Abstract: *Spencer McBride's book is the deepest look yet into Joseph Smith's 1844 campaign for president of the United States. In smooth-paced and readable detail, McBride's work expertly demonstrates the unique Latter-day Saint genesis for the campaign and how it fit into the wider American social-political environment. Its message regarding religious liberty is as applicable today as it was nearly two centuries ago.*

[**Editor's Note:** This review first appeared in *The Civil War Book Review* 24, no. 1 (2022). It is reprinted here with permission. Slight editorial changes have been made.]

On July 4, 1844, Americans celebrated sixty-eight years of independence with feasts, parades, and fireworks. Over three million enslaved Black people, however, were not celebrating. As Frederick Douglass would declare eight years later, “What to the slave is the Fourth of July?” Amongst other mechanisms, the southern Slave Power continued to enthrone states’ rights as a “political strategy ... to maintain a carefully constructed — and deeply unjust — economic and social hierarchy” (209).

In the North, Independence Day passed with an uneasy calm in Philadelphia. Tragically, however, the next three days saw nativist mobs reignite anti-Catholic violence begun two months earlier. One thousand miles west in Nauvoo, Illinois, members of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints were mourning. A week earlier their prophet and presidential candidate Joseph Smith had been assassinated while in Illinois State custody. Hundreds of electioneer missionaries canvassing

the nation for Smith were just learning of his murder and would dejectedly begin returning to Nauvoo. Sustained anti-Mormon violence would expel them from the nation only eighteen months later.

This treatment of Catholics and Latter-day Saints demonstrated that in antebellum America, religious freedom was not universal. But why? Spencer W. McBride, an associate managing historian of the Joseph Smith Papers, argues in his book *Joseph Smith for President: The Prophet, the Assassins, and the Fight for American Religious Freedom*¹ “that the states’ rights strategy was as effective at impeding efforts to establish full citizenship rights of religious minorities as it was at blocking efforts to establish the personhood of men and women of African descent enslaved in the American South” (209). In this important work, McBride employs the causes and outcomes of Smith’s sincere but quixotic campaign as a lens to effectively evaluate antebellum religious inequality and the systems that perpetuated it.

Joseph Smith’s new religion, with its community building and its anti-slavery and pro-American-Indian beliefs, engendered staunch opposition from Missourians who feared Latter-day Saints’ growing economic and political power. When tension turned to conflict, the governor of Missouri ordered the infamous “Extermination Order.” While Smith languished in jail, militia-mobs forced his people into Illinois — victims of theft, violence, and even rape.

After gaining his freedom, Smith traveled to Washington, DC, seeking federal assistance for protection and redress. Here McBride excels, meticulously immersing Smith and the reader in the larger context of American political life and realities. When the president and Congress offer no assistance behind the guise of states’ rights and electoral politics, Smith lost confidence in the American political system and even democracy itself.

No longer politically naive, Smith built a new community in Nauvoo, Illinois, by playing hardball with the state’s Whigs and Democrats. Both parties, desperate for the thousands of incoming Latter-day Saint votes, gave Smith a liberal charter and a city militia that he used to protect himself and his followers. In fact, the first law passed protected the religious freedom of all faiths, the prime reason that Smith had sought political power.

1. Spencer W. McBride, *Joseph Smith for President: The Prophet, the Assassins, and the Fight for American Religious Freedom* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2021)

In self-preservation, the Church members engaged in block voting for the candidates who offered them the most protection, eventually becoming the kingmakers of the 1842 gubernatorial race. Many western Illinoisans saw these moves as a threat against democracy and formed the Anti-Mormon Party. While Americans were comfortable with Protestant religious leaders as politicians, Smith's power mirrored Catholic loyalty to the Pope, which the Protestant majority considered dangerous to the Republic.

Desperate to avoid another Missouri, Smith wrote to the likely candidates for the 1844 presidential election. Again, McBride deftly describes each of these men and their positions in and on contemporary American politics. Those who answered Smith refused to help, chiefly citing states' rights concerns.

Therefore, in January 1844, Church leaders decided to run Smith as an independent candidate. Smith crafted a political pamphlet mailed to newspapers and leaders throughout the nation. Among other items, he called for the abolishment of slavery through remuneration, the annexation of Texas, bank and prison reform, and, above all, power for the federal government to intervene within the states to protect the constitutional freedoms of life, liberty, property, and religion. This is the strongest part of the book. McBride gives the best scholarly treatment to date of each policy proposal and its place in the wider American conversation. Equally powerful, he demonstrates each proposal was "personally poignant" to the prophet-candidate, stemming from the injustices he had experienced (90).

Smith and his followers came to see his campaign as the means to redeem the nation spiritually and politically. In March 1844, Smith created the secret Council of Fifty, which he believed was the genesis for the Kingdom of God that would govern after Christ's return. As the American government had repeatedly failed them, they looked to create a "theodemocracy" in independent Texas, somewhere in the Mexican-controlled half of the continent, or in the United States with Smith's election as president. Soon they determined to go all in on the election doing what no other presidential candidate had ever done, not only in dispatching hundreds of men throughout the country, but in having them preach as well as politick.

While many of the nation's newspapers commented on Smith's campaign, most did so mockingly. However, behind the mocking, McBride adroitly captures an undercurrent of genuine fear that Smith and others like him threatened democracy and needed to be

marginalized. Smith's campaign ended abruptly in late June as the mobs that he and his electioneers were campaigning against murdered him. The assassins escaped justice and soon the Saints fled Illinois and the nation. In antebellum America, such extra-legal action was not seen as violating religious liberty because the minority Church was not deemed a true religion.

In time, a civil war and the Fourteenth Amendment would open the way for greater religious equality, with the federal government being able to apply constitutional freedoms within the states. However, it would not be until the 1920s that such equality was consistently applied. The members of the Church knew this well — the very federal power they had campaigned for in 1844 was turned on them for decades in the fight against their practice of polygamy. “Indeed, the federal government proved just as willing to discriminate against Mormon citizens as state governments” (213).

Joseph Smith for President is beautifully written and delivers the correct amount of context without stalling the narrative flow, making it widely readable yet incisively informative. McBride effectively engages his training and scholarship of the early republic and his extensive knowledge of the primary source material regarding Joseph Smith to create the most comprehensive exploration yet of Smith's presidential campaign in its wider American historical context.

There are some holes that limit the book. I mention two. The subtitle is “the prophet, the assassins, and the fight for American religious freedom.” While the book analyzes in detail Smith and religious freedom, there is a noticeable lack of material on the “assassins” and their conspiracy. McBride catalogs the events leading to the assassination but does not give any extensive analysis of the conspirators and their motives, despite there being, as he admits, a large amount of scholarship to draw from. He does make some definitive declarations, but these often contradict the evidence he has given.

The most puzzling omission is the lack of in-depth discussion of Catholics — the other, much larger persecuted religious minority. McBride mentions only in passing the concurrent anti-Catholic riots in Philadelphia that spring and summer. These events would seem central to the arguments he is making, especially since Joseph Smith's campaign wrote to the Catholic figure at the center of the riots proposing a political alliance. Perhaps it does not fit his systemic argument, because in the case of the riots, state militia units fought against the mobs (more militiamen and nativists died or were wounded than actual Catholics), whereas with

Smith, disbanded militiamen formed the mob who assassinated him while in state custody.

Overall, McBride's excellent treatise using Joseph Smith's campaign as an "indispensable lens" on the "persistence of religious inequality in American society" (5) delivers. For those studying antebellum intersections of religion and politics, particularly non-Protestant religions, this book is a must read. Antebellum historians must grapple with McBride's findings and the treatment of Church members as a harbinger of the Civil War. It also reminds its readers that even today seemingly neutral laws and policies can ignorantly or intentionally deprive citizens of their full exercise of constitutional rights.

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A TRULY REMARKABLE BOOK

Louis Midgley

Review of John Gee, *Saving Faith: How Families Protect, Sustain, And Encourage Faith* (Provo, UT: Religious Studies Center, Brigham Young University, 2020). 313 pages.

Abstract: *Saving Faith is a truly excellent book, designed especially for families concerned about their children. It is also a book appropriate for those getting ready to serve as missionaries, or for newly married couples, young couples about to be married, or even for those about to bring children into this world to undergo their mortal probation.*

I must admit that I have had a really difficult time fashioning a review of John Gee's *Saving Faith*.¹ I have tossed out several earlier attempts to address the contents of each of its excellent chapters. When I first began to draft a review, I discovered that I simply could not address all of the excellent content in each of its ten chapters. Even reproducing the book's table of contents would not help. Hence, in this essay I will not try to address the contents of each of the chapters, but I will only give some close attention to one portion of one chapter.

What Is (and Is Not) in This Book

John Gee is the William (Bill) Gay Research Professor in the Department of Asian and Near Eastern Languages at Brigham Young University. Hence, this book is the work of a very able research professor. His employment requires him to do research and publish essays and books, which he has done in Egyptology (the field in which he has his PhD) and in other academic areas he finds challenging and important for preserving and advancing the faith of Latter-day Saints. *Saving Faith* is,

1. John Gee, *Saving Faith: How Families Protect, Sustain, and Encourage Faith* (Provo, UT: Religious Studies Center, Brigham Young University, 2020).

I believe, his fourth book, and he has published over a hundred essays and reviews.

In this work, Professor Gee has been able to locate, understand, and master the secular literature on the crucial issues that each of the book's chapters addresses. If I have counted correctly, *Saving Faith* has 1,052 footnotes, and at least half of these draw upon contemporary social science scholarship central to the issues addressed in the book. The reader can be assured that Gee has not manufactured evidence to support a revisionist ideology, which some others seem to have done.²

Saving Faith is not a devotional book composed of stories or sermons. Instead, it is, I must stress, an academic book. Don't confuse it, however, with the stereotype of an academic book — a boring and sometimes pedantic tome that one academic writes for other academics who are often indifferent to what is published. Instead, *Saving Faith* is fully accessible to ordinary Latter-day Saints on each of the topics addressed in its ten chapters. The book's subtitle — *How Families Protect, Sustain, and Encourage Faith* — is a fully accurate indication of what is addressed.

Now for Some of the Actual Contents

There is more information in *Saving Faith* than one can reasonably address in a short review such as this. Nevertheless, Professor Gee brings up some points that should be brought up here.

Saving Faith begins by addressing rumors (rife in some circles) that Latter-day Saint young people are leaving their faith in "droves." He demonstrates that while, in America, we do "lose some of our youth, certainly more than we would like," the fact is that, when compared with Roman Catholics and Protestants, "we hold on to more of our youth than anyone else" (p. 22). "There are," he demonstrates, "a number of things we as a church are doing right, and these things appear when we sift through the data" (p. 22). There are, of course, some very serious dangers, which Gee both identifies and addresses. He shows that apostasy is mostly not the same as conversion to a different faith community, such the Roman Catholic Church, or to one of the various versions of Protestantism.

Chapter Ten contains a summary, or "looking back," at what keeps young Latter-day Saints and, I believe, older ones as well, solidly faithful. "Most of the reasons why youth leave the Church have to do with either

2. See John Gee, "Conclusions in Search of Evidence," *Interpreter: A Journal of Latter-day Saint Scholarship* 34 (2020): 161–78. This is a careful review of Jana Riess, *The Next Mormons: How Millennials Are Changing the LDS Church* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2019).

events that disrupt routines (for example, divorce, moving) or behaviors (for example, drugs, drink, sex, or sin), not intellectual issues” (p. 290). “Doubts” it turns out, “generally play a role” in youth leaving the Church of Jesus Christ “only when combined with other factors,” which include “a lack of commitment to and the importance set on the Church in the teenage years by their parents” (p. 290). The “statistically effective factors for individuals to retain their faith are,” Gee demonstrates, “(1) daily prayer, (2) regular scripture reading, (3) weekly Church attendance, and (4) keeping the law of chastity” (p. 290).

“The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints,” Gee also demonstrates, is “doing a much better job than other religions at keeping our youth in the faith” (p. 289). In addition, those who strive to keep the covenants they have made at baptism “are more active and faithful than in any other religion” (p. 289). Even though we seem to be losing just over thirty percent of our youth — which is, of course, a serious problem, as the author reminds his readers several times — the Church is doing something right.

Later, also in his concluding chapter, under the heading “Faith Worth Saving” (p. 294), Professor Gee asks the question of “what sort of faith saves and is worth saving?” He answers the question by explaining the way we came to have the English word “faith” (pp. 294–96). He begins in the following way: “In English, monosyllabic terms are usually indicative of native Anglo-Saxon vocabulary, while polysyllabic terms are generally loan-words from another language, but the term *faith* is actually a loan-word into English” (pp. 295–96). At this point, in more than a full page, Professor Gee, in a manner that very much reminds me of my dear friend Hugh Nibley, takes his readers through the way our English words “faith” and “faithful” once were, and still are, or at the very least should be, very closely linked with the idea of solemn covenants that Latter-day Saints have made with God.

We need to give youth and young adults reasons to believe rather than reasons not to leave. . . . This is not about changing the Church so that atheist determinists or moral relativists (or followers of whatever wind of doctrine) can feel comfortable coming to church, but about changing ourselves so that we will feel comfortable when we come into the presence of God (see Mormon 9:3–4). This is not about keeping people in the pews but about keeping covenants. Covenants are not something that get in the way of what we are trying to do; they are what we are trying to do. (pp. 296–97)

It is this concept of the centrality of covenants that Gee understands as key to establishing, building, and maintaining faith. Indeed, “the focus on statistics can be a distraction” (p. 296) and should not glaze over the importance of covenants.

Controversy and a Shameful Response

In late 2020, shortly after it was published, *Saving Faith* was pulled from publication by BYU. There was no formal statement as to why the decision was made, but it occurred after a very negative online reaction to statements made by Gee in Chapter 6, “The Ruthless War of Promiscuity.” In summarizing statistical data on the causes of homosexuality, Gee’s words were lifted out of context and twisted by those who felt threatened by his use of data.

Lacking any public statements by the publisher, those who howled at Gee’s statements were able to claim victory — their foe had been vanquished and they, the victors, must be right and Gee must be wrong. One of the howlers triumphantly stated — without providing any supporting evidence — that the book was pulled “because of author John Gee’s statements about homosexuality and child sexual abuse.”³ Gee was obviously evil, and those opposed to him were happy — almost gleeful — to tell us why. The online book-burning was a rousing success, and fun was had by all.

This brings to mind a portion of the preface to *Saving Faith*, where the author anticipates that some of what he will discuss in the book will be controversial, to say the least:

A number of the topics discussed [in this book] are sensitive to various people, usually because of past personal experiences that have been quite painful. With Martius from Shakespeare’s *Coriolanus*, they say, “I have some wounds upon me, and they smart / To hear themselves rememb’red.” The data lead one “to enlarge the wounds of those who are already wounded, instead of consoling and healing their wounds; and those who have not been wounded, instead of feasting upon the pleasing word of God have daggers placed to pierce their souls and wound their delicate minds” (Jacob 2:9). Others have sensitivities because “the guilty taketh the truth to be hard,

3. Jana Riess, “Controversial Mormon book pulled from publication,” *Religion News Service* (September 8, 2020), <https://religionnews.com/2020/09/08/controversial-mormon-book-pulled-publication-byu-john-gee/>.

for it cutteth them to the very center” (1 Nephi 16:2); we do not like having our pet sins pointed out or poked. Nevertheless, the data are there and just because we do not like what they have to say is not reason in itself to avoid discussing them honestly. It seems to me to be more important to save faith than to save face. (p. xii)

Was the decision to pull Professor Gee’s book from the shelves correct? It is hard to say without understanding why they did so, and they aren’t talking. Some will see their action as capitulation to the howling of those poked by Gee’s words. For this reader, the decision is a shame because it really is “more important to save faith than to save face,” and *Saving Faith* is a great resource toward that end.

Conclusion

Latter-day Saints are, or should be, striving to become genuine Saints — that is, Holy Ones. And thereby genuinely seek to move past our first symbolic rebirth, when we were baptized. Saints must be or seek to become genuinely sanctified. The covenant we made when we were baptized, when we underwent a preliminary symbolic rebirth, and then those covenants we make in a temple, which I believe we renew most every Sabbath Day, hopefully should assist each of us to endure well our own mortal probation. And we should, we are somewhere actually admonished, seek wisdom (and even courage, which is one of the Cardinal Virtues) from the best books. And *Saving Faith* is such a book.

Despite no more copies being printed and despite the seemingly excellent (and intellectually intolerant) work of the “cancel culture” mob, copies of *Saving Faith* can still be found through online booksellers and secondhand stores. It would be well worth your time to procure a copy and consider the well-documented recommendations that Gee provides for how families can protect, sustain, and encourage faith.

Louis Midgley (PhD, Brown University) is an emeritus professor of political science at Brigham Young University, where he taught the history of political philosophy, which includes efforts of Christian churchmen and theologians to identify, explain, understand, and cope with the evils in this world. Dr. Midgley has therefore had an abiding interest in both dogmatic and systematic theology and the alternatives to both. His doctoral dissertation was on the religious socialist political ideology of Paul Tillich, a once famous German American Protestant theologian,

most famous for his systematic theology, which is a radical elaboration of classical theism. Dr. Midgley's encounter with the writings of Leo Strauss, an influential Jewish philosopher/intellectual historian drew his attention to the radical challenge posed by what is often called modernity to both the wisdom of Jerusalem, which is grounded on divine revelation, and also the contrasting, competing wisdom of Athens, which was fashioned by unaided human reason. Dr. Midgley has an interest in the ways in which communities of faith have responded to the challenges posed by modernity to faith in God grounded on divine special revelation.

THE NEPHITE METAPHOR OF LIFE AS A PROBATION: RETHINKING NEPHI'S PORTRAYAL OF LAMAN AND LEMUEL

Noel B. Reynolds

Abstract: *Commentaries on Nephi's first book tend to interpret the fraternal struggles it reports as historical facts that are meant primarily to invite readers' evaluative responses. While recognizing the historical character of the facts marshalled by Nephi, this paper will argue that the author transposes that history into an allegory meant to inspire his readers in all times and places to abandon prevailing metaphors of life that are focused on the attainment of worldly goods and pleasures. In their place, Nephi offers the revealed metaphor of life as a day of probation taught to him and his father in their great visions. God's plan of salvation revealed to them made it clear that the welfare of each human being for eternity would be determined by a divine judgment on how effectively their lives had been transformed by their adherence to the gospel of Jesus Christ in mortality. The message of 1 Nephi is that all men and women are invited to let the Spirit of the Lord soften their hearts and lead them into his covenant path wherein he can prepare them to enter into his presence at the end.*

From the time Lehi and his family fled from Jerusalem, Nephi kept their record on what we now call *the Large Plates of Nephi*, an enormous record that was maintained by Nephi's successors for a thousand years — with the final pages being written by Mormon and Moroni at the end of Nephite times.¹ But after thirty years, the mature prophet-leader Nephi tells us that “the Lord God said unto me: Make

1. The scribal tradition that preserved the Large Plates throughout the Nephite dispensation is described and documented in Noel B. Reynolds, “The Last Nephite Scribes,” *Interpreter: A Journal of Latter-day Saint Faith and Scholarship* 53 (2022): 95–138.

other plates” which would focus on the divine revelations and spiritual teachings of the Nephites (2 Nephi 5:30). It took at least a decade for Nephi to compose and inscribe this second record on what we call *the Small Plates of Nephi* (cf. 2 Nephi 5:34). Nephi’s purposes and guidelines for writing in these Small Plates are mentioned several times but are most fully articulated in a transitional explanation penned by Nephi’s younger brother Jacob, who inherited the responsibility of maintaining and extending them after Nephi’s death.²

The ten years or more that Nephi devoted to writing the Small Plates gave him ample time to think carefully through both the content and the rhetorical structure of this 154-page composition. While scholars have commented on Nephi’s writing from a variety of perspectives, we do not yet have a serious investigation of the following question: Why does Nephi begin this second record by recounting six stories of the earliest years of the family’s flight from Jerusalem — in which the rebellions of Laman and Lemuel are repeatedly featured — only to shift in the second half to a collection of prophetic teachings that feature the plan of salvation, the gospel of Jesus Christ, and the prophesied salvation histories of the Nephites and Lamanites, the house of Israel, and the Gentiles down to the end of times?³

As I attempt to address that question in the following essay, I will lean on the 1980s insights of George Lakoff, Mark Johnson, and Mark Turner, who challenged the traditional western perspective on human knowledge as derived from the tradition of Greek philosophy. They proposed that most human understanding derives from culturally based metaphors that are grounded, in various ways, in actual experience.⁴ These recent

2. Jacob 1:1–8. For a comprehensive discussion of Nephi’s repeated explanations and the rhetorical purposes they served by their careful placement in Nephi’s Small Plates, see Noel B. Reynolds, “Nephi’s Small Plates: A Rhetorical Analysis,” *Interpreter: A Journal of Latter-day Saint Faith and Scholarship* 50 (2022): 99–122.

3. For example, see two of my contributions to the study of Nephi’s composition in Noel B. Reynolds, “Nephi’s Outline,” *BYU Studies Quarterly* 20, no. 2 (1980): 131–49; and “Chiastic Structuring of Large Texts: 2 Nephi as a Case Study,” *Interpreter: A Journal of Latter-day Saint Faith and Scholarship* 41 (2020): 193–210. Further exploration of Nephi’s rhetorical structures can be found in Noel B. Reynolds, “Nephi’s Small Plates” and “Lehi’s Dream, Nephi’s Blueprint: How Nephi Uses the Vision of the Tree of Life as an Outline for 1 and 2 Nephi,” *Interpreter: A Journal of Latter-day Saint Faith and Scholarship* 52 (2022): 231–78.

4. Though I will not bring the theoretical framework of these scholars into my analysis explicitly, my argument does draw in many ways on their presentations in two important volumes: George Lakoff and Mark Johnson, *Metaphors We Live By* (Chicago: University Of Chicago Press), 1980; and George Lakoff and Mark Turner,

studies recognize that the Western tradition “has excluded metaphor from the domain of reason.” But they have gone on to conclude “that metaphor is anything but peripheral to the life of the mind. It is central to our understanding of our selves, our culture, and the world at large.”⁵

I will argue that Nephi’s writing is not aimed at criticizing his rebellious brothers or justifying his responses to them. Rather, Nephi and Lehi had been visited by the Lord and had been shown great visions that completely transformed their world views — their understandings of the nature and possibilities of human life and the true relationship of human beings to one another and to God. Nephi’s writing counterpoises those prophetic understandings with the comparatively shallow and mistaken world view of the Jews in Jerusalem, which his brothers shared. By telling those early stories of their rebellions and his conversion, he can introduce the basic metaphor of life as a probation. Because that metaphor underpins the plan of salvation, it can help his readers understand their own divine potentials and the way God has provided for them to transcend the limited world views of Laman, Lemuel, the Jews at Jerusalem, and most peoples — and to enter into fellowship with the gods.

Nephi also enlists the power and logic of allegory in the telling of his own family history. While most allegories feature fictional characters and stories, Nephi structures his account of his own experiences to illustrate and buttress the understanding of the universal purpose and meaning of life that has been revealed to him. Nephi describes himself as one who has seen God’s grand plan for all his human children and who is fully engaged in an attempt to persuade present and future generations to reconcile themselves to God that they might be prepared by him for eternal life. In Nephi’s allegory, his brothers Laman and Lemuel represent that segment of humanity that prioritizes its own vision of the good life over the revealed understanding that this mortal life is a probationary state in which anyone can choose to repent and follow Jesus Christ as he molds and shapes them in preparation for eternal life with him.

Scholarly Interpretations

Before proposing this new approach to 1 Nephi, I will briefly review three other proposals advanced by established Book of Mormon scholars. In 2007, Brant Gardner speculated that the division that had developed in

More Than Cool Reason: A Field Guide to Poetic Metaphor (Chicago: University Of Chicago Press, 1989).

5. Lakoff and Turner, *More than Cool Reason*, 214.

Lehi's family as a result of his newly received visions might reflect the late seventh-century BCE divide in Jewish ideology that Bible scholars now recognize between those who endorsed Josiah's recent reforms and those who maintained their loyalty to traditional religious understandings and practices.⁶ Gardner's insight has been significantly extended and updated in a 2015 article written by Neal Rappleye.⁷ Grant Hardy helpfully emphasizes the literary features of Nephi's composition and their importance in divining the author's intent.⁸ Joseph Spencer devoted Chapter Five of his theological essay on 1 Nephi to the problematic relationship of Laman and Lemuel with their younger brother Nephi. Spencer's more detailed exploration of the multiple textual references to this theme, "the source for the book's action and intrigue," leads him to interpret the book as the author's honest account of his own gradual development and preparation as a prophet, complete with his weaknesses and failures.⁹ In the following paragraphs I will briefly describe these interpretations of Nephi's treatment of his brothers in 1 Nephi and state why I see a need for an explanation grounded in the plan of salvation revealed to him and his father more than in the actual historical facts he reports.

Brant Gardner and Neal Rappleye: Harnessing Margaret Barker's Account of the Josianic Reforms

Since Latter-day Saint scholars became aware of the work of Old Testament scholar Margaret Barker in the late 1990s, several of them have observed that the ideological divide that Josiah's reforms created in Jerusalem in the late seventh century BCE might underlie the division in Lehi's family as portrayed in Nephi's writings. Brant Gardner put the question bluntly: "Suppose that [the reformist ideology] constituted a firm faith

6. Brant A. Gardner, *Second Witness: Analytical and Contextual Commentary on the Book of Mormon* (Salt Lake City: Greg Kofford Books, 2007), 1:92.

7. Neal Rappleye, "The Deuteronomist Reforms and Lehi's Family Dynamics: A Social Context for the Rebellions of Laman and Lemuel," *Interpreter: A Journal of Latter-day Saint Faith and Scholarship* 16 (2015): 87–99. See also the recent extensions and reinforcements to Rappleye's argument in 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. I do not engage these excellent papers but simply offer a different approach.

8. Grant Hardy, *Understanding the Book of Mormon: A Reader's Guide* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010), 31–57.

9. Joseph Spencer, *1st Nephi: a brief theological introduction* (Provo, UT: Maxwell Institute, 2020), 82.

and that they [Laman and Lemuel] saw Lehi as stubbornly espousing parts of their religion that they sincerely believed needed reformation.”¹⁰ Neal Rappleye has helpfully assembled the comments of several other scholars who have pointed to this possibility in one way or another and has gone on to explore other dimensions of Nephi’s writing that might reinforce the hypothesis that Gardner had proposed previously — with the caveat that it was “absolute speculation on the thinnest of data.”¹¹

Neal Rappleye has effectively fleshed out this Barkeresque analysis by collecting a number of details in the text that might be seen as compatible with it. As he 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.¹²

The new interpretation that I will propose below agrees that Laman and Lemuel, as portrayed by Nephi, may be invoking reformist perspectives to justify their rebellions. But I interpret Nephi to be portraying these invocations as convenient rationalizations and as evidence of their assimilation into Jerusalem’s elite culture, which the Jewish prophets were declaiming as so wicked that their God would find it necessary to discipline them with a Babylonian captivity. Nephi, on the other hand, does not credit their rebellion as sincere or faithful opposition. Rather, he explains their rebellions by pointing to their lack of faith, to their resistance to the Holy Spirit, and to their longing for the affluent lifestyle of contemporary Jerusalem elites. He quotes Laman

10. Gardner, *Second Witness*, I:92.

11. Rappleye, “The Deuteronomic Reforms” and Gardner, *Second Witness*, I:92.

12. Rappleye, “The Deuteronomic Reforms,” 98. A thorough review of Barker’s work on this topic from a Latter-day Saint perspective can be found in Kevin Christensen, “The Temple, The Monarchy, and Wisdom: Lehi’s World and the Scholarship of Margaret Barker,” in *Glimpses of Lehi’s Jerusalem*, ed. John W. Welch, David Rolph Seely, and Jo Ann H. Seely (Provo, UT: Brigham Young University, 2004), 449–522; and from Barker’s perspective in Margaret Barker, “What did King Josiah Reform” in *Glimpses of Lehi’s Jerusalem*, 523–42.

complaining, “we might have enjoyed our possessions and the land of our inheritance; yea, and we might have been happy” (1 Nephi 17:21).¹³

The popularity of Gardner’s speculation among current Book of Mormon scholars is such that I should provide a more developed explanation of my reasons for looking elsewhere. Margaret Barker has provided a great service in her exposé of the intent of the Josianic reforms, which was to supplant the traditional Abrahamic temple theology. I also accept the possibility that Laman and Lemuel went along with the Jerusalem elites in accepting those reforms. I will even go one step beyond that by suggesting that Lehi and Nephi may very well have also joined in their support of Josiah’s reforms. But we should also note that the troubling new messages of Jeremiah, Lehi, and other prophets are not framed in Nephi’s writings as reactionary defenses of the old religion against the reform agenda. Rather, they are based in the new visions and possibly unprecedented perspectives these prophets have just received.

Thanks to Nephi’s Small Plates, we know a lot more about Lehi’s visions than we do about Jeremiah’s. But Lehi and Nephi seemed to think they were being given the same revelations that had come to Jeremiah and others. Lehi’s visions featured both negative and positive content. On the negative side, they confirmed the coming destruction of Jerusalem, the last stronghold of the elites of Israel, because of the wickedness of the people. That wickedness was measured more by its violations of commandments guiding personal conduct given to Moses than by its rejection of the old Abrahamic religion.

In the vision given to Lehi and Nephi, the positive content dominated. Nephi wants his readers to be shocked and captivated by the fact that Lehi responded to the vision that confirmed his worst fears about the looming destruction of Jerusalem with effusive praise and expressions of gratitude to the Lord:

Great and marvelous are thy works, O Lord God Almighty.
Thy throne is high in the heavens, and thy power and
goodness and mercy is over all the inhabitants of the earth.
And because thou art merciful, thou wilt not suffer those who
come unto thee that they shall perish. (1 Nephi 1:14)

13. All quotations from the Book of Mormon in this paper are taken from the Yale critical edition. See Royal Skousen, *The Book of Mormon: The Earliest Text*, 2nd ed. (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2022). In some cases, italics have been added to call attention to key terminology.

Nephi's readers will soon learn that Lehi's positive response derived from a vision of the future coming of Jesus Christ, his atonement, the plan of salvation, and the gospel of Christ as the divinely provided way by which all humankind could choose to repent and qualify for eternal life.

Nephi sees this new message as pre-eminent and also as fulfillment — not as rejection — both of the prophets and of the law. Nephi's explanation would not seem clearly to favor or disfavor either side of the theological divide Barker describes in late seventh-century Jerusalem:

For we labor diligently to write, to persuade our children and also our brethren to believe in Christ and to be reconciled to God, for we know that it is by grace that we are saved after all that we can do. And notwithstanding we believe in Christ, we keep the law of Moses and look forward with steadfastness unto Christ until the law shall be fulfilled, for for this end was the law given.

Wherefore the law hath become dead unto us, and we are made alive in Christ because of our faith, yet we keep the law because of the commandments. And we talk of Christ, we rejoice in Christ, we preach of Christ, we prophesy of Christ; and we write according to our prophecies that our children may know to what source they may look for a remission of their sins.

Wherefore we speak concerning the law, that our children may know the deadness of the law. And they, by knowing the deadness of the law, may look forward unto that life which is in Christ and know for what end the law was given — and after that the law is fulfilled in Christ, that they need not harden their hearts against him when the law had ought to be done away.

And now behold, my people, ye are a stiffnecked people. Wherefore I have spoken plain unto you, that ye cannot misunderstand. 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. And inasmuch as it shall be expedient, ye must keep the performances and ordinances of God until the law shall be fulfilled which was given unto Moses. (2 Nephi 25: 23–30)

In this most complete statement of his purpose in writing, Nephi does not take sides in the cultural division identified by Barker. Rather, he endorses both the prophets and the Mosaic law. Even more importantly, he introduces prophecies of the coming Messiah and his plan for the redemption of all those who will choose to follow him in the way laid out in his doctrine or gospel. These new teachings require their hearers to give up their previous ways of understanding human life as a time to take enjoyment in pleasures — to minimize pain and maximize pleasure. In addition, they require replacement of these understandings with a guiding metaphor of life as a probation — a time to prove their faith in and commitment to their creator and father in heaven.

Grant Hardy

Probably the most thorough and comprehensive attempt to interpret Nephi's portrayals of himself vis-a-vis his older brothers is found in Grant Hardy's 2010 reader's guide to the Book of Mormon. His approach also introduces and maintains a sensitivity to the literary elements in Nephi's writing. He recognizes the flatness of Nephi's characterization of Laman and Lemuel and describes them as "stock characters, even caricatures."¹⁴ Hardy leverages that insight as an invitation to explore the text in search of clues that can fill out a reasonable and more complete characterization of Nephi and his brothers.

In this paper, I borrow that same insight but to go a different direction. I will argue below that Nephi flattens these characterizations because he is not writing about Laman and Lemuel as historical figures. Rather, they are intentionally presented as stock characters — those he can authoritatively describe and interpret based on extended personal experience — who lived their lives wedded to the wrong metaphor of life. Nephi sees all his readers being confronted with the same choice between life metaphors. And he knows that future readers will not know him or his brothers or care which of them is superior. Nephi was not engaged in an effort of self-justification in his writing. He was presenting an

14. Hardy, *Understanding*, 33.

allegory and an experience-based argument for distinguishing between two metaphors of life and for recognizing that only one of them offers human beings a way to reach eternal life.¹⁵ The essence of that choice was featured by Lehi in his final teaching to his sons:

And now my sons, I would that ye should look to the great Mediator and hearken unto his great commandments and be faithful unto his words and choose eternal life according to the will of his Holy Spirit, and not choose eternal death according to the will of the flesh and the evil which is therein, which giveth the spirit of the devil power to captivate, to bring you down to hell, that he may reign over you in his own kingdom. (2 Nephi 2:28–29)

Joseph Spencer

Spencer's essay on Nephi and his brothers targets two very different misreadings which can be corrected with the same interpretation. On one hand, readers who see Nephi (and other prophets) as always right and righteous can learn to follow the prophets more effectively if they will recognize and accept that prophets, like all humans, need to develop toward spiritual perfection throughout their lives. On the other hand, he resists the tendency in some quarters to reject Nephi and other prophets because of their imperfections. Spencer acknowledges that many readers have judged Nephi to be self-righteous and insensitive — even “pathologically faithful” in comparison to normal, fallible mortals.¹⁶ He defends Nephi because he has been open in his writing by being “honest about his youthful ambition and his fiery temper” and about “how his zeal sometimes outstripped his knowledge.”¹⁷ But Nephi and the other prophets should not be rejected for being human but should be

15. A reviewer of this paper suggested that the “stock character” hypothesis in Nephi's writings might help explain the lack of attention to the women in Nephi's account who are unnamed, except for his mother. His sisters and his wife may not have served the roles of the stock characters he was using for an allegorical account. Thus, while they clearly existed, he had no need to develop them or provide details that would not serve his exhortative purposes. This could be a topic for further investigation.

16. Spencer, *1st Nephi*, 83. He draws on Eugene England, “Why Nephi Killed Laban: Reflections on the Truth of the Book of Mormon,” *Dialogue: A Journal of Mormon Thought* 22, no. 3 (Fall 1989): 40, for this characterization of the critical literature.

17. Spencer, *1st Nephi*, 96.

appreciated for their ability to overcome shortcomings while seeking the welfare of others — even their enemies.¹⁸

Spencer consciously skips over the great vision that Nephi reports in the central chapters of 1 Nephi and focuses on direct interactions between Nephi and his brothers in formulating his interpretation. But, as I will argue below, the vision provides the true grounding of the difference between Nephi and his brothers. As Spencer notes, Nephi may previously have shared some of the same “hardness” that his brothers exhibit throughout the account. But the great vision given to him and his father, after their prayers for enlightenment, gave them a whole new picture of the origin and purpose of human life on this earth — a vision that undercuts the life views of most people as they seek social approval and the comforts and pleasures of this world.

As with Spencer’s perspective, some interpretations of Nephi’s writings try to be more sympathetic to Laman and Lemuel by interpreting Nephi as a mature prophet acknowledging and apologizing for his judgmental and self-righteous mistreatment of his older siblings during his youth. But even this more sophisticated reading fails to appreciate the systematic way in which Nephi portrays these older brothers as real-life examples of the basic failings that prevent so many of God’s children from accepting his continuing invitation to repent and return to him. Such approaches do not sufficiently recognize that Nephi’s reporting of his brothers’ murmurings, their refusals to listen to prophets or the Spirit or angels or the voice of God, and their threats or even attempts to kill Nephi and Lehi are not presented as self-justifications for the author.¹⁹ Rather they are deliberately featured in Nephi’s stories to illustrate the conduct of all those without faith, for whom the deliverance promised to the faithful will not be provided in God’s great plan of salvation.

This interpretation of Laman and Lemuel is presented simply and convincingly in Nephi’s report of his conversation with them just after he was shown the same great vision his father had described to the family. At this point, Nephi understood that “great things” such as Lehi’s vision and his subsequent teachings are “hard to be understood save a man should inquire of the Lord.” Nephi was “grieved [that] because of the hardness of their hearts” Laman and Lemuel “did not look unto the Lord

18. Ibid., 96–97.

19. The complaints from Laman and Lemuel included in Nephi’s text are listed and explained in John W. Welch and J. Gregory Welch, “Chart 77,” *Charting the Book of Mormon* (Provo, UT: FARMS, 1999), <https://archive.bookofmormoncentral.org/sites/default/files/archive-files/pdf/welch/2016-03-01/77.pdf>.

as they had ought” (1 Nephi 15: 3–4). When they complained to Nephi about the difficulty of understanding Lehi’s vision, he simply asked,

Have ye inquired of the Lord? And they said unto me: We have not, for the Lord maketh no such thing known unto us. Behold, I said unto them: How is it that ye do not keep the commandments of the Lord? How is it that ye will perish because of the hardness of your hearts? Do ye not remember the thing which the Lord hath said? — if ye will not harden your hearts and ask me in faith, believing that ye shall receive, with diligence in keeping my commandments, surely these things shall be made known unto you. (1 Nephi 15:8–11)

Both Lehi and Nephi can foresee that Laman and Lemuel and all others that harden their hearts, refusing to humble themselves and ask the Lord in faith, will be cut off from the presence of the Lord with damning consequences in this life and in the next — “the eternal destruction — of both soul and body” (2 Nephi 1:22). And as Nephi will reiterate multiple times when in allegorical mode, the same spiritual dynamic obtains for every man and woman born into this world.

Nephi’s Struggle with Laman and Lemuel

In what follows, I offer an interpretation that emphasizes the close connection between the spiritual teachings of Nephi’s writings and the selected family stories featuring the murmuring and rebellions of his brothers in opposition to the way that leads to eternal life. Nephi’s proffered evidences for his thesis have both a positive and a negative dimension. And the distinction comes down to faithfulness, as is demonstrated in Nephi’s six stories. Each story shows how the faithful Nephi is delivered from various dangers. And each story shows the rebellion of Laman and Lemuel who are always subdued and who even repent a few times. But the repentance never lasts, and in his final admonition to them, Lehi fears for them and their progeny and foresees that they will be cut off from the presence of God (2 Nephi 1:20–22).

Fraternal Conflict Determines Rhetorical Structure

While it may seem odd that the mature prophet Nephi would choose to feature the early conflicts with Laman and Lemuel in his writings, the rhetorical structures Nephi devises to tell his story are deliberately grounded in that conflict. We cannot ignore Nephi’s decision to place that conflict at the center not only of the history of their family but

also of his theological teachings — grounded in that history and in the prophecies he repeatedly advances about the future of their family and of the entire human race.

The same essential conflict surfaces first in Nephi's opening chapter in another form — in the violent negative reaction of the Jews to the prophets who warned of the imminent destruction of Jerusalem and "testified of their wickedness and their abominations" (1 Nephi 1:19). Because of the visions he had received, Lehi was also able to testify to them of "the coming of a Messiah and also the redemption of the world" (1 Nephi 1:19). But the prophets' calls to repentance only made the Jews angry, "even as with the prophets of old, whom they had cast out and stoned and slain. And they also sought his [Lehi's] life that they might take it away" (1 Nephi 1:20).

This stark divide between those who believe and those who will not believe the prophets and their messages from the Lord provides the basic context for the good news for all peoples that Lehi announces to the Jews and that Nephi adopts as the thesis for his book. After receiving two visions, Lehi exclaimed: "Because thou art merciful, thou wilt not suffer *those who come unto thee* that they shall perish" (1 Nephi 1:14). Following suit, Nephi rephrases this as a thesis for his first book: "I Nephi will shew unto you that the tender mercies of the Lord is over all them whom he hath chosen *because of their faith* to make them mighty, even unto the power of deliverance" (1 Nephi 1:20). With these universal declarations now on the table, Nephi moves immediately to shift the focus from Jerusalem's recurring conflicts with the prophets to one specific case — his brothers' rebellions against him and their father.

Wilderness Trials Test Lehi's Family Members

At the Lord's command, Lehi led his family into the wilderness. After duly noting the offering and thanksgiving Lehi made to the Lord at their first camp in the wilderness, Nephi next reports Lehi's wishful comparison of his rebellious oldest sons to the geographical features of their campsite — hoping that Laman could be "like unto this river, continually running into the fountain of all righteousness," and that Lemuel could be "like unto this valley, firm and steadfast and immovable in keeping the commandments of the Lord" (1 Nephi 2:9–10).

Nephi then helps his readers by providing some backstory for Lehi's wishfully stated similes:

Now this he spake because of the stiffneckedness of Laman and Lemuel. For behold, they did murmur in many things against

their father because that he was a visionary man and that he had led them out of the land of Jerusalem, to leave the land of their inheritance and their gold and their silver and their precious things, and to perish in the wilderness. And this they said that he had done because of the foolish imaginations of his heart. And thus Laman and Lemuel, being the eldest, did murmur against their father. And they did murmur because they knew not the dealings of that God who had created them. Neither did they believe that Jerusalem, that great city, could be destroyed according to the words of the prophets. And they were like unto the Jews which were at Jerusalem, which sought to take away the life of my father. (1 Nephi 2:11–13)

It is important to recognize that Nephi's portrayals of Laman and Lemuel are designed primarily to create a contrast between the two perspectives that is grounded in real-life experience. These portrayals are never aimed at demonstrating his personal superiority to his brothers on any dimension. Rather, he repeatedly urges them to choose repentance and obedience to God's commandments. At no point does Nephi dismiss them as lost causes or announce permanent rejection or recriminations. He repeatedly expresses his concern for the inevitable negative judgments they will face at the future bar of God because of choices they have made — choices which all men and women must face as individuals. In the six stories Nephi chose to include in 1 Nephi, his brothers chose to harden their hearts against the Spirit of the Lord. With this characterization of Laman and Lemuel as classic murmurers (unbelievers) and potential patricides clearly in place, Nephi moves immediately to document how he and other members of their party had their hearts softened and came to believe Lehi's prophecies. But as Lehi and Nephi make clear, their continuing hope for Laman and Lemuel is that they will finally take that step in their lives and repent.

In contrast, Nephi documents the precise moments when the other family members as individuals chose to soften their hearts and to accept the Spirit of the Lord as the guiding force in their lives. Lehi demonstrates that change of heart in his response to the second vision as cited above. Nephi, following his father's example, also turned to prayer. An answer came "by his Holy Spirit:"

Having great desires to know of the mysteries of God, wherefore I cried unto the Lord. And behold, he did visit me and did soften my heart that I did believe all the words which had been spoken by my father; wherefore I did not

rebel against him like unto my brothers. And I spake unto Sam, making known unto him the things which the Lord had manifested unto me by his Holy Spirit. And it came to pass that he believed in my words. But behold, Laman and Lemuel would not hearken unto my words ... because of the hardness of their hearts. (1 Nephi 2:16–18)

Sam believed on the words of Nephi. And their mother Sariah came to believe when, in spite of her fears, her sons returned from their dangerous but successful mission back to Jerusalem. She then declared:

Now I know of a surety that the Lord hath commanded my husband to flee into the wilderness; yea, and I also know of a surety that the Lord hath protected my sons and delivered them out of the hands of Laban and gave them power whereby they could accomplish the thing which the Lord hath commanded them. (1 Nephi 5:8)

And finally, when Lehi sent his sons to recruit Ishmael and his family to join their flight from Jerusalem, “the Lord did *soften the heart* of Ishmael and also his whole household, insomuch that they took their journey with us down into the wilderness to the tent of our father” (1 Nephi 7:5).

From Family Experience to Universal Theology

Nephi’s first book is often described as a history because of the stories it includes. But these are presented side-by-side with accounts of the great visions and prophecies Lehi and Nephi received concerning the futures of their own descendants, the Gentiles, and the house of Israel — of all God’s human creations.²⁰ Those revelations provide the universal truths about the divine plan for all people in this mortal probation and how the choices they make individually in this life determine the eternal rewards and punishments they will receive at the final judgment. The stories Nephi borrows from his family experiences give us a ground-level picture of the experiences of all men and women who come into this mortal world and teach us what we must do to be saved. But it will be the same for all. What Nephi says about his own family members applies equally to all men and women everywhere. It is in this sense that 1 Nephi offers Nephi’s readers an allegory for the key choices facing all people in this mortal life. By its very nature, allegory claims universal applicability.

20. For example, see Reynolds, “Lehi’s Dream, Nephi’s Blueprint.”

By framing the selective stories of his struggles with Laman and Lemuel as allegory, Nephi transforms them into universal teaching about the nature of human life as a probationary state. Because 1 Nephi references two other allegories, I will distinguish this one by calling it the allegory of the prophet and his sons.

Three Allegories in 1 Nephi

It seems that Nephi advances this allegory of the prophet and his sons to provide an answer to a basic question not clearly answered in the two other allegories about human life that are referenced in 1 Nephi. In his report of his great vision to his family, Lehi invoked the allegory of the olive tree to explain the vision he had seen of the futures of his own descendants, the Gentiles, and the house of Israel (1 Nephi 10:12–14). Nephi also saw those futures when the Lord gave him the same great vision Lehi had received earlier. And when his brothers sought his help in understanding Lehi's report, questions about the allegory of the olive tree were on the top of their list. Nephi's response to his brothers provides the simplest and most straightforward explanation of this allegory that we have in the Book of Mormon. And it was drawn directly from Nephi's own vision. Unstated is the fact that both Lehi and Nephi were also drawing on their knowledge of the original formulation of the allegory of the olive tree in the writings of the prophet Zenos in the Brass Plates. Fortunately, Jacob seems to have realized that future readers of Nephi's book would not have that background, and he inserted the original Zenos text into his own extension of Nephi's writing (Jacob 5:2–77).

The second allegory in 1 Nephi is Lehi's vision of the tree of life reported in chapter 8. This allegory clearly represents the character of human life as a probation in which men and women are confronted with choices which will affect both their experience in mortality and their eternal welfare. Only those who grasp the iron rod and follow it and the straight and narrow path can reach the tree of life and partake of its fruit. Those who wander into strange or forbidden paths or take up residence in the great and spacious building will become eternal captives of the devil if they do not repent. For all humans, this allegory describes the structure of their probationary state. And because of the plan of redemption and the gospel of Jesus Christ, the way to the tree is provided as a straight and narrow path defined by the commandments of God and marked by the iron rod which represents the guidance of the Holy Ghost offered to all who seek the Lord and enter into his covenant path.

The unanswered question raised by these two allegories is this: What determines for each person whether they will choose to follow Jesus Christ? In his allegory of the prophet and his sons, Nephi addresses that question directly by making it clear that every person that entered into his way had allowed their heart to be softened by the Spirit so that they could bow in repentant humility before the Lord and receive his gospel as the way to salvation. But those who hardened their hearts against the Spirit and stiffened their necks in determination to follow their own chosen paths would end up as captives of the devil in hell, unless they should repent. Nephi's allegory draws on his personal experience with his family members and others, all of whom had experienced strong encounters with the Spirit, inspired prophets, and even an angel. But for some, these divine encounters could not change their chosen course in life.

Nephi's Allegory as Universal Teaching

The choice to welcome or reject the softening influence of the Lord's Spirit in one's life leads eventually to an eternal judgment. The theological principles taught in Nephi's stories also explain the future cycles of blessing and cursing that will come upon Lehi's descendants, the house of Israel, and the Gentiles. Nephi is writing to promote the salvation of all God's children and not to justify his own conduct in relationship to his siblings. This primary purpose in writing provides the energy and direction for all the varied components of his two books — including the stories of his brothers' rebellions. The universal teachings that emerge with clarity in Nephi's second book — which includes no dialogue between Nephi and his older brothers — are (1) God's great plan of redemption and (2) the gospel or doctrine of Christ.²¹

As I have shown elsewhere,²² the first half of chapter 10 simply lists the sixteen additional prophecies that Lehi reported to his family that derived from the great vision that is reported in Lehi's voice in chapter 8. Nephi's response after that echoes his response in chapter 2 when he expressed a desire "to know the mysteries of God" (1 Nephi 2:16). But

21. For documentation and discussion of the first see Noel B. Reynolds, "The Plan of Salvation and the Book of Mormon," *Religious Educator* 21, no. 1 (2020): 31–52. For the second see Reynolds, "The Gospel according to Mormon," *Interpreter: A Journal of Latter-day Saint Faith and Scholarship* 29 (2018): 85–104; "The Gospel According to Nephi: An Essay on 2 Nephi 31," *Religious Educator* 16, no. 2 (2015): 51–75; and "This is the Way," *Religious Educator* 14, no. 3 (2013): 79–91.

22. Reynolds, "Lehi's Dream, Nephi's Blueprint," 260–62.

this time, his stated desire to “see and hear and know of these things by the power of the Holy Ghost,” is immediately extended into a doctrinal explanation of the universal availability of such revelation to all peoples in all times and places. For the Holy Ghost

is the gift of God unto all those who diligently seek him as well in times of old as in the time that he should manifest himself unto the children of men, for he is the same yesterday and today and forever. And the way is prepared for all men from the foundation of the world if it so be that they repent and come unto him. For he that diligently seeketh shall find, and the mysteries of God shall be unfolded to them by the power of the Holy Ghost as well in this time as in times of old and as well in times of old as in times to come; wherefore the course of the Lord is one eternal round (1 Nephi 10:17–19).

This universal availability of the Holy Ghost and the gospel of repentance explains why the metaphor of life as a probation defines the purpose of life for all men and women and gives them opportunity to prepare for a judgment that will come to all:

Therefore remember, O man: for all thy doings thou shalt be brought into judgment. Wherefore if ye have sought to do wickedly in the days of your *probation*, then ye are found unclean before the judgment seat of God. And no unclean thing can dwell with God; wherefore ye must be cast off forever. (1 Nephi 10:20–21)

Isaiah Provides Scriptural Backup

This way of understanding Nephi’s first book provides a straightforward explanation for his insertion of two Isaiah chapters at its end. While Isaiah had addressed these words to wayward Israel, they fit perfectly with Nephi and Lehi’s words to Laman and Lemuel — confirming again that Nephi’s recitation of family stories always has the bigger picture in mind.²³ These chapters and Nephi’s following commentary to Laman and Lemuel provide a summary and renewed exhortation of the same principles Nephi has embedded in the family stories. This is all foreshadowed in Isaiah’s opening lines:

23. I am indebted to my daughter Rebecca Reynolds Lambert for this insight, which she plans to develop in a future essay. Note how Jacob later quotes Isaiah 49:22–23 as an instructive comparison for his people (2 Nephi 6:6–7).

Hearken and hear this, O house of Jacob,
 which are called by the name of Israel ...
 which swear by the name of the Lord and make mention of
 the God of Israel;
 yet they swear not in truth nor in righteousness.
 Nevertheless they call themselves of the holy city,
 but they do not stay themselves upon the God of Israel.
 (1 Nephi 20:1–2; cf. Isaiah 48:1–2)

Nephites and Lamanites

Matthew Bowen has shown that a comprehensive review of the writings of Nephi and Mormon supports the hypothesis that the decision to believe or not to believe the prophets and the scriptures is what fundamentally distinguished the Nephites and their culture from the Lamanites and their traditions. The Nephite writers may have invented and seem to have promoted a linguistic practice that identified the names *Nephi* and *Nephites* with all that is good. Similarly, the consonants in Laman's name (*lmn*) may have been exploited in Nephite discourse for their easy association with the Hebrew term indicating negation of believing.²⁴ As Nephi made clear in quotations provided previously, failure to believe was the inevitable result of stiff-neckedness and resistance to the Spirit, which could soften the heart and enable belief.

Rhetorical Structures Emphasize the Murmuring of Nephi's Brothers

In previous studies, I have shown how Nephi divided his first book (1 Nephi) into two chiastically structured and parallel halves labeled “Lehi's account” and “Nephi's account” respectively.²⁵ Each of these accounts is built around three of the six stories Nephi relates in his first book and is centered on the principal story of that account.

As composed by Nephi in his first nine chapters, Lehi's account is centered on the trip back to Jerusalem to retrieve the Brass Plates

24. Matthew L. Bowen, “Laman and Nephi as Key-Words: An Etymological, Narratological, and Rhetorical Approach to Understanding Lamanites and Nephites as Religious, Political, and Cultural Descriptors,” (presentation, FAIRMormon Conference, Utah Valley Convention Center, Provo, UT, August 7-9, 2019), <https://www.fairlatterdaysaints.org/blog/2020/03/17/fairmormon-conference-podcast-53-matthew-bowen-laman-and-nephi-as-key-words-an-etymological-narratological-and-rhetorical-approach-to-understanding-lamanites-and-nephites-as-religious>.

25. See Reynolds, “Nephi's Outline.”

and concludes with his vision of the tree of life and a brief listing of all his teachings to the assembled entourage. The Brass Plates story is told chiastically and centers on the premier example of the murmuring of Laman and Lemuel. At the moment when their mission was in total disarray, “an angel of the Lord came and stood before them, and he spake unto them,” calling them to repentance and commanding them to return to Jerusalem, promising that “the Lord would deliver Laban into [their] hands” (1 Nephi 3:29). Their response was to murmur again — questioning how the Lord could possibly do this. Nephi must have seen this as murmuring *par excellence* (1 Nephi 3:31).

Nephi’s account centers on the story of mobilizing the family work force to build a ship and concludes with a report of the visions of the future that Lehi and Nephi had received in their great vision. As in the other five stories, the dramatic tension in the ship-building story is provided by Laman and Lemuel and their murmuring. They refuse to work and even threaten to throw Nephi into the sea. This provokes the most detailed response to their murmuring as Nephi is filled with a divine power that his attackers can actually see and delivers a long speech answering all their stated concerns. He goes even further by calling them “murderers in their hearts” and declaring their exposure to “eternal damnation” (1 Nephi 17:44 and 47).

These two stories feature Laman and Lemuel’s strongest murmuring in the Brass Plates incident and Nephi’s strongest rebuttal of their murmuring in the ship-building incident. The two are also tied together by their central locations in parallel rhetorical structures and by their inclusion of Nephi’s only two references to Moses leading the Israelites out of Egypt.²⁶ In Nephi’s book, as in the biblical account of the Israelite exodus, faithless people murmur, but the Lord supports his prophets and delivers his people when they repent.

Verbal Themes Employed by Nephi

Even though the key terminology Nephi uses to present the rebellions of his brothers is obvious, it is worthwhile to assess it more systematically. Nephi repeatedly reports the *murmuring* of his brothers against himself, Lehi, and the Lord. This murmuring characterizes those who are *stiff-necked* and *hard-hearted* because of their unwillingness to *humble* themselves and allow the *Spirit* to *soften their hearts* and help them *believe the words* of the prophets. Their resentment against prophets who

26. Cf. Reynolds, “Nephi’s Outline” and 1 Nephi 4:2 and 1 Nephi 17:26–30.

call on them to repent leads to thoughts and even efforts to *seek to kill* or *murder* their brother Nephi and even their father Lehi.

Laman and Lemuel Murmured

Twenty-four of the thirty-three occurrences of some form of *murmur* in the Book of Mormon are found in Nephi's writings and seem to deliberately echo accounts of the murmurings of Israel against Moses in the wilderness.²⁷ Almost all Old Testament occurrences of the verb *lûn* (murmur) or the noun *te lûnnâ* (murmuring) with the preposition *ʿal* (against) are in Exodus 15–17 or Numbers 14–17 where they describe the complaining or rebellion of suffering Israelites against Moses, Aaron, or even the Lord.²⁸ By using the same term so consistently to describe the complaining and rebellions of Laman, Lemuel, and others during their travels in the wilderness, Nephi adds one more literary dimension to his implicit comparisons of the Lehite exodus to the ancient Israelite exodus and of himself and his father Lehi to the prophet Moses.²⁹

Technical linguistic studies agree on how to interpret *murmuring* in the Pentateuch.³⁰ Citing Coats, one theological dictionary explains:

[T]he verb [*lûn*, murmur, rebel] means to express resentment, dissatisfaction, anger, and complaint by grumbling in half-muted tones of hostile opposition to God's leaders and the authority which he has invested in them. . . . [I]t is an open act of rebellion against the Lord (Numbers 14:9) and a stubborn

27. 1 Nephi 2:11, 12 (2x), 3:5, 6, 31, 4:4, 16:3, 16:20 (3x), 25, 35, 36, 17:2, 17, 22, 49, 18:16, 2 Nephi 1:26, 5:3, 5:4, 27:35 and 29:8.

28. Exodus 16:7, 8; Numbers 14:27 (2x), 36, 16:11 and 17:5. For *te lûnnâ*, Strong's H8519, see Francis Brown, S.R. Driver, and Charles A. Briggs, *The Brown-Driver-Briggs Hebrew and English Lexicon: Coded with Strong's Concordance Numbers* (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson Publ., 2003), 534, s.v. "תָּלַן," <https://archive.org/details/browndriverbrigg0000brow/page/534/mode/2up>. For *lûn*, Strong's H3885, see *ibid.*, 534, s.v. "לָן."

29. See Noel B. Reynolds, "The Israelite Background of Moses Typology in the Book of Mormon," *BYU Studies Quarterly* 44, no. 2 (2005): 4–23 and "Lehi as Moses," *Journal of Book of Mormon Studies* 9, no. 2, (2000): 26–35. For an earlier treatment of this question, see George S. Tate, "The Typology of the Exodus Pattern in the Book of Mormon," in *Literature of Belief: Sacred Scripture and Religious Experience*, ed. Neal E. Lambert (Provo, UT: Religious Studies Center, 1981), 245–62.

30. The classic 1968 study by George C. Coats is still the standard linguistic investigation. See his *Rebellion in the Wilderness* (Nashville: Abingdon, 1968), 21–28.

refusal to believe God's word and God's miraculous works
(Numbers 14:11, 22, 23).³¹

te lūnnâ (murmuring) is "always used of Israel's murmurings ... against the Lord; an act of rebellion, disbelief, and disobedience to duly constituted authority."³²

Laman and Lemuel Sought to Take Away My Life

Nephi includes twenty references to *murder* or the synonymous *seeking to kill* and *take away life* either in descriptions of the desires of Laman and Lemuel or other Israelites who have rejected the prophets or in the God-given prohibitions on murder.

The Decalogue's prohibition on murder in Exodus 20:13 uses the Hebrew word *râtsach* (murder, slay, kill): "Thou shalt not murder" (NIV). Scholars today agree that *murder* is a more precise translation here than the KJV's *kill*.³³ Nephi may be using this term when he accuses Laman and Lemuel of being "murderers in your hearts" (1 Nephi 17:44). He and Jacob also seem to use the same term when they refer to the sixth commandment. Jacob declares, "Woe unto the murderer who deliberately killeth, for he shall die," (2 Nephi 9:35), and Nephi echoes the Exodus mandate "that men should not murder" (2 Nephi 26:32). They also appear to associate the same term with the devil "who ... stirreth up the children of men unto secret combinations of murder" (2 Nephi 9:9) and who is "the founder of murder and works of darkness" (2 Nephi 26:22).

The term *hârag* occurs in the Hebrew Bible more than three times as frequently and is usually translated *slay*, but it also can be translated *destroy*, *kill*, or *murder*. The wicked Jews slay the prophets, and the Lord slays the wicked. *Hârag* is never used for the killing of sacrificial animals and only rarely for killing animals for food.³⁴ While we can never know for sure which original-language term might lie behind the English words of the Book of Mormon, here again the Old Testament pattern seems consistent with Nephi's usage. Nephi invokes *slay* six times in the account of Laban's killing. The abominable church "slayeth the saints of God" (1 Nephi 13:5). While sojourning in the wilderness, Lehi's party

31. Walter C. Kaiser, "1097," in *Theological Wordbook of the Old Testament*, ed. R. Laird Harris, Gleason L. Archer, Jr., and Bruce K. Waltke (Chicago: The Moody Bible Institute of Chicago, 1980), 475, hereafter referred to as *TWOT*.

32. *Ibid.*

33. William White, "2208," in *TWOT*, 860.

34. Harold G. Stigers, "514," in *TWOT*, 222.

“did slay wild beasts” for food (1 Nephi 16:15, 18, 31). On one occasion when there had been much suffering for want of food in the wilderness, Laman said to Lemuel and the sons of Ishmael: “Behold, *let us slay* our father and also our brother Nephi, who hath taken it upon him to be our ruler and our teacher, who are his elder brethren” (1 Nephi 16:37).

The Hebrew Bible has a distinctive phrasing to describe the efforts of would-be murderers. Elijah twice tells the Lord “the children of Israel have forsaken thy covenant, thrown down thine altars, and *slain thy prophets* with the sword; and I, even I only, am left; and *they seek my life, to take it away*” (1 Kings 19:10 and 14, KJV). Nephi borrows this same phrasing first to describe the efforts of the Jews in Jerusalem to kill his father Lehi (1 Nephi 1:20, 2:1, 13, 7:14, and 17:44), and then repeatedly to describe the efforts of Laman and Lemuel to slay Lehi and Nephi.³⁵

A But behold, their anger did increase against me, insomuch that *they did seek to take away my life*.

B Yea, *they did murmur against me*, saying: Our younger brother thinketh to rule over us, and we have had much trial because of him.

C Wherefore now *let us slay him*, that we may not be *afflicted more because of his words*.

1 For behold, we will not that he shall be our ruler,

2 for it belongeth unto us which are the elder brethren to rule over this people.

B* Now I do not write upon these plates all the words which *they murmured against me*,

A* but it sufficeth me to say that *they did seek to take away my life*. (2 Nephi 5:2–4)

The murderous desires and efforts of Laman and Lemuel to kill their father and brother in the hope of making their own lives easier are emphasized repeatedly in Nephi’s account to contrast them explicitly with those who believe in Christ and follow him in their lives. In Nephi’s composition, they are also implicitly contrasted with the supreme sacrifice of Jesus Christ who would “lay down his life for the salvation of his people” (2 Nephi 2:8). And they are implicitly compared with future Jews at Jerusalem who will crucify the God of Israel (see 1 Nephi 19:7–13).

35. In addition to the passages quoted in the text, see 1 Nephi 7:16, 19, 2 Nephi 1:24, and 5:19.

The Spirit and the Two Ways

Nephi's writings repeatedly invoke the metaphor of the Two Ways between which every human being must choose — to follow the Lord or the devil.³⁶ The vision of the tree of life and the presentation of the gospel describe the straight and narrow path that is the only way that leads to eternal life. The vision also speaks of “forbidden paths” and “strange roads” which Lehi later characterizes as the devil's way of captivity that leads to eternal death (1 Nephi 8:28 and 32; 2 Nephi 2:26–29). By listening to the Spirit and following its guidance, Lehi, Nephi, and the other prophets are able to receive revelation for themselves and others as they are filled with or carried away by the Spirit and as it shows them “all things which [they] should do” (2 Nephi 32:5). Further, they invite all others to repent with contrite spirits and broken hearts that they may receive those same blessings of the Spirit (see 1 Nephi 2:7 and 2 Nephi 4:32).

Nephi also features Laman and Lemuel repeatedly as his personal-life examples of people who harden their hearts and refuse to listen to the prophets or the Holy Ghost (1 Nephi 15:10–11). Nephi compares them explicitly to the Jews at Jerusalem who sought to kill Lehi and to the rebellious Israelites under Moses, and implicitly to the future Jews who will kill the Lamb of God and persecute his apostles (1 Nephi 2:9–13; 11:28, 32–33; and 17:30, 41, 44). Nephi holds them responsible for leading their posterity astray and establishing a dispensation-long division between Lehi's descendants in which so many will be destroyed. Lehi sums up the same case against Laman and Lemuel in defense of Nephi in his final words with them (2 Nephi 1:13–27).

It is obvious that Nephi is far from apologizing for teenage immaturity and harshness towards his rebellious brothers. Rather, he is teaching his descendants and his future readers that life is serious, that choices have consequences, and that if their own eternal welfare matters to them, they must repent and follow Jesus Christ who will lead them to eternal life. If they refuse to let the Spirit soften their hearts and insist on choosing their own paths in this life, they will find themselves in the devil's thrall and suffer eternally for those choices. Like Lehi, Nephi's driving desire is for the eternal welfare of the souls of his family and of

36. For a comprehensive account of this theme in Nephi's writings and in the rest of the Book of Mormon, see Noel B. Reynolds, “The Ancient Doctrine of the Two Ways and the Book of Mormon,” *BYU Studies Quarterly* 56, no. 3 (2017):49–78.

all peoples. He has dedicated his life to that pursuit. He fully endorses the words of Jacob to the Nephites:

Therefore cheer up your hearts and remember that ye are free to act for yourselves, to choose the way of everlasting death or the way of eternal life. Wherefore, my beloved brethren, reconcile yourselves to the will of God and not to the will of the devil and the flesh. And remember that after ye are reconciled unto God that it is only in and through the grace of God that ye are saved. (2 Nephi 10:23–24)

From this perspective, readers should not see the mature Nephi writing to justify or to apologize for his youthful actions to unknown and distant readers that do not know him or his brothers.

All of Nephi's writing is dominated by the visions he has been given that show how all men and women will be judged at the last day. He is driven almost exclusively by his desire to inspire his descendants, as well as the Gentiles and the house of Israel, to humble themselves in repentance before the Father and take up the gospel of Jesus Christ — the only path that can lead them to eternal life. Nephi clearly believes that only those readers who turn to Christ and seek eternal life in this way will be benefitted by his writings. And there is nothing any mortal can do now to help Laman and Lemuel or anyone else who goes to the grave with their heart hardened and their neck resolutely stiffened against the Spirit that testifies of God's love, goodness, and plan of redemption for them.

Nephi's summary of his prophecies of the last days as set forth near the end of his second book echoes the same concerns that distinguish the two ways. Nephi foresees that his writings will be "of great worth" and warn "the children of men and especially ... our seed, which are a remnant of the house of Israel" of the evils of "that day." Numerous competing churches will claim to be the Lord's but will teach their own learning and denying the Holy Ghost and the power of God.

There shall also be many which shall say: Eat, drink, and be merry, nevertheless fear God. He will justify in committing a little sin. ... And at last we shall be saved in the kingdom of God. [Many] shall be puffed up in their hearts. ... And the blood of the saints shall cry from the ground against them. Yea, they have all gone out of the way. They have become corrupted because of pride. ... They wear stiff necks and high heads ...

[W]oe, woe, woe be unto them, saith the Lord God Almighty, for they shall be thrust down to hell. (2 Nephi 28:8–15)

Here again, Nephi seems to treat his own writing as an allegory that will warn all peoples of the importance of following the right way and not allow the devil “to pacify and lull them away into carnal security [and lead] them away carefully down to hell” (2 Nephi 28:21).

A Perspective from Literary Theory

Scholars have found that the literary and linguistic theories of metaphor may open important windows for understanding the conceptual world of the ancient Near East³⁷ and especially in the Bible.³⁸ In the introduction to their edited collection, Pallavidini and Portuese assert:

Metaphor ... constitutes the only means of communicating the otherworldly or extraordinary experience. It forms the bridge between direct and mediate experience, between the religious and the human, and furnishes a common bond of understanding between people.”³⁹

Because metaphors are conceptual, they may be presented either verbally in speech or text or graphically in a work of art.

Metaphors for Life

Nephi employs many metaphors, but as argued throughout this paper, the conflict with his brothers is used deliberately to counterpoise the culturally prevalent metaphor of *the good life* — as desired by Laman and Lemuel — with the metaphor of *life as a probationary state* — as a basic plank of the plan of salvation that was taught to Lehi and Nephi in their visions.

Metaphors for *life* are known to and assumed in most cultures. Perhaps the most common metaphor for life in western cultures portrays it as a journey as exemplified in various strains of Judeo-Christian tradition. Life has also been seen as a day with its hours or as a year with its seasons. Life can also be conceptualized as a play, as bondage, or as a burden.⁴⁰ Shared cultures include vast numbers of metaphors

37. See, e.g., Marta Pallavidini and Ludovico Portuese, eds., *Researching Metaphor in the Ancient Near East* (Wiesbaden, DE: Harrassowitz Verlag, 2020).

38. P. Van Hecke, ed., *Metaphor in the Hebrew Bible* (Leuven, BE: Peeters, 2005).

39. Pallavidini and Portuese, *Researching Metaphor*, 1.

40. Examples of all of these are discussed in the opening chapter of Lakoff and Turner, *More than Cool Reason*.

which can be used almost without thought to convey meaning in human interactions. While the potential metaphors in a language community may be infinite, only a relatively small number tend to be invoked regularly.

Primary Metaphors

While this paper is not the place for a deep dive into linguistic theories of metaphor, the concept of a *primary metaphor* deserves attention because of the way it applies to Nephi's metaphor of life as a probation. Primary metaphors "form the basis for widely shared if not universal patterns of language and conceptualization, linking one idea (and element of experience) to another."⁴¹

The fundamental concepts in primary metaphors are basic concepts "grounded in universal (rather than culturally determined) aspects of human experience" and "should ultimately be grounded in what can plausibly be conceived as basic parameters of human physical, social, emotional, or intellectual experience."⁴² It seems obvious that Nephi's linked concepts of life and probation both meet these requirements for primary metaphors. We are also reminded that "metaphors are nothing but mappings across conceptual domains, where each mapping is not arbitrary but grounded in the body and in everyday experience and knowledge."⁴³ Herein lies the genius of Nephi's first book as he establishes the metaphor of life as a probation through a carefully structured recounting of his family's experience and received revelations that feature their conflict over that new metaphor.

Lakoff and Turner emphasized three of the many ways in which metaphors may differ from one another.⁴⁴ The Nephite metaphor of life as a probation is clearly *conceptual* rather than poetic. The whole

41. Joseph E. Grady and Giorgio A. Ascoli, "Sources and Targets in Primary Metaphor Theory: Looking Back and Thinking Ahead," in *Metaphor: Embodied Cognition and Discourse*, ed. Beate Hampe (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2017), 27.

42. Ibid., 29. In their study of metaphor, Lakoff and Johnson concluded that "no metaphor can ever be comprehended or even adequately represented independently of its experiential basis." See Lakoff and Johnson, *Metaphors We Live By*, 19.

43. Pallavidini and Portuese, *Researching Metaphor*, 4.

44. See Lakoff and Turner, *More Than Cool Reason*, 49–56. For an extended technical analysis see Dedre Gentner et al., "Metaphor is Like Analogy," in *The Analogical Mind: Perspectives from Cognitive Science*, ed. Dedre Gentner, Keith J. Holyoak, and Boicho N. Kokinov (Cambridge, MA: The MIT Press, 2001), 199–253.

point is to change understanding of what is important in this life. But secondly, the Nephite metaphor is innovative and even possibly unique and is clearly not already *conventionalized* in Israelite culture. Lehi, Nephi, and the prophets faced a significant challenge in getting people to accept this new metaphor as a guide in understanding the purpose of life and in adjusting their approach to life accordingly. Thirdly, metaphors may vary in considerable degree in how basic they may be to human understanding of what matters in human life. The radicalness of the new Nephite metaphor is made even more challenging by its high degree of *basicness*. It changes everything when taken seriously. This particular difference is what made the metaphor of life as a probation so challenging for contemporary Israelites to accept. It demanded repentance and complete obedience of the Lord's commandments in all things. It dramatically upset the comfortable cultural accommodation that had been established between the law of Moses and the lifestyle of Israelite elites.

Individual and Group Salvation

It would be a mistake to analyze the struggle between Nephi and his brothers as its own phenomenon in isolation from the great prophecies of Lehi, Isaiah, and Nephi himself that constitute a major portion of Nephi's books. Rather, Nephi's personal experience with the spiritual rebels in his own family provided him with the model of individual rebellion that enabled him to understand the rejection of current prophets by the Jews and the future cycles of apostasy and repentance that would occur among his own descendants as well as the opposition of many Israelites and Gentiles to the prophesied restoration of the gospel of Jesus Christ in the last days. Throughout his writings Nephi repeatedly invokes resistance to the Spirit, hardness of heart, and stiff-neckedness to explain the apostasies of present and future peoples. His final prophecies provided the opportunity to rehearse and reemphasize this explanatory approach in the presentation of his prophecies that are drawn from his own visions and from the revelations reported by Lehi and Isaiah as cited earlier in Nephi's writing.⁴⁵

Methodological Individualism and Holism

Social scientists have been debating the relative merits of competing approaches to the explanation of social phenomena for many decades.

45. Nephi's prophecies begin at 2 Nephi 25:7 and are pronounced to be at an end at 2 Nephi 31:1.

Should the events and movements in human societies be understood in terms of general laws and tendencies or as consequences of the aggregation of choices made by individual members of a society? While *methodological holists* believe that social phenomena such as organizations, social processes, cultures and traditions, and norms and rules are indispensable for adequate explanations of social phenomena, *methodological individualists* maintain that all such group phenomena can ultimately be reduced to the choices and actions of individuals.⁴⁶

A version of this philosophical debate in the social sciences might seem to apply to Nephi's teachings in his two books. On the one hand, Nephi and Lehi refer repeatedly to holistic phenomena in their understandings of this world and the future. All mankind is God's creation and has been sent to this mortal probation to be tested and prepared for a final judgment where the righteous and the wicked will be rewarded as groups. The future has been seen in terms of groups that will go through cycles of faithfulness and apostasy: the house of Israel, the remnant of Joseph (Nephites and Lamanites), and the Gentiles. On the other hand, the gospel they teach focuses constantly on individuals as the ones who must choose or refuse to believe and repent. The stories Nephi tells always feature choices made by individuals in his explanations of individual and group outcomes.

As has been explained in this paper, the founding Nephite prophets saw all men and women as agents who are free to choose to follow Jesus Christ or to follow their own path. Further, as they display a humble desire for guidance, God will bless them with his Holy Spirit, which can soften their hearts and guide them to make choices and do what is necessary to become righteous followers of Christ. From that perspective, the cycles of faithfulness and wickedness that are foreseen in Nephite prophecy would seem to reflect an aggregation of righteous or evil choices by individuals belonging to different groups of people — among whom there could be many exceptions.

This explanatory perspective may illuminate Nephi's decision to begin his final writing with stories about his personal experience with his own family members. We read Nephi backwards if we interpret him as being primarily concerned to set the record straight on his own

46. Karl Popper framed this issue clearly in his early writings on scientific explanation. For a well-informed and current account of this debate, see Julie Zahle, "Methodological Holism in the Social Sciences," *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy Archive* (March 21, 2016), <https://plato.stanford.edu/archives/win2021/entries/holism-social/>.

problematic relationships with other family members. What makes more sense is that he uses his own experience at the level that all his readers will understand to explain the great prophecies that he and Lehi and other prophets such as Isaiah have received about the futures of all humankind. Israel will be scattered among all nations. The Nephites will be destroyed. The Lamanites will eventually receive the gospel. The Gentile nations will play an important role as they provide shelter for the restoration of the gospel in the latter-days and for the gathering of scattered Israel.

Nephi's stories explain how human beings raised in the same families can bring individual choice differences to the table in ways that explain the endlessly mixed results of sharing the gospel of Jesus Christ. Outcomes will depend on choices made by individuals. Some, like Lehi and Nephi, upon hearing prophetic warnings, will humble themselves, turn to prayer, and be blessed by the softening visitation of the Lord's spirit. So blessed, many will put their very lives at risk in following God's directions for them. Others will resist the prophetic warnings with stiff necks, find sufficient justification in how they conform their lives to current cultural standards, and will harden their hearts against spiritual warnings and even descend to the persecution and murder of the prophets who are calling them to repentance. So even though the prophecies speak in terms of wholes — the Gentiles, the house of Israel, etc., those prophecies can only be understood in terms of choices by individuals — as would be required by methodological individualism.

What Determines Individual Choices?

Nephi's narratives never provide environmental explanations for these differences between those who respond to prophetic warnings positively and those who react against them, seeing them as threats to the lives they have chosen. Rather, it seems that individuals have some strength or weakness in their spiritual core that moves them to seek the goodness of God, even at great risk, or to accept the seductive rationalizations whispered to them by the devil as they are gradually drawn into his captivity. Laman and Lemuel can only be drawn into a repentant mode when confronted by immediate and overwhelming spiritual power. But as Lehi's vision and the family experience pointedly show, they are never enticed by the fruit of the tree of life. They will not even reach out to taste it when invited (1 Nephi 8:17–18). Lehi, Nephi, and Isaiah seem to see this variety of inward dispositions in human beings as the source of the aggregated choices that will lead groups to act in the ways their

prophecies describe. Those internal dispositions, possibly unique to each person, would appear to be what is being tested or proved in this mortal life understood as a probationary state.

From this explanatory perspective, Nephi's readers can see that his selected stories about his family's internal struggles are told in a way that features choice-making by individuals. Nephi shows them how those choices when aggregated between Nephites and Lamanites provide an explanation for the social phenomena described in prophecies about their own future and the future of the Gentiles and the house of Israel. These prophecies are described repeatedly in both of Nephi's books.⁴⁷ The second book moves on from family storytelling to the explanations of God's plan of salvation and the gospel of Jesus Christ, which also focus on individual choice. These choices also lie behind the great prophecies and make their happy conclusions possible.

Back to Allegory

At the same time, Nephi's grounding of the prophecies in the real-life experience of his own family also provides, through the logic of allegory, the grounding for the eventual judgment of all men and women. As they meet God on that day, there will be no place for lies or rationalizations. Their mortal choices and actions will justify either a reward of eternal life or a condemnation to the captivity of the devil — both of which will reflect the core desires of individuals that led them to humble themselves and accept the guidance of the Holy Spirit or to stiffen their necks and harden their hearts against that spiritual invitation. That is why the metaphor of life as a mortal probation, as the basic condition of the plan of salvation, is so critical in the teachings that Lehi and Nephi were given in their visions. The centrality of this Nephite teaching persists down to the last days of Mormon:

For this cause I write unto you, that ye may know that ye must all stand before the judgment seat of Christ, yea, every soul which belongeth to the whole human family of Adam — and ye must stand to be judged of your works, whether they be good or evil ... And I would that I could persuade all ye ends of the earth to repent and prepare to stand before the judgment seat of Christ. (Mormon 3:20, 22)

47. See the documentation in Reynolds, "Lehi's Dream, Nephi's Blueprint," Appendix.

Lehi and Nephi Lament Their Own Sins and Weaknesses

It is important to see that both Lehi and Nephi recognized their own weaknesses and sins for which they sought forgiveness and divinely given strength to overcome. From the beginning, Lehi was portrayed by Nephi as one who prayed for guidance and then mobilized and executed a positive response to the Lord's surprising and possibly terrifying command that he flee with his family into the wilderness. Only once did Lehi's resolve flag as misfortune led to serious hunger for his entire party. Powerless to provide for the basic need of his family for food, he "began to murmur against the Lord his God." The whole company was "exceeding sorrowful" and "did murmur against the Lord" (1 Nephi 16:20).

In this instance, it was Nephi who rose to the occasion: "And it came to pass that I Nephi did speak much unto my brethren because that they had *hardened their hearts* again, even unto complaining against the Lord their God" (1 Nephi 16:22). And they "humbled themselves because of my words; for I did say many things unto them in the energy of my soul" (verse 24). Lehi repented and prayed for direction. "And it came to pass that the voice of the Lord came unto my father, and he was truly chastened because of his murmuring against the Lord, insomuch that he was brought down into the depths of sorrow" (verse 25).

Later, in deeply pained language, Nephi lays out his own sense of weakness and vulnerability to the temptations of the enemy of his soul. Reflecting on "the great goodness of the Lord" he acknowledges his own sins:

O wretched man that I am! Yea, my heart sorroweth because of my flesh. My soul grieveth because of mine iniquities. I am encompassed about because of the temptations and the sins which doth so easily beset me. And when I desire to rejoice, my heart groaneth because of my sins. (2 Nephi 4:17–19)

What was the Spiritual Status of Lehi and His Family before His First Vision?

Those who may be looking for a softer judgment on Laman and Lemuel in Nephi's writings might do better to look at their filial relationship to their father Lehi than to focus on their fraternal battles. The clearest statement of family influence on the choices made by family members occurs in Lehi's blessing to the children of Laman when he states his own mature belief "that if ye are brought up in the right way that ye should go, ye will not depart from it" (2 Nephi 4:5; cf. Proverbs 22:6).

Behold, my sons and my daughters which are the sons and the daughters of my first born, I would that ye should give ear unto my words. For the Lord God hath said that inasmuch as ye shall keep my commandments, ye shall prosper in the land. And inasmuch as ye will not keep my commandments, ye shall be cut off from my presence.

But behold, my sons and my daughters, I cannot go down to my grave save I should leave a blessing upon you. For behold, I know that if ye are brought up in the right way that ye should go, ye will not depart from it.

Wherefore if ye are cursed, behold, I leave my blessing upon you, that the cursing may be taken from you and be answered upon the heads of your parents. (2 Nephi 4:3–6)

So what about their fathers, Laman and Lemuel? Were they not “brought up in the right way?” They were introduced first as lacking in faithful following of the commandments. They were characterized by their “stiff-neckedness” and their “murmuring” against their father and his visions that had brought them into this wilderness. They attributed Lehi’s revelations to “the foolish imaginations of his heart” ... “because they knew not the dealings of that God who had created them.” In these ways, “they were like unto the Jews which were at Jerusalem, which sought to take away the life of my father” (1 Nephi 2:9–13). At one point in the story, Nephi quotes Laman’s proposal to the others: “Let us slay our father and also our brother Nephi” (1 Nephi 16: 37). Their resentment was deeply personal because of the good life they had lost. For Lehi “had led them out of the land of Jerusalem, to leave the land of their inheritance and their gold and their silver and their precious things, and to perish in the wilderness” (1 Nephi 2:11). Years later they would reformulate this same complaint: “Behold, these many years we have suffered in the wilderness, which time we might have enjoyed our possessions and the land of our inheritance; yea, and we might have been happy” (1 Nephi 17:21).

Though descended from a refugee Manassite scribal family, Lehi grew up comfortably in seventh-century Jerusalem.⁴⁸ He was highly educated, wealthy, and possessed of a noteworthy inheritance.⁴⁹ Nothing he or Nephi tells us would refute the supposition that the attitudes displayed

48. 1 Nephi 1:4, “my father Lehi having dwelt at Jerusalem in all his days.”

49. See the extended discussion in Reynolds, “Lehi and Nephi as Trained Manassite Scribes.”

by Laman and Lemuel in Nephi's text may have characterized the whole family in their lives before Lehi received his life-changing visions. We should not be surprised if many of the refugee Manassite scribal school families had assimilated themselves over the preceding century to the same wealthy and educated society of Judahite scribes in Jerusalem — the “elders of the Jews” that Lehi's cousin Laban was so comfortably ensconced with — as evidenced by his night-time carousing.⁵⁰ Before Lehi received his first visions, they may all have shared the attitude expressed repeatedly by Laman and Lemuel:

And we know that the people which were in the land of Jerusalem were a righteous people, for they keep the statutes and the judgments of the Lord and all his commandments according to the law of Moses; wherefore we know that they are a righteous people. (1 Nephi 17:22)

Lehi may have been referring to a recent dramatic shift in his spiritual perspective when explaining to Sariah his confidence in the Lord's command to send their sons back to Jerusalem to retrieve the Brass Plates:

And it had come to pass that my father spake unto her, saying: I know that I am a visionary man, for if I had not seen the things of God in a vision, I should not have known the goodness of God but had tarried at Jerusalem and had perished with my brethren. (1 Nephi 5:4)

But Lehi had been sufficiently shaken by the recent prophecies of Jerusalem's looming destruction:

Wherefore it came to pass that my father Lehi, as he went forth, prayed unto the Lord, yea, even with all his heart, in behalf of his people. And it came to pass as he prayed unto the Lord, there came a pillar of fire and dwelt upon a rock before him, and he saw and heard much. And because of the things which he saw and heard, he did quake and tremble exceedingly. (1 Nephi 1:5–6)

50. See 1 Nephi 4:22. In Reynolds, “Lehi and Nephi as Trained Manassite Scribes,” I have explained why Lehi and Laban should be seen as members of the same Manassite family scribal school that had maintained the Josephite scriptural tradition for centuries and had manufactured the Brass Plates in Lehi's day to preserve their unique collection of inspired writings.

Returning to his home, Lehi was “carried away” in a second vision which may have provided a dramatic turning point in his life. After receiving the dreaded confirmation that Jerusalem would be destroyed and its people “carried away captive” into Babylon, Lehi exclaims:

Great and marvelous are thy works, O Lord God Almighty. Thy throne is high in the heavens, and thy power and goodness and mercy is over all the inhabitants of the earth. And because thou art merciful, thou wilt not suffer those who come unto thee that they shall perish. And after this manner was the language of my father in the praising of his God, for his soul did rejoice and his whole heart was filled because of the things which he had seen, yea, which the Lord had shewn unto him. (1 Nephi 1:14–15)

So what had Lehi seen in the second vision that evoked such an effusively positive response to a vision that had also confirmed his worst fears? In a previous paper I have advanced several reasons for concluding that Lehi’s second vision received at his house in Jerusalem may have been the same great vision of the tree of life described to the first assembly of his emigrant group in the wilderness.⁵¹ It was in that vision that Lehi and Nephi were first taught the gospel of Jesus Christ and the plan of salvation that spelled out the great things the Father and the Son have done to provide for the eternal salvation of mankind — as well as the path men and women must choose and follow if they would receive eternal life. These teachings dramatically expanded the understanding of these newly commissioned prophets beyond their traditional understanding of the Abrahamic covenant. These visions showed Lehi and Nephi what the Lord was doing to bring salvation to all humans who would choose to follow him and give up the worldly perspective of Jerusalem’s elites.

The Vision of the Tree of Life

We should not follow Laman and Lemuel in interpreting Nephi’s youthful actions and attitudes as manifestations of personality defects or immaturity.⁵² Nephi and Lehi are trying to persuade all their listeners

51. Reynolds, “Lehi’s Dream, Nephi’s Blueprint.”

52. Lehi provides the best summary of the accusations and complaints that Laman and Lemuel have lodged against their younger brother in 2 Nephi 1:25–26. As indicated in the abstract and in footnote 7 above, I will not engage here the critical literature and the interpretations of Nephi that have been proposed in some of those writings.

to abandon the perspectives of this fallen world in which life's values are usually judged in terms of creature comforts, social status, or power relationships. As a result of their great visions, Lehi and Nephi recognize that the eternal welfare of their own beloved family members and all peoples depends on their willingness to transcend that temporal perspective as they repent and come to Christ. Nephi and Lehi have seen the heavens opened, have been called as prophets, have become part of the heavenly council, and have spoken in person with the Father and the Son.⁵³ They understand the possibility of eternal life that is extended to every human being and the awful hell that awaits those who choose to follow the devil while in this probationary state.

From the time they received that great vision they have been changed fundamentally by this eternal, heavenly perspective that trivializes all worldly values. It no longer matters to them whether they have social status, worldly wealth, or even that they be treated fairly by others. They have seen the beginning from the end. They know that the only important issue for all of humanity is salvation — or damnation. This life is a probation that will pass quickly. There will be a judgment and a division between those who have chosen Christ's proffered path to eternal life and those who have surrendered to the captivity of the devil and the eternal suffering to which his path leads. God has provided a way for all to be saved — according to their works. But each individual must choose between pursuit of worldly values or righteousness in following Christ with all the sacrifices and suffering, injustices and disappointments that might entail. Understood in this way, Lehi's vision of the tree of life is also an allegory that describes the choices men and women have in this probationary state and the good and bad consequences associated with those choices.

In their visions, Lehi and Nephi have seen (1) the impending destruction of their Jerusalem, (2) the future coming of Jesus Christ to make salvation possible for every human being, the more distant futures of (3) their own descendants, (4) the nations of the world, and (5) of the house of Israel. They know of the destruction and damnation that awaits those who refuse the blessings of the atonement. They have seen the destruction of their own wicked descendants. They no longer have the option to humor the wicked — to be politely tolerant of all ways of life. While all have equal rights to choose, the ways of life they can choose between are not of equal value. Lehi and Nephi labor diligently to help others choose the right way. But any such efforts will always be offensive

53. Reynolds, "Lehi's Dream, Nephi's Blueprint," 244.

to those who choose to pursue worldly values. The choice to repent entails a judgment or recognition that the other options are inferior and wrong. For that reason, many people do not appreciate being called to repentance, to give up their own ways and to take up the covenant path provided in Christ's gospel.

In the visualization of this teaching provided in Lehi's vision, we see people (1) who come to the tree of life and endure to the end in righteousness, (2) who taste the fruit and are then embarrassed and shamed by worldly ridicule and return to their worldly pursuits, (3) who are blinded by mists of darkness or the temptations of the devil and never make it to the tree, and (4) who never respond to the invitation, who never seek the tree or its fruit — like Laman and Lemuel in Lehi's dream. For Lehi and Nephi this is all about salvation, and they desperately want that eternal blessing for their family members.

Lehi begins his report on the vision by saying he has "reason to rejoice in the Lord because of Nephi and also of Sam." But he then tells Laman and Lemuel, "I fear exceedingly because of you" (1 Nephi 8:3–4). He concludes his report on the vision by repeating and expanding on his fears for Laman and Lemuel:

And it came to pass that after my father had spoken all the words of his dream or vision, which were many, he said unto us, because of these things which he saw in a vision, he exceedingly feared for Laman and Lemuel. Yea, he feared lest they should be cast off from the presence of the Lord. And he did exhort them then with all the feeling of a tender parent that they would hearken to his words, in that perhaps the Lord would be merciful to them and not cast them off. Yea, my father did preach unto them. And after that he had preached unto them and also prophesied unto them of many things, he bade them to keep the commandments of the Lord. And he did cease speaking unto them. (1 Nephi 8:36–38)

At the end of his life, Lehi expanded on this vision-based fear in a more detailed expression of his fears for them based on the "hardness of heart" they had displayed repeatedly in their lives to that point:

My heart hath been weighed down with sorrow from time to time, for I have feared, lest for the hardness of your hearts, lest the Lord your God should come out in the fullness of his wrath upon you, that ye be cut off and destroyed forever, or that a cursing should come upon you for the space of many

generations and ye are visited by sword and by famine and are hated and are led according to the will and captivity of the devil. (2 Nephi 1:17–18)

Lehi then went on at length calling on Laman and Lemuel to “arise from the dust ... and be men.” He plead with them to “rebel no more against” Nephi as he summed up the list of their offenses against Nephi who was only seeking “the glory of God” and their “own eternal welfare” as “the Spirit of the Lord which was in him ... opened his mouth to utterance, that he could not shut it.” These years of sad experience led Lehi once again to “exceedingly fear and tremble because of” these two rebellious sons (see 2 Nephi 1:19–29). Lehi’s interpretations of his visions and revelations directly reinforce the core message of the allegory Nephi has constructed using their family history.

Timeframes Visualized and Verbalized in the Vision Given to Lehi and Nephi

In a previous paper I have explained Nephi’s use of three important timeframes and their accompanying visual images to convey the teachings of his visions and prophecies.⁵⁴

The eternal perspective is visualized for Lehi as he sees God on his throne in the heavenly council and verbalized as the plan of salvation. The perspective of salvation history and the future of God’s covenant peoples on the earth is visualized in the allegory of the olive tree and verbalized as God’s covenants with Abraham, Lehi, and the founding prophets of other dispensations. The perspective of individual lifetimes is visualized in the vision of the tree of life with a straight and narrow path that leads to salvation and with many strange and forbidden paths that lead to the great and spacious building and eventually to death. This perspective is visualized further in the ancient doctrine of the two ways — the way of light and life that leads to Christ and eternal life, and the way of darkness and death that leads to the eternal captivity of Satan. The former is verbalized throughout the Book of Mormon as the way or as the gospel or doctrine of Christ which men and women can follow back to the presence of God and constitutes the primary message of the Nephite prophets.⁵⁵

54. See Reynolds, “Lehi’s Dream, Nephi’s Blueprint.”

55. *Ibid.*, 232–33, emphasis added.

Each of these three pairs of visualizations and verbalizations provided Nephi and his readers with helpful metaphors and allegories for understanding different perspectives on this mortal life. Behind all three of them is the fundamental metaphor of *life as a probationary state*.

Life as a Probationary State in a Specified Time

Visions and prophecies were given to Lehi and Nephi to teach them God's perspective on this life as a tiny slice, though essential part, of eternal life. From that divine perspective, they could understand and teach others that other perspectives that focused only on this mortal life were inadequate and would make those who based life decisions in such worldly outlooks vulnerable to the deceptions and temptations of the devil. As Lehi summarized what he had learned from his visions,

Therefore remember, O man: for all thy doings thou shalt be brought into judgment. Wherefore if ye have sought to do wickedly in the days of your *probation*, then ye are found unclean before the judgment seat of God. And no unclean thing can dwell with God; wherefore ye must be cast off forever. (1 Nephi 10:20–21)⁵⁶

Lehi's final appeal to his children to choose the right way was grounded in a recital of the fact and purposes of the creation.

For there is a God and he hath created all things, both the heavens and the earth and all things that in them is, . . . and to bring about his eternal purposes in the end of man . . . wherefore the Lord God gave unto man that he should act for himself. (2 Nephi 2:14–16)

Lehi went on to explain that Adam and Eve first chose to follow the guidance of the devil and ate the forbidden fruit which led to their being cast out and placed in a state of probation where they could choose to repent and keep the commandments.

And after that Adam and Eve had partaken of the forbidden fruit, they were driven out from the garden of Eden to till the earth. And they have brought forth children, yea, even the

56. The metaphor of life as a *time* or *state* or as *day(s) of probation* is stated explicitly seven times in the words of Lehi and his sons and twice more by later prophets. Cf. 1 Nephi 10:21, 15:31 and 32, 2 Nephi 2:21 and 30, 9:27, 33:9, Helaman 13:38, and Mormon 9:28. See below for a discussion of Alma and Amulek's parallel language describing life as a *probationary state*.

family of all the earth. And the days of the children of men were prolonged, according to the will of God, that they might repent while in the flesh. Wherefore their state became a *state of probation*, and their time was lengthened according to the commandments which the Lord God gave unto the children of men. For he gave commandment that all men must repent, for he shewed unto all men that they were lost because of the transgression of their parents. (2 Nephi 2:19–21)

Lehi and Nephi had been instructed repeatedly in their visions of the redemption offered to all men and women through the atonement of Christ. With that perspective, Lehi went on to plead with his sons to follow “his Holy Spirit,” and not continue in following “the will of the flesh.” This final plea provides the most comprehensive explanation of the metaphor of life as a probation that we have in the Book of Mormon:

But behold, all things have been done in the wisdom of him who knoweth all things. Adam fell that men might be, and men are that they might have joy. And the Messiah cometh in the fullness of time that he might redeem the children of men from the fall. And because that they are redeemed from the fall, they have become free forever, knowing good from evil, to act for themselves and not to be acted upon, save it be by the punishment of the law at the great and last day, according to the commandments which God hath given.

Wherefore men are free according to the flesh, and all things are given them which is expedient unto man. And they are free to choose liberty and eternal life through the great Mediator of all men, or to choose captivity and death according to the captivity and power of the devil, for he seeketh that all men might be miserable like unto himself.

And now my sons, I would that ye should look to the great Mediator and hearken unto his great commandments and be faithful unto his words and choose eternal life according to the will of his Holy Spirit, and not choose eternal death according to the will of the flesh and the evil which is therein, which giveth the spirit of the devil power to captivate, to bring you down to hell, that he may reign over you in his own kingdom. (2 Nephi 2:24–29)

Laman and Lemuel Understood the Metaphor Conceptually and Even Repented Episodically

It would be a mistake to think that Laman and Lemuel were somehow incapable of grasping Nephi's metaphor of life as "the days of probation." Their questioning of Nephi about their father's vision comes down to exactly that topic (1 Nephi 15:31–32). Nor would it be correct to think that they were incapable of seeing the error of their recurring impenitence and the reality of God's imbuing Lehi and Nephi with divine power. Nephi's selected stories repeatedly detail ways in which they were forced to acknowledge that divine power or even humbled themselves voluntarily.⁵⁷ But these instances of repentance never last. In the long section that bridges the ending of 1 Nephi and the beginning of 2 Nephi, Nephi and then Lehi teach Laman and Lemuel and their families in great detail about the gospel, the plan of salvation, and the importance of using their days of probation wisely (1 Nephi 19 — 2 Nephi 4:12). But then Lehi dies, and Nephi eventually has to lead his faithful followers to a new location to avoid his brothers' plans to take control of their growing colony by murdering him (2 Nephi 5:1–5).

The Gospel Applies the Plan of Salvation to Individual Lives

Nephi and Lehi had learned in the divine revelations given to them that this life is a time given to men and women to prepare them to return to the presence of God as his covenant sons and daughters. That insight is the fundamental principle behind the plan of salvation as revealed to Lehi, Nephi, and Jacob. Nephi echoed Lehi's summary at the end of his own writings: "But behold, for none of these I cannot hope except they shall be reconciled unto Christ and enter into the narrow gate and walk in the straight path which leads to life and *continue in the path until the end of the day of probation*" (2 Nephi 33:9).⁵⁸

After reporting the part of the great vision in which the Father and the Son taught him the gospel or doctrine of Christ, Nephi concluded by pointing out that the gospel was given to all mankind as the only and true way by which any man or woman could accomplish this:

A And now behold, my beloved brethren, *this is the way*.

57. Examples of both responses are featured in 1 Nephi 2:14, 3:21, 4:4, 7:20–21, 15:20, 16:5, 16:20–24 and 32, 16:39, 17:44:1–18:1, 18:15–20, 19:22–23.

58. Papers documenting this concept of the path or the gospel of Jesus Christ in the Book of Mormon are listed above in footnote 21.

- B And *there is none other way* nor name given under
 heaven
- C whereby man can be saved in the kingdom of *God*.
- A* And now behold, *this is the doctrine of Christ*,
- B* and *the only and true doctrine* of the Father and of the
 Son and of the Holy Ghost,
- C* which is one *God* without end. (2 Nephi 31:21)

Support for the Metaphor of Life as a Probation from the Brass Plates

Lehi's final teaching appears to draw on the creation account restored to Joseph Smith in the Book of Moses that features language not present in biblical Genesis and appears to have been included in the Brass Plates.⁵⁹ Like Lehi, that account portrays the devil as an enemy to "*the agency of man*" who seeks "to deceive and to blind men, and to *lead them captive at his will*, even as many as would not hearken unto my voice" (Moses 4:3–4). Through the Holy Ghost men are taught that this life is a time to believe and repent that they may be redeemed and prepared for eternal life:

And in that day the Holy Ghost fell upon Adam, which beareth record of the Father and the Son, saying: I am the Only Begotten of the Father from the beginning, henceforth and forever, that as thou hast fallen thou mayest be redeemed, and all mankind, even as many as will.

And in that day Adam blessed God and was filled, and began to prophesy concerning all the families of the earth, saying: Blessed be the name of God, for because of my transgression my eyes are opened, and in this life I shall have joy, and again in the flesh I shall see God. And Eve, his wife, heard all these things and was glad, saying: Were it not for our transgression we never should have had seed, and never should have known good and evil, and the joy of our redemption, and the eternal life which God giveth unto all the obedient. And Adam and

59. 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, for a demonstration of the high probability that the creation account available to the Nephites in the Brass Plates was very similar or equivalent to the Book of Moses as restored to Joseph Smith.

Eve blessed the name of God, and they made all things known unto their sons and their daughters. (Moses 5:9–12)

This concept — that in the divine perspective mortal life is a probationary period in which men and women can prove themselves as faithful followers of the Lord — never surfaces clearly in the Bible, though it could easily be posited as a background explanation for the creation and the repeated calls to obedience. While the Bible does not explicitly advance the metaphor of life as a probation, it can be read easily as being consistent with that metaphor.

The Book of Moses cited above was likely the version of Genesis contained in the Brass Plates. While the Book of Moses does not use the word *probation*, it clearly uses the concept in multiple explanations of the plan of salvation given to the earliest prophets. The preceding quotation reports the teachings of an angel to Adam. The contrast between those who would and would not hearken to God's voice was framed by Moses in the same chapter (see Moses 5: 55–59). In Chapter Six, the Lord spoke to Enoch from heaven describing the decree “sent forth from the beginning” by which the wicked have been warned of “a hell I have prepared for them, if they repent not” (Moses 6:26–30). As Enoch undertook the mission to preach the divinely given message, he began by asking people “why counsel ye yourselves, and deny the God of heaven?”⁶⁰ After Enoch's great success in establishing Zion, the Lord spoke to him again about his brethren who have rejected the prophet's message and their heavenly Father: “And unto thy brethren have I said, and also given commandment, that they should love one another, and that they should choose me, their Father; but behold, they are without affection, and they hate their own blood.”⁶¹ The Book of Moses may well have been an important source that reinforced Lehi's and Nephi's newly discovered metaphor for human life. From beginning to end it expands and reinforces the theme announced in the opening chapter: “This is my work and my glory — to bring to pass the immortality and eternal life of man” (Moses 1:39).

60. This opening line in Moses 6:43 sets up the long explanation of God's plan of salvation that was prepared to overcome the inadequacies of all the competing understandings of life invented by men in Moses 6: 43–62.

61. This sentence in Moses 7:33 anchors the longer passage about the choice that God has given to all men and women between God and Satan as their father, between the sins of their own ways and repentance and returning to the Lord. See Moses 7: 32–39.

The Book of Abraham given to Joseph Smith sometime after the translation of the Book of Mormon, and also likely included in the Brass Plates, does point explicitly to this concept as the purpose for creation:⁶²

And there stood one among them that was like unto God, and he said unto those who were with him: We will go down, for there is space there, and we will take of these materials, and we will make an earth whereon these may dwell; And we will prove them herewith, to see if they will do all things whatsoever the Lord their God shall command them. (Abraham 3:24–25)

Mormon's Abridgment Extends Nephi's Metaphorical Model

The binary understanding of the doctrine of the two ways as taught by Lehi and Nephi persists in Mormon's abridgment in quotations taken from the teachings from later prophets and from the Lord himself. A few examples will be sufficient to support this point.

Abinadi

The wicked king Noah ordered the prophet Abinadi to be burned to death for teaching this to his people:

And then shall the wicked be cast out, and they shall have cause to howl and weep and wail and gnash their teeth — and this because they would not hearken unto the voice of the Lord. Therefore the Lord redeemeth them not. For they are carnal and devilish; and the devil hath power over them, ... But remember that he that persists in his own carnal nature and goes on in the ways of sin and rebellion against God, he remaineth in his fallen state, and the devil hath all power over him. Even this mortal shall put on immortality, and this corruption shall put on incorruption and shall be brought to stand before the bar of God to be judged of him according to their works, whether they be good or whether they be evil: if they be good, to the resurrection of endless life and happiness; and if they be evil, to the resurrection of endless damnation, being delivered up to the devil, who hath subjected them

62. In a previous article, I have argued that there are good reasons to conclude that the Book of Abraham was included in the Brass Plates, which the Nephites regarded as their “holy scriptures.” See Noel B. Reynolds, “A Backstory for the Brass Plates,” *Interpreter: A Journal of Latter-day Saint Faith and Scholarship* 53 (2022): 199–254.

— which is damnation — having gone according to their own carnal wills and desires, having never called upon the Lord while the arms of mercy was extended towards them — for the arms of mercy was extended towards them and they would not — they being warned of their iniquities, and yet they would not depart from them. And they were commanded to repent, and yet they would not repent. (Mosiah 16: 2–3, 5, 10–12)

The Lord Instructs Alma

When Alma sought divine direction in prayer on how to deal with unrepentant sinners in the church at Zarahemla, he received this direction from the Lord:

And he that will hear my voice shall be my sheep; and him shall ye receive into the church, and him will I also receive. For behold, this is my church. Whosoever that is baptized shall be baptized unto repentance; and whosoever ye receive shall believe in my name, and him will I freely forgive. For it is I that taketh upon me the sins of the world, for it is I that hath created them. And it is I that granteth unto him that believeth in the end a place at my right hand. For behold, in my name are they called; and if they know me, they shall come forth and shall have a place eternally at my right hand. And it shall come to pass that when the second trump shall sound, then shall they that never knew me come forth and shall stand before me. And then shall they know that I am the Lord their God, that I am their Redeemer, but they would not be redeemed. And then will I confess unto them that I never knew them, and they shall depart into everlasting fire prepared for the devil and his angels. Therefore I say unto you that he that will not hear my voice, the same shall ye not receive into my church, for him I will not receive at the last day. (Mosiah 26:21–28)

While other prophetic statements could be cited, these two adequately demonstrate that Nephi's despair for those, who like his brothers, Laman and Lemuel, would not hear the word of the Lord because of the hardness of their hearts, echoed powerfully down through the Nephite dispensation. The great sorrow of Lehi and Nephi was the knowledge that their own descendants would be divided between these two kinds of people, both in life and at the final judgment.

Alma in Ammonihah

Lehi and Nephi's introduction of the metaphor of life as a probation persisted successfully throughout the Nephite dispensation. On two different occasions, Alma used a review of creation and the subsequent fall of Adam and Eve to explain the fact that ever since that fall, their descendants have been in a probationary state. Preaching to the apostate Nephites in Ammonihah, Alma explained:

Nevertheless there was a space granted unto man in which he might repent. Therefore this life became *a probationary state*, a time to prepare to meet God, a time to prepare for that endless state which has been spoken of by us, which is after the resurrection of the dead. (Alma 12:24)

Amulek to the Zoramites

The effectiveness of Alma's teaching was nowhere more evident than in the teaching of his follower and eventual missionary companion, Amulek, as they undertook to reclaim the apostate Zoramites. Amulek's sermon was possibly the clearest of the Nephite explanations of the teaching that this life is a day of probation:

And now my brethren, I would that after ye have received so many witnesses, seeing that the holy scriptures testifies of these things, come forth and bring fruit unto repentance. Yea, I would that ye would come forth and harden not your hearts any longer. For behold, now is the time and the day of your salvation. And therefore, if ye will repent and harden not your hearts, immediately shall the great plan of redemption be brought about unto you.

For behold, this life is the time for men to prepare to meet God. Yea, behold, the day of this life is the day for men to perform their labors. And now as I said unto you before, as ye have had so many witnesses, therefore I beseech of you that ye do not procrastinate the day of your repentance until the end. For after this day of life, which is given us to prepare for eternity, behold, if we do not improve our time while in this life, then cometh the night of darkness wherein there can be no labor performed. ...

For behold, if ye have procrastinated the day of your repentance even until death, behold, ye have become

subjected to the spirit of the devil, and he doth seal you his.⁶³ Therefore the Spirit of the Lord hath withdrawn from you and hath no place in you, and the devil hath all power over you. And this is the final state of the wicked. ...

And now my beloved brethren, I desire that ye should remember these things and that ye should work out your salvation with fear before God and that ye should no more deny the coming of Christ, that ye contend no more against the Holy Ghost, but that ye receive it and take upon you the name of Christ, that ye humble yourselves even to the dust and worship God in whatsoever place ye may be in, in spirit and in truth, and that ye live in thanksgiving daily for the many mercies and blessings which he doth bestow upon you. (Alma 34:30–38)

Alma's Blessing to His Son Corianton

Sometime later, Alma was blessing and teaching his sons and took the opportunity to explain these things in much greater detail to his wayward son, Corianton:

And thus we see that there was a time granted unto man to repent, yea, a *probationary time*, a time to repent and serve God. For behold, if Adam had put forth his hand immediately and partook of the tree of life, he would have lived forever, according to the word of God, having no space for repentance. Yea, and also the word of God would have been void, and the great plan of salvation would have been frustrated...

And now remember, my son, if it were not for the plan of redemption — laying it aside — as soon as they were dead, their souls were miserable, being cut off from the presence of the Lord. And now there was no means to reclaim men from this fallen state, which man had brought upon himself because of his own disobedience. Therefore according to justice the plan of redemption could not be brought about, only on conditions of repentance of men in this *probationary state*, yea, this preparatory state. (Alma 42:4–5 and 11–13)

63. Twenty years ago, John Gee explained the ancient-world meaning of the verb *seal* as declaring personal possession. See John Gee, “Book of Mormon Word Usage: ‘Seal You His,’” *Insights* 22, no. 1 (2002): 4.

In the long passage from which these statements are excerpted, Alma links the metaphor of life as a probationary state six times to “God’s great plan of salvation” using four of its names before summing these up as “his great and eternal purposes, which was prepared from the foundation of the world” (Alma 42:26).⁶⁴ The understanding of human life as a probationary state given to Lehi and Nephi in their early visions clearly dominated Nephite teaching of the plan of salvation across multiple centuries down to the time of Alma and his successors.

Occurrences of the Metaphor in Modern Cultures

While the metaphor of life as a probationary state has not been featured broadly in Christian or Jewish theologies, it has been promoted by some Bible scholars, moralists, and philosophers. After an extensive but not exhaustive survey of the Early English Books Online database, I can say that the term *probation* appears in English writings from the sixteenth century onward reflecting earlier usages in Latin and French literature.

Because the Book of Mormon translation was largely rendered in what we now recognize as Early Modern English,⁶⁵ I investigated sixteenth- and seventeenth-century usage most thoroughly. Three usages predominate in that period. The first is the legal concept of probation that we still use today. The second has long since disappeared; the *day of probation* on academic calendars was the scheduled day for exams. And third, the word *probation* was also used extensively to refer to proofs in arguments, mathematics, and philosophy.

However, the *Oxford English Dictionary* (OED) also lists a handful of early statements in which the word was used to refer to periods of “testing of the character, conduct, or abilities of a person” so that one could speak of “a period or state of trial.” Even today, we hire people “on probation.” By 1685 this blossomed into a metaphor of life as a probation in the writings of Isaac Barrow (1630–1677) who clearly stated that “this life is a state of probation and exercise, like to that ... of God’s people in the wilderness.”⁶⁶

64. These six references occur in Alma 42:4–5, 8, 10–11, 13, 15, and 16.

65. See Stanford Carmack, “A Look at Some ‘Nonstandard’ Book of Mormon Grammar,” *Interpreter: A Journal of Latter-day Saint Faith and Scholarship* 11 (2014): 209–62. An updated adaptation of this original paper is now included as Stanford Carmack, “The Nature of the Nonstandard English in the Book of Mormon,” in *The History of the Text of the Book of Mormon: Part One, Grammatical Variation*, ed. Royal Skousen (Provo, UT: FARMS and BYU Studies, 2016), 45–95.

66. Isaac Barrow, *Of Contentment, Patience and Resignation to the Will of God Several Sermons* (London: M. Fleisher for Brabazon Aylmer, 1685), 4:133. See

The *OED* lists a very few similar usages before William Paley (1743–1805) who asserted in a sermon over a century later that “Of the various views under which human life has been considered, no one seems so reasonable as that which regards it as a state of probation.”⁶⁷ Over a century after Paley, the philosopher A. E. Taylor (1869–1945) articulated an equally clear version of this metaphor while observing that its day of popularity was over: “We clearly may have to reconsider the worth of a once familiar conception which is now very much out of general favour, the conception of our earthly life as one of *probation*.”⁶⁸

These investigations show that while we cannot claim that the Nephite metaphor advanced by Lehi and Nephi is unique, it has never captured modern English-speaking theological theorizing. This may be because the metaphor suggests a pre-mortal existence of individual humans and a post-mortal existence which will be blessed positively according to the good works of individuals in their mortal probation. As comfortable as that concept may have been for Barrow, Paley, and Taylor, it has not fit easily with prevailing Protestant, Catholic, or Jewish theologies. For that reason, the Book of Mormon and The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints may well be the most prominent proponents of this metaphor in contemporary religious culture.

Laman and Lemuel Again

Lehi and all his family may well have shared the more worldly perspective of the Jews in Jerusalem that led the Lord to send them into Babylonian captivity. But when he sent Jeremiah and other prophets to warn them, Lehi’s heart was softened sufficiently that he turned to prayer, and the Lord gave him great visions. He and other prophets who warned of the impending catastrophe were driven out of Jerusalem or even killed. Laman and Lemuel were essential to this story as the individuals Lehi and Nephi knew best who were repeatedly humbled into obedience by the overwhelming power of the Lord’s interventions in their lives but who repeatedly returned to their vision of this life as a time to enjoy their riches, their comfortable and elite social position, and be happy.

many other similar examples of this obsolete or rare usage listed there such as B. Whichcote (1683), Bf. J. Butler (1736), and J. R. McDuff (1858) from the same sixteenth- to nineteenth-century time period.

67. William Paley, “This Life a State of Probation,” Sermon 33 in *The Works of William Paley, D. D.* (Edinburgh: Thomas Nelson and Peter Brown, 1829), 706–709.

68. A. E. Taylor, *The Faith of a Moralist: Gifford Lectures Delivered in the University of St. Andrews* (London: Macmillan, 1930), 422.

Nephi's writing was devoted to convincing his descendants and other readers down to the last days of this newly revealed or restored metaphor that *life is a probation*. It was grounded in his personal experience of visions and revelations on the one hand and the rebellions of his murmuring brothers on the other. We do not get the full benefit of Nephi's account when we see him focused on the spiritual failings of his brothers so that we will condemn them and use Nephi as our exemplar. Rather, Nephi wants his readers to see themselves in Laman and Lemuel's conduct to the extent that they are stiff-necked and harden their hearts in resistance to the Lord's Spirit. Nephi wants his readers to accept the Lord's continuing invitation to all men and women to repent and take up the covenant path through which he can prepare them to return to him. Like Lehi before him, Nephi could have concluded, "I have none other object save it be the everlasting welfare of your souls" (2 Nephi 2:30).

Conclusions

Nephi's stories of the murmuring of Laman and Lemuel play an essential role in his presentation of God's teachings that goes far beyond documenting the brothers' mistreatment of Lehi and Nephi. The behavior of Laman and Lemuel provided Nephi with real-life examples of the binary structure of human possibilities in this probationary state. Their life-long resistance to the softening influence of the Spirit exemplified the hardness of heart and stiffness of neck that characterizes those in all generations who will not humble themselves before the Father and believe in him and the gospel of his Son as the only way that leads to meaningful salvation.

Because of his personal experience with Laman and Lemuel, Nephi could explain in universal terms why their descendants would go through cycles of belief and apostasy and finally be destroyed. Lehi, Nephi, and their faithful successors labored in every way to bring salvation to Laman and Lemuel and their descendants. But over their dispensation, both Nephites and Lamanites would divide repeatedly between choosers of righteousness and of wickedness. Nephi taught that those choices would determine which ones would be raised to eternal life at the final judgment and which would be condemned to hell as captives of the devil.

Undergirding it all is the revealed metaphor of this life as the/their "*days of probation*" (1 Nephi 15:31–32). The great visions of Lehi and Nephi showed them that this life is but a moment in the eternity that God has prepared for all his children. In the first book of his final writings,

Nephi has composed an allegory based in his own life's experience that shows how all people can rise above limited understandings or metaphors of life and engage the eternal vision that characterizes mortal life as a probationary state "according to the great plans of the Eternal God" (Alma 34:9). Nephi's life efforts and writings were devoted to convincing his own people and his future readers that they too should pursue eternal life by following the covenant path spelled out for them in the gospel or doctrine of Christ. Nephi's first book not only reports the revelations and spiritual teachings received by him and his father Lehi, but it also goes to the next literary level by transforming their family experiences into an allegory that promotes the new metaphor of life as a probationary state that grounds the plan of salvation as revealed to them.

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NEPHI’S EIGHT YEARS IN THE “WILDERNESS”: RECONSIDERING DEFINITIONS AND DETAILS

Godfrey J. Ellis

Abstract: *A traditional reading of Nephi’s chronicle of the trek through Arabia relies heavily on two verses in 1 Nephi 17. In verse 4, Nephi states that they “did sojourn for the space of many years, yea, even eight years in the wilderness.” In verse 5, he reports that “we did come to the land which we called Bountiful.” The almost universal interpretation of these verses is that of sequential events: eight years traversing the arid desert of Western Arabia following which the Lehites entered the lush Bountiful for an unspecified time to build the ship. A question with the traditional reading is why a trip that could have taken eight months ostensibly took eight years. It may be that Nephi gave us that information. His “eight years” could be read as a general statement about one large context: the “wilderness” of all of Arabia. In other words, the “eight years in the wilderness” may have included both the time in the desert and the time in Bountiful. In this paper I examine the basis for such an alternative reading.*

Recent discoveries have provided remarkable plausibility for many of the Book of Mormon’s locations and events.¹ As more discoveries are made, it becomes increasingly apparent that Nephi wrote his account of the family’s trek through Arabia with a high level of accuracy and detail. However, in spite of Nephi’s carefully composed text, a variety

1. Exemplary sources include the following books: Warren P. Aston and Michaela K. Aston, *In the Footsteps of Lehi* (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 1994); Warren P. Aston, *Lehi and Sariah in Arabia: The Old World Setting of the Book of Mormon* (Bloomington, IN: Xlibris Publishing, 2015); and George Potter and Richard Wellington, *Lehi in the Wilderness: 81 New, Documented Evidences that the Book of Mormon is a True History* (Springville, UT: Cedar Fort, 2003). Other relevant publications will be cited hereafter.

of questions remain. With an aim to seeking helpful clarifications, this article will explore three questions about the journey through Arabia:

1. What did Nephi mean by the word *wilderness*?
2. Why did the trek ostensibly take eight years, and why do all current speculations designed to account for those “missing” years fall short?
3. How much time did the Lehites spend in Bountiful, and how much of that total time was spent constructing Nephi’s ship?

Nephi tells us that he wrote the Small Plate account of the trek through Arabia in First Nephi some 30 years after his departure from Jerusalem (2 Nephi 5:27–31). Twenty years earlier, in what are usually referred to as the Large Plates,² Nephi had been similarly commanded to “make plates of ore that [he] might engraven upon them the record of [his] people” (1 Nephi 19:1). Note that Nephi’s father, Lehi, had been recording events of their exodus even earlier than that (v. 1). All of that latter material was dictated by Joseph Smith and recorded on the 116 large manuscript pages that were later lost by Martin Harris. It was in those Large Plates that Nephi wrote or copied material that was essentially contemporaneous. In the Small Plates, written 30 years later, Nephi wrote retrospectively and selectively to emphasize spiritual points and only touch “lightly, concerning the history of this people” (Jacob 1:2). In some places, we are forced to guess at certain details of the trek. An example of a rather important detail concerns how long it took them to travel through the arid portion of western Arabia? Did it take eight full years? It sounds like it when we read in 1 Nephi 17: 4–5,

And we did sojourn for the space of many years, yea, even eight years in the wilderness.

And we did come to the land which we called Bountiful ...

and we beheld the sea, which we called Irreantum ... etc.

A key question is what Nephi meant by *wilderness*. Another way to phrase this same question is where, exactly, did they spend those eight long years? The traditional and almost universal reading of these two verses assumes that the answers to these questions are obvious: They spent the eight years in the arid, desert portion of the journey: Jerusalem

2. They are not called “Large Plates” in the Book of Mormon.

to Nahom,³ and on to the edge of Bountiful.⁴ In other words, it assumes that there were two sequential events: (1) the Lehites spent eight years reaching Bountiful, and then, after that, (2) another undetermined period of time in Bountiful while building some kind of vessel to get them to the Promised Land. But is that traditional interpretation correct? The major and overriding problem with that reading is that the distances just don't match the timeframes given. If it was a journey of months;⁵ how could it have taken them eight years? Jeff Lindsay puts it well when he writes that "as for the eight years in total, this is a puzzle for all of us."⁶

Yes, it is a puzzle, and in order to solve it, scholars have been obliged to speculate on how and where the Lehites spent the "missing years." Those various speculations all contain significant credibility problems. Ironically, none of them are even necessary if we allow for the alternative reading of Nephi's words, which I will present in this study. Those

3. Some scholars count the years beginning at Jerusalem; others begin at the Valley of Lemuel (which contradicts Nephi's account). Some end the years at Nahom; others end at Bountiful. But, since the question is whether *wilderness* was *pre*-Bountiful or *included* Bountiful, these nuances are irrelevant to this discussion.

4. There are only two serious candidates for the location of Bountiful. Khor Kharfot, as proposed by Warren Aston (Aston and Aston, *In the Footsteps of Lehi* and Aston, *Lehi and Sariah in Arabia*), is most widely accepted, but nearby Khor Rori has been proposed by George Potter. See, for example, George D. Potter, "Khor Rori: A Maritime Resources-Based Candidate for Nephi's Harbor," *Interpreter: A Journal of Latter-day Saint Faith and Scholarship* 51 (2022): 253–94, <https://journal.interpreterfoundation.org/khor-rori-a-maritime-resources-based-candidate-for-nephis-harbor/>. That article was then countered by Warren P. Aston, "Nephi's 'Bountiful': Contrasting Both Candidates," *Interpreter: A Journal of Latter-day Saint Faith and Scholarship* 55 (2023): 219–68, <https://journal.interpreterfoundation.org/nephis-bountiful-contrasting-both-candidates/>. It is not necessary here to take a stand.

5. Jeffrey Chadwick estimates that the time needed for the trek from Jerusalem to Nahom was "less than 18 months," and from the Valley of Lemuel to Nahom was around 13 months. Jeffrey R. Chadwick, "An Archeologist's View," *Journal of Book of Mormon Studies* 15, no. 2 (2006): 74. Kent Brown similarly estimates that the journey from the Valley of Lemuel to Nahom "required only months" and gives as an illustration that "a Roman military force of 10,000 took six months" to go down and "only two months" to return and that "Lehi's party likewise took no longer than a year to reach Nahom." S. Kent Brown, "Refining the Spotlight on Lehi & Sariah," *Journal of Book of Mormon Studies* 15, no. 2 (2006): 45.

6. Jeff Lindsay, "Joseph and the Amazing Technicolor Dream Map: Part 1 of 2," *Interpreter: A Journal of Latter-day Saint Faith and Scholarship* 19 (2016): 179, <https://journal.interpreterfoundation.org/joseph-and-the-amazing-technicolor-dream-map-part-1-of-2/>.

speculations will be discussed later in the section called “Speeds and Stops Through Arabia.”

An Alternative Reading of Nephi’s Wilderness

Before addressing the three most common attempts to account for the missing years, let’s first consider an alternative reading of what Nephi may have meant in 1 Nephi 17:4–5. The alternative reading that I suggest for Nephi’s comment is that the word *wilderness* might not have referred only to a desert environment, but to any undeveloped area. If that is the case, then the eight years “in the wilderness” could have *included* the time spent in the lush but uninhabited oasis/inlet of Bountiful. That changes everything. Most importantly, it allows Nephi’s eight years to represent the *total time* on the Arabian Peninsula, not just the time from Jerusalem to the entrance to Bountiful. This alternative reading of the verses requires considerable explanation, which I provide below.⁷

Considering the eight-year timeframe to include the entirety of the time in Arabia, not just the desert portion, is important in at least four ways:

1. It allows a reconsideration of the timeframes for the trek portion without having to speculate unlikely multi-year layovers to account for missing years.
2. It provides a closing “book-end” for the time the Lehtes spent on the Arabian Peninsula. At this point, there is no clearly marked ending for their stay in Bountiful. It is one of the “blank checks” of the Book of Mormon that is left for readers to fill in — but nobody has known what number to write. The alternative reading allows a possible number: that of eight years for their time in Arabia, which includes Bountiful.

7. A similar interpretation was presented in the 2006 special issue of the *Journal of Book of Mormon Studies*. Jeffrey R. Chadwick wrote a response to three studies exploring the trek. All three adopted the traditional reading and speculated on how the Lehtes spent the extra years. In just two sentences, Chadwick asserted that Nephi “considered Bountiful to be wilderness territory, its fruit and honey notwithstanding. Nephi’s summary statement about eight years in the wilderness seems to me to include both the period of the trek (prior to [1 Nephi] 17:4) and the time at the seashore (after [1 Nephi] 17:4)” (see Chadwick, “Archeologist’s View,” 75). He did not offer any justifications for re-interpreting or ignoring Nephi’s apparent assertion to the contrary. Perhaps because of the pervasive acceptance of the traditional reading, Chadwick’s opinion has largely gone unnoticed. Hopefully, this article will re-present and fully justify his (and my) alternative reading.

3. It allows an improved estimate of the time available to construct Nephi's ship.
4. It increases the likelihood that a large enough percentage of the seeds, obtained in the land of Jerusalem (1 Nephi 18:24), would still be viable to "grow exceedingly ... in abundance" in the New World (18:24). In other words, the seeds they carried were, in effect, an invisible clock ticking on their journey to the Promised Land. All seeds, like everything living, have a shelf-life. They progressively lose viability; that's the principle of entropy. Experts are divided as to how long seeds will last and still germinate but are united that the issue of seed longevity depends on the variety of the plants and the conditions of storage. Longevity is enhanced by very cool and dry storage and decreased by heat and humidity. The Lehighites' situation could not have been worse. They experienced mainly hot, not cool, conditions in the desert and, later, very damp, not dry, conditions while in Bountiful and during the ocean crossing, especially during the tempest (18:13–15). Nephi's wording tells us that the crossing took at least five or six months, and most commentators suggest up to a year of sea-level voyage to sail across 16,000 miles of wet ocean. The traditional interpretation would require 13 to 14 years under these adverse conditions. Obviously, a greater percentage of the seeds would have survived the heat, then damp, of their journey if it took less time, eight or nine years, to complete. A question to ask yourself is where you would store extra seeds for multiple years: in the back of your cold fridge or next to the hot shower in the bathroom? For those who are interested, further discussion of this complicated topic of seed viability can be found in Appendix A.

A valid and obvious question is "How is an alternative reading even possible at all, given what appears to be Nephi's clear and specific wording?" The next section attempts to answer that question.

An Amplification or Colophon Rather Than a Sequence

Let's begin with a discussion of the larger context of the passage in 1 Nephi 17 which speaks of eight years in the wilderness. I will add the words "by the way" and "back to the story" to verse 4 (the reason will be shown shortly).

3. And thus we see that the commandments of God must be fulfilled. And if it so be that the children of men keep the commandments of God he doth nourish them, and strengthen them, and provide means whereby they can accomplish the thing which he has commanded them; wherefore, he did provide means for us while we did sojourn in the wilderness.

4. And [by the way] we did sojourn for the space of many years, yea, even eight years in the wilderness.

5. And [back to the story] we did come to the land which we called Bountiful. ...

6. And we beheld the sea, which we called Irreantum. ...

7. And ... we did pitch our tents by the seashore. ...

8. And ... the voice of the Lord came unto me saying: Arise, and get thee into the mountain. ...

9. And ... the Lord spake unto me, saying: Thou shalt construct a ship. ...

10. And ... the Lord told me whither I should go to find ore, that I might make tools.

11. And ... I, Nephi, did make a bellows. ...

Essentially all commentators — from Nibley in the 1950s to Aston, Brown, and Potter in the present — write unequivocally and at length about the eight years being in the desert portion alone. For example, Aston and Aston write, “After some eight years ... of difficult *desert travel* from their Jerusalem home ... ‘to the seashore’ at Bountiful.”⁸ Then they talk additionally about building the ship. This, then, assumes a temporal sequence of two events/locales: the desert portion of the journey — ostensibly eight years — and the time spent in Bountiful — unknown, but generally taken to be another four years or so. In fact, the assumption of eight years, just in the desert portion, is so universally applied that many readers do not even recognize that an assumption is being made. This assumption fits the way modern readers read adventure accounts. But this is much more than an adventure story. One goal is to teach a doctrinal message of reliance on the Lord, trust in His goodness, commitment to yield our will to his, and a probationary period of agency

8. Aston and Aston, *In the Footsteps of Lehi*, 27. Similar quotes are in most scholarly publications.

and choice.⁹ Although those encountering the Book of Mormon for the first time seldom realize it, 1 Nephi was written in a complex parallelistic and poetic style, as numerous scholars have shown but not all readers have noticed.¹⁰ It is as if people are reading the verses with a *then* inserted:

And we did sojourn for the space of many years, yea, even
eight years in the wilderness,

And [*then*] we did come to the land which we called Bountiful

...

and we beheld the sea, which we called Irreantum, ... etc.

However, just as *then* can be easily and unconsciously inserted, so the words *this includes* could also be inserted, instead. That would make the verses read quite differently and yield a very different conclusion:

And we did sojourn for the space of many years, yea, even
eight years in the wilderness. ...

And [*this includes the following:*] we did come to the land
which we called Bountiful ...

and we beheld the sea, which we called Irreantum, ... etc.

Granted, this alternative reading is also speculative, though reasonable. An analogy may help. My wife and I have sons, grandchildren, and great-grandchildren who live in Sacramento, California. We could recount a visit there by writing in real time using Nephi's formatting. It might sound something like this:

9. See Noel B. Reynolds, "The Nephite Metaphor of Life as a Probation: Rethinking Nephi's Portrayal of Laman and Lemuel," *Interpreter: A Journal of Latter-day Saint Faith and Scholarship* 57 (2023), 231–80.

10. For a discussion of Nephi's use of complex rhetorical structures, see Noel B. Reynolds, "Nephi's Small Plates: A Rhetorical Analysis," *Interpreter: A Journal of Latter-day Saint Faith and Scholarship* 50 (2022): 122, <https://journal.interpreterfoundation.org/nephis-small-plates-a-rhetorical-analysis/>. See also: Noel B. Reynolds, "Lehi's Dream, Nephi's Blueprint: How Nephi Uses the Vision of the Tree of Life as an Outline for 1 and 2 Nephi," *Interpreter: A Journal of Latter-day Saint Faith and Scholarship* 52 (2022): 231–78, <https://journal.interpreterfoundation.org/lehis-dream-nephis-blueprint-how-nephi-uses-the-vision-of-the-tree-of-life-as-an-outline-for-1-and-2-nephi/>. Another source is Benjamin L. McGuire, "Nephi: A Postmodernist Reading," *Interpreter: A Journal of Latter-day Saint Faith and Scholarship* 12 (2014): 49–78, <https://journal.interpreterfoundation.org/nephi-a-postmodernist-reading/>.

And we did sojourn for the space of many days, yea, even two weeks in Sacramento,

And [*this includes the following:*] we did take a day-trip to the city called San Francisco, ...

And we beheld Alcatraz Island in the sea (along with other sights).

A sequential reading would not be correct. The two weeks in Sacramento were not followed (and then) by a trip to San Francisco on the way home. San Francisco was not on the way home. We enjoyed the two weeks with the family in Sacramento, which we then amplified or elaborated upon to say that the overall holiday *included* a day-trip to San Francisco along with other specific day-trips and fun events.

In like manner, assuming a chronological sequence of 1 Nephi 17:4 followed by vs. 5 may sound obvious, but this is not necessarily warranted. Although the *wilderness* and *Bountiful* are usually read as a sequence of two events, it is possible to read the time in Bountiful as an amplification of the statement of the total of eight years. In other words, the large context was the overall wilderness. The specifics were the time spent traversing the desert portion from Jerusalem to Bountiful and also the time spent in Bountiful.

This alternative reading of 1 Nephi 17:4–5 as an amplification is not an isolated linguistic event; it is a frequent device in the Book of Mormon. Nephi uses it repeatedly when he presents a broad context and then amplifies it, clarifies it, or elaborates on it. A small sampling of this literary practice can be seen in the Table 1. As the table shows, he uses this rhetorical device two times in the very first verse of the Book of Mormon. But he also uses this device throughout his account.¹¹

11. Nephi was far from the only prophet to make large-context statements and then amplify the comments with specific examples. Examples of amplification by other prophets in the Book of Mormon are Mosiah 11–14, Alma 7:23–25, and Moroni 8:5–15. A few examples that span the length of the KJV Old Testament are Genesis 27:34–36; Joshua 24:15; Psalms 23; Isaiah 30:19–25; Isaiah 61:1–3; and Malachi 3:8 and 3:13–14.

Table 1. Nephi's Literary Practice.

1 Nephi Reference	Scriptural Broad Context	Amplification of the General Statement
1 Nephi 1:1	"I, Nephi, having been born of goodly parents" (What is the result of this favorable birth into a righteous family?)	"I was taught somewhat in all the learning of my father" "[I was] favored of the Lord in all my days" "[I] had a great knowledge of the goodness ... of God"
1 Nephi 1:1, 3	"Therefore I make a record of my proceedings" (Tell us more about this record.)	"I make a record in the language of my father" "I make it with mine own hand" "I make it according to my knowledge"
1 Nephi 1:8–10	"And being thus overcome with the Spirit" (What exactly happened during the time that he was overcome?)	"He was carried away in a vision" "He saw the heavens open" "He thought he saw God sitting upon his throne" "He saw One descending and he also saw 12 others"
1 Nephi 1:17	"I...make an account of my proceedings in my days." (Tell us more about your account.)	"[It's] an abridgment of the record of my father" "[It is upon] plates which I have made" "After ... will I make an account of mine own life"
1 Nephi 2:4	"He departed into the wilderness" (What was a part of his rapid departure?)	"He left his house, and ... inheritance" "[He left] his gold, and his silver, and his precious things" "[He] took nothing with him"
1 Nephi 8:10–12	"I beheld a tree, whose fruit was desirable to make one happy" (What do you mean by "desirable and happy?")	"It was most sweet, above all that I ever tasted" "It was white, to exceed all the whiteness" "It filled my soul with exceeding great joy" "It was desirable above all other fruit"
1 Nephi 17:1–2	"We did again take our journey in the wilderness; and we did travel nearly eastward from that time forth" (What happened there?)	"We did travel and wade through much affliction" "Our women did bear children" "We did live upon raw meat" "Our women did give plenty of suck" "[They] were strong, yea even like unto the men"

The last reference in Table 1 is perhaps the clearest example to replicate the situation of the verses in 1 Nephi 17:4–5. The location of the leg of the journey in 1 Nephi 17:1–2 is critical to keep in mind. Nephi can only be talking about the 700-mile leg from Nahom to Bountiful — skirting the southern edge of the *Rub' al Khali*, the sun-blistering sand

dunes of what is often called the *Empty Quarter*. That is the broad context. If a sequential assumption were applied to these verses, they would make little to no sense. The blessings that mitigated their challenges could not have *followed* the 700 miles. They all occurred *during* that leg of the trip. The descriptions of those blessings were all amplifications of the overall context of the journey from Nahom to the edge of Bountiful. It can be read in no other way.

In 1 Nephi 17:3 (shown above), Nephi presents a general principle: God will “provide means whereby they can accomplish the thing which he has commanded them.”¹² Nephi in the same verse applied this principle to their own specific case: “He did provide means for *us* while we did sojourn in the wilderness” (v. 3). The Lord is the Great Planner. Just as the earth was planned spiritually before it was created physically, the oasis of Bountiful was perfectly planned, prepared, fully stocked, and waiting for the arrival of the Lehighites. The first verses of 1 Nephi 17:4–5 can thus be read as a further *amplification* of the general principle given in verse 3. The time in the lush and fertile Bountiful was also among those *means* provided. Nephi says as much when he adds in verse 5: “and all these things [‘much fruit and also wild honey’] were *prepared of the Lord* that we might not perish.” He continues listing the “means” in verses 6–13: an uninhabited oasis, ocean access, fresh water supply, flint for fire, ore to smelt, trees for lumber, meat and fish to supplement the fruit and honey, his “light [to] prepare the way,” and so on. The logical takeaway of the amplifications of the general principle is the conclusion that Bountiful was a part of the total eight-year wilderness experience. That eight-year experience plausibly included the totality of travelling from Jerusalem, building the ship, and launching out into the Indian Ocean for the beginning of the ninth year rather than merely referring to the desert portion of the trek.

There is another way of thinking about all of this that is related, although expressed differently. The passage in 1 Nephi 17:3–4 could be thought of as a mid-course, parenthetical aside about the trip in its

12. Nephi earlier taught: “The Lord giveth no commandments unto the children of men, save he shall prepare a way for them that they may accomplish the thing which he commandeth them” (1 Nephi 3:7). The Apostle Paul said much the same thing: “God ... will not suffer you to be tempted above that ye are able; but will with the temptation also make a way to escape, that ye may be able to bear it” (1 Corinthians 10:13). Joseph Smith was told: “Whom I love I also chasten ... [and] with the chastisement I prepare a way for their deliverance” (D&C 95:1). That general principle is true at all times and in all places — including Bountiful. It is, in fact, one of the prevailing themes of the entire Book of Mormon.

entirety. If the text were read with the parenthetical passage temporarily taken out, it would read as follows:

And so great were the blessings of the Lord upon us, that while we did live upon raw meat in the wilderness, our women ... began to bear their journeyings without murmurings. ... And we did come to the land which we called Bountiful, because of its much fruit and also wild honey; and all these things were prepared of the Lord that we might not perish.

The parenthetical passage, therefore, sounds as if Nephi, 30 years later, is interrupting the story to burst out in praise, song, and testimony to marvel that God always provides the means to accomplish what he has commanded, and that God specifically provided the necessary means for *them*. He adds that this went on for the entire eight years, not only during the desert portion but in Bountiful as well. He then returns to the factual account of the means in Bountiful.

This is not the only time Nephi uses such editorial asides, sometimes called *colophons*,¹³ that interrupt a narrative account. For example, in 1 Nephi 1:14–15 Nephi starts to describe his father's reaction to the book he was given. He then interrupts the description to explain to the reader the limitations of his recording (vv. 16–17). He then resumes his account of Lehi's testifying of the truths he has just read (vv. 18–20). That is an editorial colophon; no one could read that text in any other way.

A smaller example starts in 1 Nephi 3:2, when Lehi tells Nephi of the Lord's commandment that the sons are to return to Jerusalem for the Brass Plates. He then interrupts the commandment to explain why the Brass Plates are important (v. 3), only to resume recounting the commandment for the sons to return to Jerusalem (v. 4).

There is a similar aside or colophon when Nephi discusses Lehi's rendition of the vision in 1 Nephi 8. Nephi then interrupts his father's account to tell the reader that he is leaving out some material "to be short in writing" (8:29–30), only to then resume Lehi's account in vv. 30–35. Nephi continues to quote Lehi and his exhortations to his sons for the remainder of chapter 8. Nephi then interrupts the account yet again with an explanation for the reader that there are two sets of plates. That comprises all of chapter 9. He then resumes the account of his father's

13. See "Why Did Book of Mormon Authors Use Colophons?," Book of Mormon Central, June 21, 2018, <https://knowhy.bookofmormoncentral.org/knowhy/why-did-book-of-mormon-authors-use-colophons>.

preaching and prophesying in chapter 10. All of Chapter 9, then, can be viewed as an editorial colophon.

Another example of a colophon begins in 1 Nephi 17:9–11, where Nephi describes making a bellows to melt the ore in order to fabricate tools. He then “interrupts” that narrative to tell us that the Lord prohibited fire but made the meat sweet and was their light then and afterwards (vv. 12–15). Nephi then resumes his account of forging the tools, which he “did molten out of the rock” (v. 16).

Similarly, in 1 Nephi 18:6, Nephi talks about the party boarding the ship. He interrupts that to talk about the births of Jacob and Joseph (vs. 7) and then resumes the discussion of the launch into the ocean in verse 8.

Many other examples could be cited, not just of Nephi’s use of editorial asides but other Book of Mormon writers’ use of this literary device as well. For example, I have previously written about another significant colophon at the end of Alma 30. The story of Korihor appears to end with his being trampled to death in Antionum. The moral lesson is then given: “Thus we see ... the devil will not support his children at the last day” (Alma 30:60). This colophon has traditionally been read as the end of the story. Alma 31 is then seen as the beginning of another unrelated story — but still in Antionum. In that paper, I attempted to demonstrate that this colophon was really an editorial aside that broke up a continuous and related account beginning in Alma 30 and *continuing* into Alma 31.¹⁴

In summary, 1 Nephi 17:4–5 can be reasonably understood as either an amplification or an editorial colophon during the narrative account of the Lehites’ travel through the larger “wilderness” of the Arabian Peninsula — and that includes Bountiful. For this to be a viable possibility, though, it is necessary to closely examine the word *wilderness*. Could Bountiful credibly be referred to as *wilderness*? It must be for this new reading to be correct. I would ask the reader to indulge me in an extensive discussion of how diverse the concept of *wilderness* can be. It needs to be extensive, since I am attempting to provide an alternative reading to the one that is deeply imbedded in the minds of most readers of the Book of Mormon.

14. Godfrey J. Ellis, “The Rise and Fall of Korihor, a Zoramite: A New Look at the Failed Mission of an Agent of Zoram,” *Interpreter: A Journal of Latter-day Saint Faith and Scholarship* 48 (2021): 49–94, <https://journal.interpreterfoundation.org/the-rise-and-fall-of-korihor-a-zoramite-a-new-look-at-the-failed-mission-of-an-agent-of-zoram/>.

Bountiful as a Part of the Wilderness

Granted, for the Hebrew slaves coming out of the fertile Egyptian delta, *wilderness* meant some form of desert. The word *wilderness*, used 305 times in the KJV Old Testament, is usually translated from the Hebrew *midbar* (מִדְבָּר, Strong's H4057¹⁵). A *midbar* generally refers to an arid and largely uninhabited and undeveloped wasteland, usually with limited vegetation and a limited human population. Since the Hebrew people refer to *midbar* using that particular conceptualization of what it means to be an uninhabited wasteland, it should come as no surprise that a search of Hebrew Bible references for *midbar* finds an overwhelming association with a desert or an arid, dry land. Jeremiah 2:6 contains particularly powerful desert imagery: "The Lord led us through the wilderness (*midbar*), through a land of deserts and of pits, through a land of drought, and of the shadow of death, through a land that no man passed through, and where no man dwelt. (Jeremiah 2:6).

That is the iconic Hebrew *midbar*. That Lehi's journey involved, in part, being led across just such an arid, dry land, even including skirting the southern sand-blown corner of the *Rub' al-Khali* or "Empty Quarter" is a given; nobody disputes that. But that a *wilderness* is necessarily restricted *only* to a desert is actually not a given.

A Diversity of Deserts and Mountains as Wilderness

The *Brown-Driver-Briggs Hebrew and English Lexicon of the Old Testament* does not restrict the word *midbar* to only a sand desert but offers considerable diversity.¹⁶ The first *Brown-Driver-Briggs* definition is "tracts of land, used for the pasturage of flocks and herds." In addition to the stark desert he described just above, Jeremiah also refers to "the pleasant places of the wilderness." So, a *midbar* can contain "pleasant places" (Jeremiah 23:10; see also Psalms 65:13). The prophet Joel mentions "the pastures of the wilderness" in Joel 1:19–20 and even that "the pastures of the wilderness do spring [i.e., produce grass]" (Joel 2:22). In like manner, Nephi tells us that there were some relatively fertile sections along the wilderness of the ancient Frankincense Trail and again in the

15. F. Brown, S. Driver, and C. Briggs, *The Brown-Driver-Briggs Hebrew and English Lexicon*, rev. ed. (1906; repr., Peabody, MA.: Hendrickson, 2010), 184–85, s.v. "מִדְבָּר," <https://archive.org/details/browndriverbrigg0000brow/page/184/mode/2up>. Also see the Brown-Driver-Briggs section at Blue Letter Bible, s.v. "Strong's H4057 — midbār," <https://www.blueletterbible.org/lexicon/h4057/kjv/wlc/0-1>.

16. Brown, Driver, and Briggs, *Brown-Driver-Briggs*, 184–85, s.v. "מִדְבָּר."

Nahom region. Based on the research of Warren Aston,¹⁷ Jeff Lindsay comments that “the *most* fertile parts’ [1 Nephi 16:14] come right after Shazer, followed by the ‘*more* fertile parts,’ [v. 16] after which things become much more difficult and presumably a lot less fertile.”¹⁸ Yet all of this was still considered to be a part of the general *wilderness* or *midbar*.

A second *Brown-Driver-Briggs* definition is “uninhabited land.”¹⁹ Job refers to “the wilderness, wherein there is no man” (Job 38:26) but instead is a place for “wild asses ... [where] the wilderness yieldeth food for them” (Job 24:5). Jeremiah talks of the “wild ass ... [adapting to] the wilderness” (Jeremiah 2:24). Malachi calls it a “waste for the dragons [jackals] of the wilderness” (Malachi 1:3). Jeremiah longs for uninhabited seclusion in a solitary wilderness when he bemoans: “Oh that I had in the wilderness a lodging place of wayfaring men; that I might leave my people, and go from them!” (Jeremiah 9:2). Deuteronomy 32:10 describes “a desert land, and in the waste howling wilderness.” Lehi and his party passed through many such isolated patches between the infrequent oases. Note, however, that Bountiful itself was also apparently isolated and uninhabited. Aston writes, “It is evident, for several reasons, that Kharfot has been unpopulated for most of its history ... [and there is] a likelihood to near certainty that it was uninhabited when the Lehites lived here.”²⁰

A third *Brown-Driver-Briggs* example of diversity in *midbar* is that it often refers to “large tracts of such land bearing various names, in certain districts of which there might be towns and cities.”²¹ A few examples among many include the wildernesses of Kedar (Isaiah 42:11), Shur (Exodus 15:22), Sinai (Exodus 19:1), Kadesh (Psalms 29:8), Judah (Judges 1:16), Beersheba (Genesis 21:14), Moab (Deuteronomy 2:8), and even the great Arabian desert (Judges 11:22).

There is considerable diversity, then, even among Hebrew speakers, in the application of the word *midbar*. Egypt was surrounded by desert, as was the Holy Land. In some places, that meant drifting sand dunes, yes; but in other places, that meant arid and parched country with scrub bushes and occasional small farms that required constant irrigation. That

17. Aston, *Lehi and Sariah in Arabia*, 48, 53.

18. Jeff Lindsay, “Joseph and the Amazing Technicolor Dream Map: Part 2 of 2,” *Interpreter: A Journal of Latter-day Saint Faith and Scholarship* 19 (2016): 282, <https://journal.interpreterfoundation.org/joseph-and-the-amazing-technicolor-dream-map-part-2-of-2/>.

19. Brown, Driver, and Briggs, *Brown-Driver-Briggs*, 184–85, s.v. “*ʾm̄ḏ̄ḇ̄r*.”

20. Aston, *Lehi and Sariah in Arabia*, 143.

21. Brown, Driver, and Briggs, *Brown-Driver-Briggs*, 184–85, s.v. “*ʾm̄ḏ̄ḇ̄r*.”

doesn't mean that those more arid areas were always totally uninhabited — humans adapt to all sorts of environments — but if a desert area is developed, it is only with a great deal of work, effort, and expense.²²

This diversity, even in the desert portions, is also shown in Nephi's own description. He refers to the Valley of Lemuel as *wilderness* four times: 1 Nephi 2:11, 3:4, 3:14, and 3:15. Yet he still writes that they left the wilderness of the Valley of Lemuel to cross the river Laman and "depart into the wilderness" (repeated in four verses in a row in 1 Nephi 16:9–12). He is clearly saying that the Lehites left one type of wilderness to enter another type of wilderness.

Mountains within desert areas have always been accepted as yet another type of *midbar*, even by Hebrew writers. Abraham went into the mountain "wilderness" (Jacob 4:5) to sacrifice his son Isaac (Genesis 22:2). King Saul chased David into a wooded mountain *midbar* in the wilderness" (1 Samuel 23:14–15). In Lehi's trek, the party skirted the Mazhafah mountains in the north, the Hijaz Mountains down much of the Frankincense Trail, and arrived at the Nahom (NHM) tribal territory "centered in the mountains northeast of Sana'a."²³ When Nephi broke and replaced his steel bow, the Liahona directed him "into the top of the mountain" (1 Nephi 16:30). Remember, too, that the oasis of Bountiful contained its own mountain (1 Nephi 17:7).

Lush Tropical Rainforests as *Wilderness*

The breadth of meaning of a *wilderness* — still in the Book of Mormon itself — can be expanded even further. Nephi wrote his account of their

22. As an example, consider the capital of Saudi Arabia, the same country Lehi traversed. Although Riyadh is now a large city, it sits on the northern edge of the Rub' al Khali and is almost surrounded by sand dunes (see the map in Figure 1). Access to potable water is at a crisis level. This vital resource is transported into Riyadh or drilled from aquifers. Were it not for these twin efforts, both at enormous expense, one expert warns that the "the lack of water could destroy [the Saudi state] if drastic solutions aren't found soon. Despite heroic means, the desert is still a desert." See Mohammed al-Harbi, "Saudi Arabia's Empty Quarter: Beauty and Wealth of World's Largest Sand Desert," *Alarabiya News*, April 3, 2018, <https://english.alarabiya.net/life-style/travel-and-tourism/2018/04/03/Saudi-empty-quarter>. Also see Ruth Michaelson, "Oil Built Saudi Arabia — Will a Lack of Water Destroy It?," *The Guardian*, August 6, 2019, <https://www.theguardian.com/cities/2019/aug/06/oil-built-saudi-arabia-will-a-lack-of-water-destroy-it#:~:text=Indeed%2C%20oil%20may%20have%20built,a%20collection%20of%20towering%20skyscrapers>.

23. Warren Aston, "A History of NaHoM" *BYU Studies Quarterly* 51, no. 2 (2012): 79. As a part of this article, Aston provides an impressive photograph of the Nihm mountains in Yemen, 78.

trek some 30 years after leaving Jerusalem (2 Nephi 5:28). By then, he was established in the New World in an entirely different environment. He was now in the tropical rain forests surrounding the city of Nephi. Yet he continued to use the word *wilderness* (e.g., 2 Nephi 5:5). Clearly, the concept of *wilderness* had taken on an entirely different connotation. Nephi, his people, and his descendants were no longer just surviving in an arid desert or even enjoying an oasis-lagoon. Based on what many Latter-day Saint scholars believe is the most plausible general setting for the Book of Mormon, the Lehites were now living in a wilderness that consisted of the lush *jungle-like tropical rain forests* of Mesoamerica.²⁴

Years later, Mosiah described some of his people being “lost in the wilderness for the space of many days” (Mosiah 8:8, 21:25). He tells of the army chasing Limhi’s people, but they “could no longer follow their [Limhi’s] tracks; therefore they [the army] were lost in the wilderness” (Mosiah 22:16). In fact, the army was “lost in the wilderness for many days” (Mosiah 23:30). Similarly, Mosiah’s unsuccessful search party “wandered many days in the wilderness, even forty days did they wander” (Mosiah 7:1–4). Later, when king Noah sent his army to “destroy” Alma and his people who had “departed into the wilderness” (Mosiah 18:34), the army “searched in vain for the people of the Lord” (Mosiah 19:1). Notice that nobody died in all of this getting lost in the jungle rainforests, whereas, by contrast, “to lose one’s way in the desert was almost certain death.”²⁵ Moreover, when Zeniff was later forced to defend his people, he armed the men but “caused that the women and children of my people should *be hid* in the wilderness” (Mosiah 10:9). Hiding in a desert is difficult; hiding in a tropical rainforest is easy, almost unavoidable. Even pyramids and stone buildings become lost in vegetation. For example, one recent survey along the borders of Guatemala and the Yucatan Peninsula of Mexico, using LIDAR aerial photography, revealed over 61,000 structures that are not easily visible from the ground because of the jungle growth.²⁶

24. I acknowledge that many faithful members of the Church adopt the Heartland Theory — i.e., that the Book of Mormon events occurred in the area south of the Great Lakes. Even using that theory, Nephi’s people would be living in a heavily forested area, not in a desert.

25. John L. McKenzie, *Dictionary of the Bible* (Milwaukee, WI: Bruce Publishing, 1965), s.v. “desert.”

26. Brian Hales quotes Takeshi Inomata, et al., “Archaeological Application of Airborne LiDAR with Object-Based Vegetation Classification and Visualization Techniques at the Lowland Maya Site of Ceibal, Guatemala,” *Remote Sensing* 9 (2017): 563, <https://www.mdpi.com/2072-4292/9/6/563>. See Brian C. Hales,

One might object that these accounts in Mosiah occurred 400 years after Nephi and are therefore not relevant to an Ancient Near East (ANE) understanding of the word. This is irrelevant, since at this point, we are not talking about the ANE, we are talking about Nephi's account, which, while beginning in the ANE, soon spread to the tropical rainforests of the Americas. Although we know that the Nephite language changed over time, the translation into the word *wilderness* was given to Joseph Smith by the Lord. It is not reasonable to expect that the textual meaning of a word that was familiar to, and used by, Joseph Smith changed, without warning, sometime between the ANE beginning of 1 Nephi and the New World account of Mosiah.

Plains, Forests, Oceans, and Ice Fields as *Wilderness*

A more modern diversity of meaning is also shown in the etymology of the English word *wilderness*: "Wilderness (n.) 'wild, uninhabited, or uncultivated place,' with -ness + Old English *wild-deor* 'wild animal, wild deer.'"²⁷ A "wilderness," then, is a relatively uninhabited area, but not necessarily an arid or a sandy one. It is instructive to look at what Noah Webster considered a *wilderness* in 1828, at the time of Joseph Smith. He started his definition with "a *desert*" but quickly moved beyond that. Similar to the *Brown-Driver-Briggs* definition given earlier, Webster referred to "a tract of land or region uncultivated and uninhabited by human beings." Examples of that were "a forest or a wide barren plain."²⁸ His second definition was "the ocean." Let's touch on these other meanings of a *wilderness*.

One major definition of *wilderness* in the minds of Americans in 1828, presumably including Joseph Smith, included the Great Plains of the Midwest and the deciduous forests of the East. Joseph Smith used the word *wilderness* over 200 times in the Book of Mormon and 16 times in

"Unavailable Genetic Evidence, Multiple Simultaneous Promised Lands, and Lamanites by Location? Possible Ramifications of the Book of Mormon Limited Geography Theory," *Interpreter: A Journal of Latter-day Saint Faith and Scholarship* 56 (2023): 114–15, <https://journal.interpreterfoundation.org/unavailable-genetic-evidence-multiple-simultaneous-promised-lands-and-lamanites-by-location-possible-ramifications-of-the-book-of-mormon-limited-geography-theory/>. See also "Sprawling Maya network discovered under Guatemala Jungle," *BBC News*, February 2, 2018, <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-latin-america-42916261>.

27. *Online Etymology Dictionary*, s.v. "wilderness," <https://www.etymonline.com/search?q=wilderness>.

28. Noah Webster, *American Dictionary of the American Language* (1828), s.v. "wilderness," <https://webstersdictionary1828.com/Dictionary/Wilderness>.

the Doctrine and Covenants, often to describe the deciduous forests near his home. One entry reads, “My servant Parley P. Pratt ... shall go ... into the *wilderness* among the Lamanites” (D&C 32:1–2). Another asks, “And again, what do we hear? ... A voice of the Lord in the *wilderness* of Fayette, Seneca county. ... The voice of Peter, James, and John in the *wilderness* ... [by] the Susquehanna river” (D&C 128:20).

As the West was explored and developed, readers were told of vast evergreen forests on the slopes of the Rocky Mountains. Joseph Smith only saw those forests in vision but had expected to lead the Saints through the wilderness plains to those wilderness evergreen forests.²⁹ He was, of course, forced to leave that exodus to Brigham Young, but the West as *wilderness* still resides in the minds of millions of Americans.³⁰

As noted earlier, Noah Webster’s 1828 definitions expanded the diversity even further to include “the ocean.”³¹ Even though Nephi did not use the word *wilderness* in his description of the ocean leg of the journey, to the weary travelers that would have seemed an empty wilderness. The Lehighites became all too familiar with that wilderness, given their likely year-long crossing.³² So, if *wilderness* can be expanded to include uninhabited and undeveloped prairies, forests, and oceans, there seems no reason the *midbar* cannot be expanded to include the lagoon of Bountiful.

In an even further and more dramatic contrast to the Hebrew mindsets of deserts and mountains is the mindset of many people of the far north. They have always thought, and continue to think, of their vast,

29. See “Joseph Smith’s Rocky Mountain Prophecy,” *FAIR Answers Wiki*, https://www.fairlatterdaysaints.org/answers/Joseph_Smith%27s_Rocky_Mountain_prophecy.

30. Gundars Rudzitis writes, “To me, the American West is wilderness, yet wilderness and the wild mean different things to different people” (Gundars Rudzitis, *Wilderness and the Changing American West* [New York: John Wiley and Sons, 1966], xi and 10). There is now a “long tradition of wealthy elites” remaking the wilderness of the American West by purchasing great swaths of land in an attempt to preserve this wilderness, at least for themselves (Justin Farrell, *Billionaire Wilderness* [Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2020], 150–51.)

31. Webster, *Dictionary*, s.v. “wilderness.”

32. Jason Daley noted that “anyone who’s ventured beyond the sight of land or looked down from a jetliner could easily imagine most of the vast ocean as a wilderness.” He adds, “The Wilderness Conservation Society ... develop[ed] a map of ... the world’s oceans [that] fit their definition of wilderness.” Jason Daley, “Why the Ocean Needs Wilderness,” *Smithsonian Magazine* (website), August 6, 2018, <https://www.smithsonianmag.com/science-nature/why-ocean-needs-wilderness-180969875>.

undeveloped regions of ice and snow as *wilderness*.³³ The U.S. National Park Service officially calls Alaska a "wilderness,"³⁴ and that word also applies to the southern continent, where "as much as 99.6% of Antarctica is considered to be *wilderness*."³⁵

The definition of a *wilderness* therefore — whether ancient or modern — often comes down to the mindset of the speaker. That's why a mountain, a plain, a forest, an ocean, and even a frozen tundra could all be a *wilderness*. The definition is in the eye of the beholder. People envision the concept of an undeveloped area according to what is in their mental map. If these varying definitions of an undeveloped wilderness are all valid, and they seem to be, and if the fertile oases of Western Arabia are universally acceptable as part of the greater wilderness through which the Lehighites traveled, then there seems to be no reason that *midbar* could not be expanded to include the uninhabited and undeveloped oasis of Bountiful.

There is no question that the fertility of the lagoon came as a total surprise to the Lehighites. The beauty and fertility inspired them to spontaneously name the inlet *Bountiful*. Although the lagoon came across as *bountiful* in comparison to the Empty Quarter that they just spent an agonizing month or two traversing, Bountiful was as "wild" (uninhabited and uncultivated) in its own way as the arid land along the west coast of Arabia had been. It was a mini and fertile "wilderness" within a larger and dryer "wilderness." In a fascinating parallel written not long after the death of Joseph Smith, William Palgrave, an 1860–65 traveler, found his own lush inlets in Oman (though along the northern coast of Oman, not in the Dhofar area).

33. Rovaniemi, Finland, advertises their various winter destinations as being in the "wilderness," <https://wildnordic.fi/?s=%22wilderness%22>; as does Norway's "Arctic Wilderness Lodge," *Best Served Scandinavia* (website), www.best-served.co.uk/destinations/norway/places-to-stay/arctic-wilderness-lodge-norway-183930.

34. The United States Congress designates as protected a 7.2-million-acre area in Alaska, calling it the "Gates of the Arctic Wilderness" (University of Montana, "Gates of the Arctic Wilderness," *Wilderness Connect*, <https://wilderness.net/visit-wilderness/?ID=199>). The U.S. National Park Service describes that area as a "Premier Wilderness" and "Alaska's Ultimate Wilderness" (U.S. Department of the Interior, "Arctic Wilderness," August 15, 2019, <https://www.nps.gov/subjects/arctic/wilderness.htm>).

35. Nick Carne, "How Much of Antarctica Is Really Wilderness? New Study Maps Extent and Pattern of Human Activity," *Cosmos Weekly*, July 17, 2020, <https://web.archive.org/web/20200717113628/https://cosmosmagazine.com/earth/earth-sciences/how-much-of-antarctica-is-really-wilderness/>.

[W]e anchored ... [off] the coast. ... Next morning dawned for us on a very pretty scene. It was a low shingly beach, behind which a wooded valley stretched far back between the mountains, and ended in deep gorges, also clothed with trees, though the rough granite crags peeped out here and there. ... [There] were herds of goats clinging to the mountain ledges ... and *abundant* [bountiful?] vegetation of mixed character ... laden with round berries ... [all] contrasted pleasantly with the past barrenness.³⁶

Nephi's Own Hints of Bountiful as a *Wilderness*

An obvious question that follows this discussion of the diversity of *wilderness* is whether Nephi himself ever used the term to refer to the oasis of Bountiful. Would that not be the acid test? Obviously, we would not expect to find Nephi frequently using the word *wilderness* to refer to Bountiful, since that might well have been contrary to his youthful mindset of a *midbar*. That may be the reason why only twice may Nephi's words associate Bountiful with *wilderness*. The first instance occurs as the family is loading up the ship: "After we had prepared all things, much *fruits* and *meat from the wilderness*, and *honey* in abundance, and provisions according to that which the Lord had commanded us, we did go down into the ship" (1 Nephi 18:6).

One must consider several questions with this possible link of Bountiful and *wilderness*.

- Why did Nephi place the word *meat* between the words *fruit and honey*? He didn't say, "fruit and honey from Bountiful and meat from the wilderness." The placement of the words suggests that all three categories of food came from the same place: "from the wilderness" of Bountiful.
- What is meant by "meat from the wilderness"? Surely not the desert of the Rub' al-Khali, which was many days of travel back up the rock-strewn wadi. Nor is it likely that they simply hopped across the high cliffs and mountains to the north. Going to the desert was, by no means, a case of merely stepping out of a garden oasis to get meat and then stepping back into the lagoon. Could the game animals have been as close as the *mountain* in which Nephi

36. William G. Palgrave, *Narrative of a Year's Journey Through Central and Eastern Arabia* (London: Macmillan, 1865), 2:323–24.

prayed? Since that mountain was unquestionably a part of *Bountiful*, that would suggest that Bountiful was part of the wilderness.

- Why would the game be out in the desert in the first place? There was little food for them there and little water. An axiom is that animals follow water, and abundant fresh water was in the lagoon. In any case, it is well documented that wildlife, both kosher and non-kosher, was bountiful in Bountiful, as Aston convincingly documents.³⁷ They did not need to leave the region of Bountiful to find game.

The second instance of Nephi's wording possibly associating Bountiful with *wilderness* comes not from what Nephi says, but from what he does *not* say. It occurs in 2 Nephi just after Lehi died. The full weight of the responsibility for the new immigrants' physical and spiritual well-being had come crashing down on the head of Nephi, who was, after all, still just a young man. In a lament of great intimacy, often called *Nephi's Psalm*, he contemplates his own perceived weaknesses. Then he recounts, in a poetic parallelistic couplet that seems to pair "led in wilderness" and "preserved upon waters," that "My God hath been my support; he hath led me through mine afflictions in the wilderness; and he hath preserved me upon the waters of the great deep. (2 Nephi 4:20).

What wildernesses is he referring to? There is no disputing that Nephi experienced afflictions in the desert portion *preceding* his entering the land of Bountiful. And Nephi obviously included afflictions *following* Bountiful while crossing the wilderness of the "waters of the great deep."

37. There were animals in both Khor Rori and Khor Kharfot. Aston's boots-on-the-ground video, "Lehi in Arabia," shows a close-up of a predator (likely an Arabian leopard) in Khor Kharfot with eyes glowing in the night. The narrator tells the viewer that "Kharfot is a sanctuary for wildlife" and discusses a "diversity of wildlife; it was not uncommon for the team to wake up with a fresh leopard kill nearby or find new turtle and wolf tracks on the beach." See "Lehi in Arabia: The Search for Nephi's Bountiful," *Living Scriptures Streaming*, December 15, 2015, timestamp 5, <https://stream.livingscriptures.com/movies/lehi-in-arabia>. Warren and Michaela Aston also recount an anecdotal incident in which "one whole meal disappeared when a cow loomed out of the darkness and it was devoured as it cooked on the fire." Aston and Aston, "In the Footsteps of Lehi," 67–68. Aston summarized the situation when he writes in his larger book: "A handful of the almost extinct Arabian Leopard (*Panthera pardus nimr*), together with wolves, porcupines, rock hyrax and striped hyenas still live here and there is a variety of other small game and over 100 bird species, some of them potential food sources." Aston, *Lehi and Sariah in Arabia*, 135.

But why does he appear to be skipping his afflictions *within* Bountiful? That he also experienced afflictions while in the inlet is beyond question. They included the onerous and overwhelming responsibility of building a seaworthy ship out of tree trunks, while being roundly mocked and ridiculed (1 Nephi 17:17), and even suffering an attempted murder (1 Nephi 17:48). It would be highly unlikely for him to describe afflictions in the desert and then skip several years, only to then describe afflictions on the ocean and thereby glossing over his afflictions in Bountiful. Instead, it suggests that he considered all of his afflictions, including those in Bountiful, to be a part of the total “afflictions in the wilderness.”

New World References to Bountiful as a *Wilderness*

So far, the emphasis has been based on Nephi’s account of the journey in the Old World. Other perspectives are recorded among the Lehités’ descendants in the New World. It is to those that I now turn.

The Traditions of the Lamanites

A very different take on the journey through Arabia comes from Laman and Lemuel’s progeny as recounted by Zeniff in Mosiah 10:12–16. According to his description of the Lamanites:

12. They were a wild, and ferocious, and a blood-thirsty people, believing in the tradition of their fathers, which is this — Believing that they were driven out of the land of Jerusalem because of the iniquities of their fathers, and that they were wronged in the wilderness by their brethren, and they were also wronged while crossing the sea;

13. And again, that they were wronged while in the land of their first inheritance, after they had crossed the sea. ...

14. And his brethren were wroth with him ... they were also wroth with him upon the waters. ...

15. And again, they were wroth with him when they had arrived in the promised land. ...

16. And again, they were wroth with him because he departed into the wilderness [of the jungle].

Again, where is Bountiful in all of this? Did Laman and Lemuel not consider themselves wronged in Bountiful? Obviously they did. Zeniff makes it clear that the Lamanites felt “wronged” because Nephi “took the lead of their journey in the wilderness” (Mosiah 10:13) and because

he instructed, cajoled, chided, reminded, prompted, taught, urged, encouraged, rebuked, scolded, and admonished his older brothers. Did this “wronging by Nephi’s assuming leadership” continue in Bountiful? Of course, it did. The group had no sooner pitched their tents upon arrival in Bountiful than Nephi “did exhort my brethren to faithfulness and diligence” — and he obviously took the leadership in constructing the ship. Predictably, “they began to murmur against me” (1 Nephi 17:15, 17). Nothing changed in Bountiful. In fact, the brothers became so angry with Nephi’s “wronging them” that they again attempted to murder him (v. 48).

That Zeniff gave such a comprehensive description of the perceived “wrongings” in the several wilderness situations, without specifically mentioning Bountiful, is startling. It is also revealing. Unless Bountiful was deliberately and intentionally skipped, which seems unimaginable, the Lamanite traditions included Bountiful within the general category of being “wronged in the wilderness.”

Mosiah’s and Alma’s Reminders to Their Sons

A different New-World perspective on the trek occurred when King Benjamin explained to his son Mosiah that the Liahona stopped working when the Lehites “were unfaithful ... [so they] were *driven back* ... and were smitten with famine” (Mosiah 1:17). Similarly, Alma reminded his son Helaman that when the Liahona stopped working “they did not travel a *direct course*, and were afflicted with hunger” (Alma 37:42). Indeed, Nephi indicates that they hungered during their journey. Likewise, they could have had “difficulty in locating the next oasis to make their base camp — and were instead ‘driven *back*,’” presumably to the last known water source when the Liahona stopped working, *prior* to Bountiful.³⁸ It is equally clear that when the Liahona stopped working *after* Bountiful, they “knew not whither they should steer the ship” (i.e., it didn’t travel in “a *direct course*”) and they were “driven back upon the waters” (1 Nephi 18:13) and likely had times of hunger. The Liahona was their lifeline for survival during those times.

But what about in Bountiful? Was the Liahona their lifeline during those several years as well? It must have been. It doesn’t seem credible that they would put the Liahona away as they entered the oasis of Bountiful and then take it back out once they launched into the ocean.

38. Timothy Gervais and John L. Joyce, “‘By Small Means’: Rethinking the Liahona,” *Interpreter: A Journal of Latter-day Saint Faith and Scholarship* 30 (2018): 221, <https://journal.interpreterfoundation.org/by-small-means-rethinking-the-liahona/>.

That would seem to contradict Nephi's account. He needed help to find many things in Bountiful. He surely needed the Liahona "to find iron ore" (1 Nephi 17:10), to find additional flint, to find the right trees to utilize, to find meat and game, and to find "what manner I should work the timbers of the ship" (1 Nephi 18:1). "The Lord showed unto me great things" (1 Nephi 18:3), and the Liahona was likely the vehicle for much of all this finding and showing. King Benjamin's and Alma's point was that the Liahona "was prepared to show unto our fathers the course which they should travel *in the wilderness*" (Alma 37:39) all the time and every time, including *before*, *during*, and *after* Bountiful. Bountiful was not skipped; it was part of the "wilderness."

The Words of the Lord about Bountiful as a *Wilderness*

A final piece of evidence of an association between Bountiful and the concept of *midbar* is to read what the Lord himself had to say about Bountiful being a *wilderness*. When he asked Nephi to reflect upon his tender mercies, he did not say, "Here you are, safely in Bountiful. Now look back at the means that I provided for you, back then, in the desert." No, he continued to provide means. He said to Nephi in 1 Nephi 17:13, and this when Nephi *first entered* Bountiful and before they arrived in the New World: "And I *will also be* [note the future tense] your light in the *wilderness*; and I *will prepare the way* [future tense] before you ... [and] ye shall be led [future tense] towards *the promised land*; and ye shall know [future tense] that it is by me that ye are led."

The Lord was not just talking about merely providing a physical light for their nighttime travel through the desert (past tense). Yes, he had been their light; but he promised to continue to be their light. The "light in the wilderness" (whether physical light, spiritual light, or both) did not end when the desert ended (past tense). It is expressed in the future tense. In this scriptural promise, which was given at the very *beginning* of the Lehiters' many years in Bountiful, the Lord promised to remain their "light" in the *wilderness* of Bountiful and on the waters, just as he can be our light in *our* wildernesses. He next tellingly says, "*After* ye have arrived in the promised land, ye shall know that I, the Lord, am God; and that I, the Lord, did deliver you from destruction" (v. 14). He is telling Nephi that he (Nephi) will look back over the entire experience — desert, Bountiful, and the oceans — and see that the "means" were "provided" the whole time (v. 3). By asking Nephi to recognize that he had been "their light in the *wilderness*" and would continue to be their

light in the future (in Bountiful), it appears that the Lord himself is calling Bountiful a part of the wilderness.

Speeds and Stops Through Arabia

Having discussed the diversity of meanings of *wilderness*, which seems to include Bountiful, the next point to consider is what this alternative reading might reveal about the *timing* of the various events that took place during their trek across Arabia. If we can suspend, at least for the sake of this discussion, the restriction imposed by assuming that the eight years were just the desert portion, we can reexamine the specific rest stops along the journey. I will also discuss the three speculations that attempt to fill the "missing" years required by the traditional interpretation.

The desert portion of the trek has been extensively covered in many scholarly discussions, especially by Warren Aston in his many publications. I will cover some of the same ground, but my focus will be on estimates of the time spent reaching each stopping point and the time of the activities that took place there. It is primarily about the timing that the various scholars disagree. Yet it is the timing of the trek that is most pertinent in calculating how long the Lehites sojourned in Bountiful.

Overall Distances and Reasonable Speeds

Let's begin the discussion with the overall distances involved in the desert trek portion of the journey. From Jerusalem to Nahom (near Sana'a, Yemen) is 1,500 miles. The group then turned eastward to reach the entrance to Bountiful, which was likely Khor Kharfot, just 15 to 20 miles past the eastern Yemeni border into the country of modern-day Oman. That last leg, through harsh terrain, adds some 700 miles. The total distance along Lehi's Trail from Jerusalem to Bountiful, then, is roughly 2,200 miles.³⁹ This is the same distance as from Salt Lake City to New York City.

Lehi and his group suffered scarcity of food, only occasional water, daytime heat and nighttime cold, and travel by foot or by camel. Essentially, all experts agree that they used camels,⁴⁰ but a camel's

39. Mileage estimates come from Google Maps (website), <https://www.google.com/maps>; but are only approximate because the maps are based on existing roads, and there is no road down the long wadi route of Wadi Sayq to Khor Kharfot. (The distance to Khor Rori would be even farther.) That calculation of 2,200 miles agrees exactly with the mileage given by Brown, "Refining the Spotlight," 45.

40. Jeff Lindsay notes, "By Lehi's day, domesticated camels were in widespread use on trade routes in Arabia, and it is entirely plausible that someone embarking

role was primarily to carry provisions and tents. Sometimes travelers also “journeyed taking turns to walk and ride,”⁴¹ but according to one observer on a camel train in 1888, riding was usually reserved for “small children, the aged, the sick, and even bed-ridden folk.”⁴²



Figure 1. A possible map of the travels of Lehi and his group.

Perhaps a better equivalency for the Arabian trek is the shorter “Mormon Trail” of the early pioneers. The Mormon Trail was similar in that both involved walking (for healthy adults), scarcity of food and water, rough terrain, and almost impenetrable barriers. The major

on a trip south of Israel would have used camels” (Lindsay, “Joseph and Dream Map: Part 1,” 169). Warren Aston asserts that Lehi’s use of tents “virtually assures us that the departure from Jerusalem used camels, not mules or donkeys, as the primary means of carrying their belongings,” Warren P. Aston, “Into Arabia: Lehi and Sariah’s Escape from Jerusalem — Perspectives Suggested by New Fieldwork,” *BYU Studies Quarterly* 58, no. 4 (2019), 101.

41. Charles M. Doughty, *Travels in Arabia Deserta*, ed. Edward Garnett (Gloucester, MA: Peter Smith, 1968), 49.

42. *Ibid.*, 95.

difference is that the distance of the Mormon Trail was 1,000 miles less than the travel down the coast of Arabia.⁴³

In addition to distances involved in the trek, travel speeds need to be factored in. Kent Brown, and most other scholars, believe that Lehi's camel caravan "was traveling about twenty miles per day, or perhaps fewer."⁴⁴ The Book of Mormon Central (now, Scripture Central) team points out that "Lehi would likely have fled Jerusalem as quickly as possible, pushing his traveling party much faster than under normal travel conditions."⁴⁵ Talking only about the initial 180 miles from Jerusalem to the tip of the eastern fork of the Red Sea (Eilat or Aqaba),⁴⁶ they conclude that the family could have accomplished "an average of only 20 to 25 miles (32–40 km) per day."⁴⁷ Had the group been able to maintain that rate of travel for the entire trek down to what is now Oman, and with no long rest stops, they would have arrived in Bountiful in slightly less than four months. That speed is highly unlikely, because it was simply not sustainable, and we know they took rest stops. A more realistic speed is closer to the rate of the Mormon pioneers, who were "making about 13 miles a day"⁴⁸ traveling to their Promised Land in Utah.⁴⁹ Applying the speed of the Mormon pioneers to the Lehites' trek yields a result of six months.

43. FamilySearch Wiki, s.v. "Mormon Trail," last updated May 10, 2023, 12:56, [https://www.familysearch.org/en/wiki/Mormon_Trail#:~:text=The%20original%201846%2D1847%20Mormon,1%2C300%20mile%20\(2%2C092%20km\).](https://www.familysearch.org/en/wiki/Mormon_Trail#:~:text=The%20original%201846%2D1847%20Mormon,1%2C300%20mile%20(2%2C092%20km).)

44. S. Kent Brown, "The Hunt for the Valley of Lemuel," *Journal of Book of Mormon Studies* 16, no. 1 (2007): 66, <https://scholarsarchive.byu.edu/jbms/vol16/iss1/8/>. See also Hugh Nibley, *Lehi in the Desert; The World of the Jaredites; There Were Jaredites* (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 1988), 53–54.

45. "How Could Lehi Travel from Jerusalem to the Red Sea in 3 Days?," Book of Mormon Central, February 1, 2018, <https://bookofmormoncentral.org/qa/how-could-lehi-travel-from-jerusalem-to-the-red-sea-in-3-days>.

46. The modern-day Israeli resort town of Eilat and the modern Jordanian resort city of Aqaba lie at the tip of the eastern fork of the Red Sea (see Figure 1). Both were small settlements around the time of Lehi.

47. "How Could Lehi Travel from Jerusalem to the Red Sea in 3 Days?"

48. Linda Thatcher, "The Mormon Trail: A Photographic Exhibit," *History to Go* (blog), June 2, 2016, <https://historytogo.utah.gov/mormon-trail-exhibit/#:~:text=Making%20about%2013%20miles%20a,124%20miles%20from%20Fort%20Laramie>.

49. The very first immigrants were even slower: "The first 1847 company traveled more than 1,000 miles by wagon in 111 days," which calculates to an average of only nine miles per day. Christine T. Cox, "Mormon Pioneer Emigration Facts," *Church History*, Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, March 6, 2018, <https://history.churchofjesuschrist.org/blog/mormon-pioneer-emigration-facts>.

As noted earlier, these speeds create a problem, given Nephi's apparent report that the journey prior to Bountiful required eight years. To resolve this, scholars have speculated that they spent multiple *years* — as many as six or seven — in one or more sites along the route. As Kent Brown puts it, "The eight-year duration of the wilderness experience suggests that ... the family must have spent a considerable period in at least one location."⁵⁰ No, there is another possibility: the alternative interpretation, which includes Bountiful in the eight years. That would allow the trip through the desert to be much faster.

In the next section of the paper, I present estimated times at the major stopping points along the way. I also discuss the three speculations that attempt to account for the "missing" years of the traditional reading of 1 Nephi 17:4–5. Here, I ask the reader's indulgence, as considerable detail will be needed to critique each speculation. I then return to timing estimates for the major stopping points of the Lehites' journey.

Speculation 1: Sluggishness Caused Slow Progress to Allow Comparison with Moses

The first speculation is not a full-blown theory as much as an observation. Don Bradley notes in passing that Lehi and his party were spiritually sluggish, just like the children of Israel under Moses.⁵¹ For that reason, and to emphasize similarities between Moses and Nephi, the Lord permitted (or implicitly, "arranged") for them to wander at an extremely slow overall pace throughout the journey. That slowdown was ostensibly in order for readers to draw a parallel between the Lehites' exodus from apostate Jerusalem and the exodus of Moses from out of slavery in Egypt.⁵² In his words,

50. S. Kent Brown, *From Jerusalem to Zarahemla: Literary and Historical Studies of the Book of Mormon* (Provo, UT: Religious Studies Center, Brigham Young University, 1998), 58.

51. Don Bradley, *The Lost 116 Pages: Reconstructing the Book of Mormon's Missing Stories* (Salt Lake City: Greg Kofford, 2019), 155.

52. A parallel of the children of Israel and the Lehites is readily drawn. Nephi himself makes this comparison (1 Nephi 4:1–4) and several scholars have pointed to this parallel. For example, Brown, *From Jerusalem to Zarahemla*, 75; Noel B. Reynolds, "The Political Dimension in Nephi's Small Plates," *BYU Studies* 27, no. 4 (Fall 1987): 22–24; and Terrence L. Szink, "Nephi and the Exodus," in *Rediscovering the Book of Mormon*, ed. John L. Sorenson and Melvin J. Thorne (Provo, UT: FARMS, 1991), 38–51, <https://archive.bookofmormoncentral.org/content/nephi-and-exodus>.

In both the biblical and Book of Mormon exoduses, the people ... moved toward their respective promised lands with *painful sluggishness*. The Israelites wandered 40 years to traverse the distance between Egypt and Palestine. The Lehites ... managed to take eight years to go from Jerusalem to the bottom of the Arabian Peninsula — a pace of about 5 miles per week.⁵³

A speed of five miles per week, or less than a mile per day, seems highly unlikely, inefficient, and contrary to Nephi's choice of wording, which suggests fairly rapid travel between specific, named, oasis stopping points. In addition, consider the nature of their tents. An Arabian tent compound was far from a cluster of collapsible pup-tents. According to an 1888 description, "The Arab tent ... [is], strong and rude ... and may last out, they say, a generation, only wearing thinner."⁵⁴ Those tents were not only large and bulky, they were incredibly heavy. Aston notes that "even a single panel of a desert tent is a heavy and awkward item, weighing hundreds of pounds."⁵⁵ Hilton and Hilton estimate that the full tents weighed around 500 pounds each.⁵⁶ Erecting several such huge, heavy, and complex tents to form a compound for just one night and afterwards striking the heavy tents and reloading the camels would have consumed much of a day at each end. It would not have taken place unless the group was staying for at least a few weeks. That may be why Nephi takes the time and space on the plates to record the setting up of the tents as significant and worth mentioning. In fact, while traveling "the space of many days" to the next watering hole, they would not have used their tents at all. Rather, they would have snatched what sleep they could during brief stops as they traveled by day when possible or by night when the heat became unbearable. Either way, they would not have had the luxury of setting up their luxurious and spacious Bedouin desert tents. Writing in 1865, Palgrave eloquently describes typical Arabian desert practice:

Then an insufficient halt for rest or sleep, at most of two or three hours, soon, interrupted by the oft-repeated admonition, "if we linger here we all die of thirst," sounding in our ears;

53. Bradley, *The Lost 116 Pages*, 155.

54. Doughty, *Travels in Arabia Desert*, 60.

55. Aston, "Into Arabia," 101.

56. Hilton and Hilton, *Discovering Lehi*, 18.

and then to remount our jaded beasts and push them on through the dark night.⁵⁷

They simply would not have loaded up the camels with their massive tents, all their provisions, their abundant seeds, and so on, and then traveled just a mile or two, only to unload the camels and set up their all their heavy tents again. That defies logic. And there is still another piece of evidence of the group's rapid, not sluggish, travel speed. This one was pointed out by a helpful anonymous reviewer of an early draft of this paper. He suggested that since the Lord told the party not to "make much fire" (1 Nephi 17:12), that indicated, at least to that reviewer, that the Lehighites "were hiding or at risk from others. Such a risk would be a motivation to hurry and not delay when passing through dangerous regions."

Nor is there textual support for the idea that they ever "wandered," although that may be a logical assumption to fill some of the missing time. But the text seems to indicate that they were being specifically directed by the Liahona; and even the few times that their faith lagged and the Liahona stopped working, they seem to have been immobilized in place. There is no indication that they "wandered" aimlessly. To the contrary, Nephi's account provides clear directions and clear timeframes. Then, too, they were often crossing barren deserts, and "to lose one's way in the desert was almost certain death."⁵⁸

The implication that they were usually or frequently spiritually sluggish, like the children of Israel, also does not hold up to scrutiny. Bradley notes that

Lehi's band failed to progress in their journey when they failed to give "heed and diligence" to God. ... The Lehighites failed to progress due to the Liahona ceasing to work when their "faith and diligence waned." ... The Lehighites' journey to the Promised Land continued to echo the Israelite wandering in the wilderness, even while they crossed the ocean.⁵⁹

In other words, the multi-year delay was caused by the lack of faith of the Lehighites, just like the Hebrews under Moses. There is unquestionably a degree of validity in this comparison. Nephi points to the comparison in his admonition to his brothers, especially in 1 Nephi 17:23–30 and 42. But there are far more differences in the groups than similarities, and

57. Palgrave, *Narrative of a Year's Journey*, 1:12.

58. McKenzie, *Dictionary of the Bible*, s.v. "desert."

59. Bradley, *The Lost 116 Pages*, 155–56.

we must not overstate the resemblances. In fact, there are at least three glaring differences.

First, the children of Israel had been slaves who obeyed overlords. They needed time to find out who they were and how to handle their new freedom, how to become a cohesive and united body. Further, they needed to prepare for battle in an occupied land. By contrast, the Lehites were highly educated, upper-class, family members who were fleeing from, not toward, an established society.⁶⁰ They were not ignorant slaves. There were, likewise, no enemies to defeat once they arrived in the Promised Land.

Second, there was a huge difference in timeframes. The "exodus" of Lehi/Nephi took, at most, eight years and, as we will see, perhaps much less — not 40 years. It seems unlikely that the Lord dragged out the trek to underscore a lesson that was already apparent and made clear by Nephi himself.⁶¹

Third, there was a vast difference in the spiritual level of the groups. Most of the Lehites were not consistently spiritually sluggish. The text simply does not support that reading. Other than when she believed all four of her sons were dead, Sariah never faltered. Camille Fronk notes that "children were the focus of life for women in ancient Israel. Only in their roles as mothers did Israelite women receive honor and authority."⁶² A temporary and grief-induced anger against her husband and even against God seems entirely understandable. Similarly, Lehi murmured only one time, when Nephi's bow broke and they had no food (1 Nephi 16:20). Almost immediately, he was truly "chastened because of his murmuring against the Lord (v. 24), insomuch that he was brought down into the depths of sorrow" (v. 25).

Overall, the Lehites come across as faithful, at least most of the time. When one examines the full story closely and despite their characterization in talks and lessons, even Laman and Lemuel were not spiritually sluggish most of the time. It is obvious that they had periods of complaining, rebellion, and even attempted murder, but those periods were actually just occasional.

60. Noel Reynolds believes that Lehi had been a wealthy and educated scribe, and Nephi was following in his footsteps. See Noel B. Reynolds, "The Last Nephite Scribes," *Interpreter: A Journal of Latter-day Saint Faith and Scholarship* 53 (2022): 95–137, <https://journal.interpreterfoundation.org/the-last-nephite-scribes/>.

61. Aston discusses briefly the parallels between Moses and Lehi/Nephi in *Lehi and Sariah in Arabia*, 12.

62. Camille Fronk, "Desert Epiphany: Sariah and the Women in 1 Nephi," *Journal of Book of Mormon Studies* 9, no 2 (2000): 9.

Based on the work of Margaret Barker, several scholars are pursuing a possible paradigm shift. Grant Hardy, Neal Rappleye, Val Larsen, Kevin Christensen, and others are arguing that much of the conflict between the Lehi-Nephi-led side of the family and the Laman-Lemuel-led side may have been based on differing acceptance of the Deuteronomist reforms of King Josiah, and not on spiritual sluggishness on the part of anyone.⁶³ In other words, Laman and his followers may not have been rejecting God as much as they were rejecting Lehi's "out-of-date" pre-reform ways. In the extreme, the desire to kill their brother and even their father was not "murder." Rappleye points out that Josiah's reforms may have justified, and even mandated, the killing of false prophets and that Laman and Lemuel saw their father and their brother as exactly that, as false prophets.⁶⁴ According to Val Larsen and Newell Wright, "Laman and Lemuel behave as the book [that] Josiah received mandates they behave. ... [They] are motivated by fierce piety."⁶⁵ In Hardy's words, "Whatever else they may have been, Laman and Lemuel appear to have been orthodox, observant Jews."⁶⁶ Val Larsen even calls them "pious."⁶⁷

Nephi certainly does not describe his brothers as *pious*. Nor do they sound pious when they mock Nephi's revelation to build a ship

63. Grant Hardy, *Understanding the Book of Mormon: A Reader's Guide* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2010), 33; Neal Rappleye, "The Deuteronomist Reforms and Lehi's Family Dynamics: A Social Context for the Rebellions of Laman and Lemuel," *Interpreter: A Journal of Latter-day Saint Faith and Scholarship* 16 (2015): 87–99, <https://journal.interpreterfoundation.org/the-deuteronomist-reforms-and-lehis-family-dynamics-a-social-context-for-the-rebellions-of-laman-and-lemuel/>; 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/>; and Kevin Christensen, "Twenty Years After 'Paradigms Regained,' Part 1: The Ongoing, Plain, and Precious Significance of Margaret Barker's Scholarship for Latter-day Saint Studies," *Interpreter: A Journal of Latter-day Saint Faith and Scholarship* 54 (2022): 1–64, <https://journal.interpreterfoundation.org/twenty-years-after-paradigms-regained-part-1-the-ongoing-plain-and-precious-significance-of-margaret-barkers-scholarship-for-latter-day-saint-studies/>.

64. Rappleye, "The Deuteronomist Reforms," 94.

65. Val Larsen and Newell Wright, "Theosis in the Book of Mormon: The Work and Glory of the Father, Mother and Son, and Holy Ghost," *Interpreter: A Journal of Latter-day Saint Faith and Scholarship* 56 (2023): 295, <https://journal.interpreterfoundation.org/theosis-in-the-book-of-mormon-the-work-and-glory-of-the-father-mother-and-son-and-holy-ghost/>.

66. Hardy, *Understanding the Book of Mormon*, 39.

67. Larsen, "Josiah to Zoram," 235.

(1 Nephi 17:17), when they “make themselves merry ... and speak with much rudeness,” and bind Nephi while crossing the ocean (1 Nephi 18: 9–11). So we are left with two conflicting theories. Laman and Lemuel were either (1) paragons of evil and rebellion who may be spiritually asleep, as Lehi later describes them, or (2) pious defenders of “competing religious ideologies.”⁶⁸ How does one resolve these two extreme views? Noel Reynolds provides one possible resolution when he writes that Laman and Lemuel “may be invoking reformist perspectives to *justify* their rebellions. But I interpret Nephi to be portraying these invocations as convenient *rationalizations*.”⁶⁹

Leaving aside the debate over the Deuteronomistic theory, let's consider the softer side of Laman and Lemuel, based only on Nephi's text. It may come as a surprise that almost two dozen instances in the record are clearly positives, not negatives. These positives are not often recognized and even less often enumerated:

1. They left their comfortable lifestyles to follow their “visionary” father and his “foolish imaginations” (1 Nephi 2:11).
2. They agreed to return to Jerusalem, a multi-week trip, for what seemed a hopeless mission (1 Nephi 3:5, 9).
3. After Laban attempted to slay them (3:13), they “did follow [Nephi]” (1 Nephi 4:4) to make a second attempt.
4. After a rage, they “did soften their hearts ... were sorrowful and did plead ... that I would forgive them” (1 Nephi 7:19–20).
5. When Nephi “did exhort them that they would pray ... it came to pass that they did so” (1 Nephi 7:21).
6. Back in the Valley of Lemuel, “my brethren ... did offer sacrifice and burnt offerings” (1 Nephi 7:22).
7. Later, they were interested enough in their father's teachings to be “disputing one with another” (1 Nephi 15:2).
8. Once Nephi explained Isaiah's teachings “they were pacified and did humble themselves before the Lord” (1 Nephi 15:20).
9. They were interested enough to ask, “What meaneth this thing which our father saw in a dream?” (1 Nephi 15:21).
10. Once Nephi explained the “hard things” (1 Nephi 16:1), they “did humble themselves before the Lord” (1 Nephi 16:5).

68. Rappleye, “The Deuteronomist Reforms,” 99.

69. Reynolds, “The Nephite Metaphor,” 235, emphasis added.

11. When Nephi's replacement bow resulted in meat, "they did humble themselves before the Lord" (1 Nephi 16:32).
12. Their rebellion in Nahom was followed by rapid and sincere repentance, which the Lord accepted (1 Nephi 16:39).
13. After being "shocked" by Nephi (17:53–54), "they were about to worship me [Nephi]" (1 Nephi 17:55).
14. Nephi stopped that inappropriate worship, and Laman and Lemuel instead "did worship the Lord." (1 Nephi 18:1).
15. Then they "did go forth with me; and we did work [heavy manual labor on the ship]" (1 Nephi 18:1) for several years.
16. They said of the ship "that the workmanship was exceedingly fine" (1 Nephi 18:4), which was a humble reversal of their earlier mockery (1 Nephi 17:17–18).
17. At sea, they "began to make themselves merry" but "repented" and "loosed me [Nephi]" (1 Nephi 18:20).
18. That was followed by "a great calm" (1 Nephi 18:21) of waves but also a lack of turbulence from Laman and Lemuel (presumably for months).
19. In the New World, they helped Nephi. "till ... and plant" (1 Nephi 18:24). And "find ... beasts" and "ore" (1 Nephi 18:25).
20. Following these mutual discoveries, they allowed Nephi to "teach ... and ... read many things" (1 Nephi 19:22–23) including 49 verses of Isaiah (1 Nephi 19:24 to 21:26).
21. After Nephi read from the plates of brass, "my brethren came unto me" to ask "what meaneth these things?" (1 Nephi 22:1).
22. They allowed their father, Lehi, to also speak "many things unto them" (2 Nephi 1:1), including what must have seemed to be rubbing salt in the wounds, a pleading to "hearken unto the voice of Nephi" (2 Nephi 1:28).

These 22 instances are not consistent with the behaviors of men who are the personification of evil. Rather, *most* of the time, Laman and Lemuel sound quite compliant. Yes, the infrequent flare-ups were intense; but those flare-ups were generally impulsive, irrational, and brief. The brothers come across, not as villains, but as emotional children throwing infantile tantrums of jealousy — although with the extreme actions and violence of adult men. If anything, their behavior comes across as decidedly bipolar. It ranged from brief and impulsive outbursts to brief and impulsive repentance and even worship, while twice bowing down to worship their little brother. Despite the infrequent negative outbursts,

there were much longer periods of repentance and compliance. Rather than symbols of evil, they are symbols of vacillation. That symbolism is ideal. We, too, are at neither end-point of being celestial beings or telestial villains; most of us consistently vacillate as well.

This discussion is not meant to excuse Laman and Lemuel's horrendous behavior on multiple occasions. It is to point out that most of the time, they were obedient, if reluctantly so. It may be a mistake to judge that Laman and Lemuel were "sluggish." Nephi and Alma make it clear that the Lehites had occasional times of slothfulness (Alma 37: 41–43), but that is not enough to support the idea that the trek was extended because of constant "sluggishness" or to intensify and underscore the similarities between Nephi and Moses. It was not enough to stretch eight months into eight years.

Still, we must estimate just how much time the Lehites remained in any of the four primary stops that Nephi describes. Although not always the case, traveling pauses for Arabian camel caravans — pauses long enough to justify setting up their tents — still tended to be brief, just enough to catch whatever rest they could and replenish their supplies. And that seems to be what Nephi describes. Writing about typical Arabian caravans, Hugh Nibley tells us that "from ten to twelve days is the average time a Bedouin encampment of ordinary size will remain on the same ground," although "they remain often for a whole month."⁷⁰

And there is another problem. As Brown points out, "There were now a number of teenagers and young adults who would consume much of the available food supply. The longer they camped, the more the group would have eaten."⁷¹ Based on all of these facts — the hints of rapid travel, the aging of the seeds for the New World, and that the scriptural record does not talk of any long-term layovers — any multi-year residencies at any of the stops described by Nephi appear unlikely. Let's examine the text of 1 Nephi for more realistic timeframes for traveling to each of the stops and the time spent in each one.

An Estimate of Time Spent Getting Out of Jerusalem

Lehi, like his contemporary, Jeremiah, proclaimed various warnings and woes upon the people of Jerusalem. Chief among them was, first, the destruction of a city that most citizens believed would be protected by God. A second warning was that the many Israelites would be carried away into captivity in Babylon (1 Nephi 1:13). The people initially "did

70. Nibley, *Lehi in the Desert*, 54.

71. Brown, *Refining the Spotlight*, 48.

mock [Lehi] because of the things which he testified” (v. 19), but that quickly escalated, and they “sought his life, that they might take it away” (v. 20). If one considers the Deuteronomist reforms of King Josiah, along with the intensity of their anger, the extreme reaction might have been because Lehi was (1) preaching a suffering servant Messiah and not a liberating warrior Messiah, (2) testifying “of their wickedness and their abominations” (v. 19), and (3) was preaching a Mother God and a Son of God (both ideas being rejected by the Deuteronomists). Of course, many readers simply assume that the excessive anger was attributable to the evil of the people of Jerusalem, while Lehi was righteous. It was most likely some combination of those causes.

In any case, and presumably like his contemporary Jeremiah, Lehi could not stop testifying, because the Lord’s “word was in mine heart as a burning fire shut up in my bones ... and I could not stay” (Jeremiah 20:9). Only after he was commanded by the Lord to “take his family and depart into the wilderness” (1 Nephi 2:2) did Lehi take the death threats seriously and cease preaching. He was warned that “this people ... seek to take away thy life” (v. 1).

Based on that divine warning, it is tempting to imagine a frantic overnight scramble to secure camels, load them with essentials, and race out of town, precipitously leaving “his house ... and his gold, and his silver, and his precious things and [taking] nothing with him, save it were his family, and provisions, and tents” (v. 4). One commentator uses the words *escape* and *fleeing*,⁷² which make his departure sound like a desperate scramble to get away. That may or may not be accurate. To me, Nephi’s account does not sound as if a crazed mob was imminently charging toward the house, carrying pitchforks and blazing firebrands. The Lord actually said that “they *seek* to take away thy life” (v. 2). If *seek* means “planning or plotting,” Lehi might have had more time, perhaps as much as a week or two, to plan a more organized, but still rapid, exit. Lehi likely would not have had enough tents on hand and certainly not enough seed for a New World, which would have taken at least a few days to procure. In his account, Nephi used the calmer word *depart* (v. 2). Moreover, the leaving of Lehi’s “precious things” (v. 4) may have been a calculated decision rather than an oversight in a desperate panic to get away. Although it could have been overnight or the next day, a more measured departure suggests an extremely generous estimate of *half a month* for the departure from Jerusalem.

72. Aston, “Into Arabia,” 102.

Travel From Jerusalem to the Valley of Lemuel

The group then traveled approximately the 180 to 250 miles (depending on route⁷³) to Eilat or Aqaba. "And he came down by the borders near the shore of the Red Sea" (1 Nephi 2:5). This was a journey that would have taken around two weeks. Still not safe and feeling vulnerable to Jewish travelers potentially taking news of his location back to Jerusalem, Lehi felt the need to avoid a stay in either town. Perhaps hearing about the *Wadi Tayyib al-Ism* from locals, they traveled an additional "three days in the wilderness, [where] he pitched his tent in a valley by the side of a river of water" (vv. 5–6). Lehi renamed the *Wadi Tayyib al-Ism* as the "Valley of Lemuel" to create an object lesson of stability.⁷⁴ This leg of the journey, traveling from Jerusalem to the Valley of Lemuel, took another half a month.

Speculation 2: Growing Crops in the Valley of Lemuel

The question is what did they do in the Valley and, more importantly, how long were they there? We now encounter the second speculation. The discussion may again appear to veer off-topic, but it is necessary to carefully examine the validity of what this speculation asserts. This speculation is the most popular one for filling in the missing years. The assertion is that Lehi and his family spent several growing seasons, hence several years, living in the Valley of Lemuel. Aston guesses that most of the "eight years in the wilderness" may have been spent here, "apparently to augment those [seeds] brought from Jerusalem ... and long enough to include at least one growing season."⁷⁵ (Aston makes a similar claim about growing crops in Shazer and Nahom, discussed later.)

Let's take a closer look at this idea of growing crops in the Valley of Lemuel. I again ask the reader's indulgence in so doing, and I offer the assurance that this detail is necessary to replace a speculation designed to try to "fill the time." I return to a more realistic estimate of the time spent in the Valley of Lemuel following this discussion.

There are several considerations that make speculation 2 problematic, as discussed in the following sections.

The Seeds Came from the Land of Jerusalem

First and most decisive, Nephi specifically tells us that the seeds were not grown in the Valley of Lemuel. Nephi writes that when they arrived in

73. Ibid., 104.

74. Brown, "The Hunt for the Valley."

75. Aston, *Lehi and Sariah in Arabia*, 45.

the New World, “we began to plant seeds; yea, we did put all our seeds into the earth, which we had brought from the land of Jerusalem” (1 Nephi 18:24). If we take Nephi at his word, and surely most readers will want to do that, the word “all” would preclude the possibility that any of the seeds came from a bounteous crop grown in the Valley of Lemuel (or Shazer, or Nahom), or anywhere else along the way. Keep in mind, as the discussion continues, that there was not merely a large number of seeds but also a widely varying assortment (“all manner of seeds of every kind” (1 Nephi 8:1). The account clearly states that that “all” came from “the land of Jerusalem.”⁷⁶ Any idea of the seeds being “augmented” here or anywhere else does not come from the text.

Nobody Anticipated Growing Crops

Neither Lehi nor Nephi appear to have known, in the very beginning, the exact reason why the Lord commanded Lehi to depart from Jerusalem, other than to preserve his life. Nephi didn’t know why until his second theophany when the Lord revealed that “ye shall ... be led to a land of promise” (1 Nephi 2:20). Nephi returned “to the tent of my father” (1 Nephi 3:1) to tell him the news. If Lehi had already known, he had apparently not shared it. It was not until Sariah’s panic that their sons had “perish[ed] in the wilderness” (1 Nephi 5:2) that he comforted her by telling her, “I have obtained a land of promise” (v. 5). Laman and Lemuel apparently knew by the time they recruited Ishmael’s family that they “shall obtain the land of promise” (1 Nephi 7:13), but probably not much earlier. If Laman and Lemuel, probably Zoram, and Ishmael’s family were initially ignorant of the full scope of their mission, it’s hard to imagine how Lehi could have recruited their labor to grow a widely varied and large crops of fruits, grains, and vegetables, not to eat, but to produce seeds for long-term storage. Kent Brown reminds us that “Lehi carried the main batch of seeds specifically for planting in the promised land. He evidently planted none along the way.”⁷⁷

There was no Fertile Garden Area in the Valley

Even if Lehi had been able to recruit labor and had planted some of the sacred seeds meant for the New World, there is yet another problem. There was no fertile garden area in the Wadi Tayyib al-Ism (the Valley of Lemuel) in which to grow crops. The gorge was too narrow and shadowed

76. Claiming that Nephi meant for the “land of Jerusalem” to include the Valley of Lemuel is an unlikely stretch, especially since Nephi was writing for his family or for us and had already explained the geography quite precisely.

77. Brown, *Refining the Spotlight*, 48.

to grow anything at the Red Sea end. It widens out to the southeast, but that area was still an arid corner of desert, not fertile farmland.⁷⁸ The average rainfall in northwest Arabia totals 100 millimeters [4 inches] or less per year, which is far from the amount needed for cultivation"⁷⁹ And even that small amount cannot be counted on to be regular. "[Sudden] rain storms ... came with such force that [they] created spurting jets of water [flash floods] ... leaving only temporary pools of standing water."⁸⁰

Lehi was not a Large-Scale Farmer

Lehi and Nephi, or both, have been described as "a model sheikh of the desert,"⁸¹ "a smelter and trader in precious metals,"⁸² a caravanner,⁸³ metal worker,⁸⁴ whitesmiths, workers of precious metals⁸⁵ and "highly trained ... scribes" and scholars.⁸⁶ Nephi was also a "master sword smith,"⁸⁷ a master shipbuilder and ship navigator, a skilled woodworker who not only constructed a replacement wooden bow, which Nibley describes as "something of a miracle,"⁸⁸ but "did teach my people to build buildings, and to work in all manner of wood." He was also a skilled stonemason who "did build a temple ... and the workmanship thereof was exceedingly fine" (2 Nephi 5:15, 16). Finally, he was an eloquent spiritual and political leader and king. All of that is a staggering resumé for anyone; are we now to accept that Lehi and Nephi were also skilled and successful, large-scale farmers?⁸⁹ There is simply little to no credible evidence that they

78. Aston, "Into Arabia," 99–126.

79. Brown, "Hunt for the Valley," 67.

80. Ibid.

81. Nibley, *Lehi in the Desert*, 43.

82. Aston, "Into Arabia," 101. See also Aston, *Lehi and Sariah in Arabia*, 12.

83. Nibley, *Lehi in the Desert*, 36.

84. John Tvedtnes, *The Most Correct Book: Insights from a Book of Mormon Scholar* (Springville, UT: Horizon, 2004), 9395. See also Warren P. Aston, "Across Arabia with Lehi and Sariah: 'Truth Shall Spring Out of the Earth,'" *Journal of Book of Mormon Studies* 15, no. 2 (2006): 20.

85. Jeffrey R. Chadwick, "Lehi's House at Jerusalem and the Land of His Inheritance," in *Glimpses of Lehi's Jerusalem*, ed. John W. Welch, David Rolph Seely and Jo Ann H. Seely (Provo, UT: FARMS, 2004), 81–130. Also see Aston, "Into Arabia," 101; and Aston, *Lehi and Sariah in Arabia*, 12.

86. Noel B. Reynolds, "Lehi and Nephi as Trained Manassite Scribes," *Interpreter: A Journal of Latter-day Saint Faith and Scholarship* 50 (2022): 214, <https://journal.interpreterfoundation.org/lehi-and-nephi-as-trained-manassite-scribes/>.

87. Potter, "Khor Rori," 284.

88. Nibley, *Lehi in the Desert*, 61.

89. Note, however, that they did "till the earth, and ... plant seeds once in the New World" (1 Nephi 18:24).

had the knowledge or ability to conduct extensive farming in the Valley of Lemuel. Making that even less credible is that they ostensibly grew this large-scale and multi-varied crop in a challenging, arid ground and with excessive temperatures that would preclude most crops setting fruit, even if they were able to sprout. Even in the unlikely event that Lehi can be imagined to be an experienced farmer, nobody, not even an seasoned grower, can make a wide variety of crops grow in a desert. In addition to those problems, S. Kent Brown asks another excellent question: “There is also the matter of arable land where Lehi might plant seeds. Would not local people claim such ground?”⁹⁰

Lehi and Sarah Lacked a Labor Force

The main strength and vigor of Lehi’s labor force was not available. Even if they had unnamed servants with them,⁹¹ and there is no solid evidence of that; the labor force was still tiny. Laman, Lemuel, Nephi, Sam were away for arguably several months, which spanned most of a full growing season. Not only that, they had not yet recruited Ishmael and his family. Where was the labor force? Could an older Lehi and Sariah, even with the possible help of daughters, have tilled, planted, watered, weeded, harvested, threshed, and bagged the seeds by themselves?

The Timing of the Trips and the Growing Conflict

Consider also the timeframe. The text says that “we had gathered together all manner of seeds of every kind” (8:1), this immediately after it recounts the return of the sons. True, one could read “gathered” as “harvested,” but that also seems unlikely, given the immediacy of the sons’ return with Ishmael’s family. They ostensibly returned and immediately harvested. This would be a remarkable coincidence, and it totally overlooks the fact that the crops were highly varied and wouldn’t have all been harvested at the same time anyway. That immediacy is obscured, because the two events, the return and the “gathering,” are reported in separate chapters in the current edition of the Book of Mormon (1 Nephi 7:22 and 8:1). They sound like two entirely different activities; but they weren’t. In the original Printer’s Manuscript of the Book of Mormon, the text of the sons’ return and the text of the gathering of the seeds are reported in the same chapter and even on the same line. Moreover, the text doesn’t actually say they “gathered” anything. The text uses the past perfect tense “we

90. Brown, “Refining the Spotlight,” 48.

91. Newell Wright, email correspondence to Godfrey Ellis, December 28, 2022.

had gathered." This suggests that they returned with the seeds already "gathered," that is, "purchased" in Jerusalem (more on this shortly).

An Absence of Available Wild Fruits and Grains

Some commentators have speculated that "gathered" literally means "gathered," and that the family merely picked existing seeds from spontaneously growing plants while they were living in the Valley of Lemuel. There are serious problems with this idea as well.

- Wild figs and dates would not fulfil the requirement of "all manner of seeds of *every kind*, both of grain of *every kind*, and also of the seeds of fruit of *every kind*" (1 Nephi 8:1).
- There was no oasis here to produce spontaneous wild figs or dates growing on their own. Perhaps later in Shazer or Nahom, but not in the *Wadi Tayyib al-Ism*.
- If the Valley of Lemuel had wheat, barley, rye, dates, figs, and olives growing on their own, which seems unlikely given that this area was never described as an oasis. Such a wild crop would almost certainly have been owned by someone else and not be available to be "gathered" freely and in large quantities by total strangers.
- There is some question whether wild dates and figs, if those were the only seeds they had, would even grow "exceedingly" and "in abundance" (1 Nephi 18:24) in MesoAmerica, much less around the Great Lakes area or other new-land areas.
- As already noted, even if wild figs were the seeds to which Nephi refers and were simply "gathered," Nephi would most likely have told us that the seeds came from the Valley of Lemuel in Arabia, not "which we had brought from the land of Jerusalem" (v. 24).

Did They Have the Resources to Purchase Seeds?

It seems more likely that the sons, along with Ishmael and his family, "gathered" the seeds in Jerusalem or as they traveled south through the "land of Jerusalem," as the text reports (v. 24). However, a fair question is to ask *how* they "had gathered" the seeds. As mentioned above, the best possibility is that they *purchased* them, but with what money? After all, the text says that Lehi "left his gold, and his silver, and his precious things" behind when he left Jerusalem (1 Nephi 2:4). Worse, the treasure left behind was later stolen by Laban. However, leaving behind the family's "precious things" and treasure does not necessarily mean

they left behind all of the family's financial resources. The "precious things" may have referred to gold bracelets, jewels, silver platters, framed mirrors, and the like. Lehi left all that behind, but that need not tell us that he left all his money behind. It seems irresponsible to take his family out into the desert with no money at all. Thus, it is entirely credible that they lost their "treasure," but still had financial means. Fronk adds an intriguing possibility:

Nomadic women, such as Bedouin women, possessed one simple locked box to hold their valuables. ... Bedouin women also wore their valuables, in the form of coins and jewelry, around their necks and wrists. One wonders whether Sariah did the same. The wealth around her neck or niceties in her box may have gradually disappeared as necessity to survive in the desert required trading or selling them. After all, Nephi said that his father left his possessions behind; he made no such claim for his mother's wearable wealth.⁹²

Whether Fronk's musing is correct or not, it is unrealistic to conclude that a group of at least 20 people traveled through 2,200 miles of somewhat populated areas with no financial resources whatsoever.⁹³ Even in the unlikely event that Lehi and Sariah had no funds, what of Ishmael's resources? We are not told that Ishmael also left his wealth behind. He may well have had considerable resources.

This may be how a caravan of people could have spent months (or, ostensibly, years) successfully passing from water hole to water hole through somewhat populated areas. The "empty quarter" may have truly been empty, but the oases along the Frankincense Trail, and especially at Sana'a (Nahom), were not. Several scholars now assert a social relationship between the Lehites and the local water owners. Travelers were typically "going from public waterhole to public waterhole ... along only established routes ... [and] where water is precious, waterwells are both known and populated."⁹⁴ The Lehites would have needed money to purchase water rights at every oasis they visited, particularly along the Frankincense Trail, and would have interacted with those water owners.

92. Fronk, "Desert Epiphany," 8.

93. My wife and I once visited London, England, where we found ourselves with no ready British currency on hand. That was for merely half a day until we could get to a bank, and that was a surprisingly debilitating and dispiriting experience that we would not wish to repeat. One to eight years in that condition is unthinkable.

94. Lynn M. Hilton and Hope A. Hilton, *Discovering Lehi: New Evidence of Lehi and Nephi in Arabia* (Springville, UT; Cedar Fort, 1996), 7 and 10.

"The few existing wells were well known by Lehi's time, and all were owned by tribes who guarded them closely. Travel to and from these wells could not be undertaken without the permission of the Arab tribes who owned the land."⁹⁵

In addition to water needs, the Hiltons also point out that the Lehtes would also have had to purchase birds and small animals. "Nephi tells us on seven occasions that the group offered 'burnt offerings' (animal sacrifices). ... Lehi could have purchased or traded for these animals from local Bedouin herders."⁹⁶ Kent Brown agrees and offers his opinion that they "purchased [sacrificial animals] locally," adding that "if Lehi offered birds, he likely bought them from someone in the area who raised domesticated fowl."⁹⁷ Aston concurs that they were not alone, writing that "Lehi's family had contact with other peoples during the journey" and that "contacts with other people on the journey to Nahom could have been quite frequent."⁹⁸ He has repeatedly pointed out that Nahom (NHM) was an "already-existing, locally known name,"⁹⁹ which strongly implies interaction with local NHM tribal members. In addition, NHM was known as a regional burial site, and Ishmael could not be buried without the payment of a fee, perhaps a significant fee.

Given this evidence of a need for and availability of financial resources, we may conclude that the Lehtes also had the means to purchase the seeds in or around Jerusalem. That scenario seems more likely than to speculate that they grew a large and highly varied crop of seeds, grain, and fruit "of every kind" in a desert.

In sum, the speculation that they spent multiple years in the Valley of Lemuel growing seeds is unlikely. This idea is enticing as a way to help fill up some of the missing years required by the traditional reading. However, even if true and despite the objections listed above, two or three years in the Valley of Lemuel would still be insufficient to fill up all eight of the needed years. So what would be a more likely estimate of their time in the Valley?

95. Richard Wellington and George Potter, "Lehi's Trail," *Journal of Book of Mormon Studies* 15, no. 2 (2006): 27.

96. Hilton and Hilton, *Discovering Lehi*, 10.

97. Brown, *From Jerusalem to Zarahemla*, 3.

98. Aston and Aston, "In the Footsteps of Lehi," 10.

99. Aston, "Across Arabia," 13–14.

A More Reasonable Estimate of Time Spent in the Valley

Jeffrey Chadwick, a noted archeologist, estimates that they sojourned in the Valley of Lemuel for just “four months.”¹⁰⁰ Kent Brown agrees but then widens the estimate: “There are fewer problems if we assume that the family spent no more than a few months at the first camp, perhaps up to a year. All of the activities rehearsed by Nephi ... could have taken place within a few months. ... To this point, it appears to me that the family remained at the first camp for only a few months, a year at most.”¹⁰¹

On the other hand, even if they didn’t grow their own crops in the Valley of Lemuel, it is still clear that a lot happened there. There were two trips back to Jerusalem: first, to obtain the Brass Plates (reasonably, two months); and second, to recruit Ishmael’s family to join the group (another two months). Plus, at least five weddings took place there (16:7). In addition, the entire Brass Plates were closely read and studied, and profound revelations received. “And all these things did my father see, and hear, and speak, as he dwelt in a tent, in the valley of Lemuel, and also a great many more things, which cannot be written upon these plates” (1 Nephi 9:1). Clearly, they were in the Valley of Lemuel for some time — just not multiple years, as would be required to support the traditional reading.

Given all of the events that took place in the Valley of Lemuel, Chadwick’s “four months” seems insufficient and Aston’s speculation of multiple years seems unsupported by the text. Brown’s other extreme is one full year. I would tend to strike a compromise of eight months but, in the interest of being as accommodating to the traditional estimate of 1 Nephi 17:4–5 as possible, let’s accept the high estimate of *one year*.

Travel to the Oasis of Shazer

After leaving the Valley of Lemuel, they “traveled for the space of *four days* ... and we did pitch our tents again; and we did call the name of the place Shazer” (1 Nephi 16:13). Notice that Nephi’s takes the time and attention to specifically comment that, upon arrival, “we did pitch our tents” (v. 13). That strongly suggests that the setting up of the many tents was a significant and noteworthy activity. Nephi takes the trouble to specifically point out “they pitched their tents” at their arrival at the Camp of the Broken Bow (v. 17), at their arrival at Nahom (v. 33), and at their arrival in Bountiful (1 Nephi 17:6). It is clearly significant, and

100. Chadwick, “An Archeologist’s View,” 73.

101. Brown, “Refining the Spotlight,” 48.

it tells us that setting up the tents was not something that happened on a nightly basis along the way.

He also reports that "we did call the name of the place, Shazer" (v. 13). It is not clear why they named the location, since it would have already had a name. This may indicate that they hadn't yet encountered the residents of the area and learned the name. Alternatively, they may have unofficially given the oasis a new name just for themselves. Nibley comments that "Lehi ... is following a good old Oriental custom" of naming any water one finds.¹⁰² Several commentators, including Nibley, have suggested that Lehi named the site because of an association between that word and the concept of trees.¹⁰³ There may have been an unusual number of trees in that oasis or perhaps the Lehites hadn't seen that many trees for some time. In any case, Shazer is believed to have been the 15-mile-long oasis along the Wadi Agharr. This was also known by the name of Wadi esh Sharma, because it was just east of the town of Sharma.¹⁰⁴ Perhaps the locals called the oasis by one of those names. Warren Aston, based on fieldwork, calls this oasis "the most plausible location for Shazer by far"¹⁰⁵ and asserts that it "can now be identified with a high degree of certainty."¹⁰⁶

An Estimate of Time Spent at the Oasis of Shazer

Nephi is careful to note that they "pitched their tents" (v. 13) after arriving in Shazer, indicating that they were going to stay for a while. Even so, the stay does not sound like an extended one. It was certainly not multi-year. The only reason that is given for the stop (other than obviously to have

102. Nibley, *Lehi in the Desert*, 75

103. Ibid., 78. Also see Jeff Lindsay for a discussion of various possible meanings of this name, most relating it to the prominent presence of trees in that oasis (Jeff Lindsay, "Shazer on Lehi's Trail: Perhaps More Interesting Than You Thought," *Nauvoo Times: True to the Faith*, November 13, 2015, http://www.nauvootimes.com/cgi-bin/nauvoo_column.pl?number=102957&author=jeff-lindsay#Y9bQenBMJD8.)

104. Jeffrey R. Chadwick notes that the exact location of Shazer is not known but cites Wellington and Potter as claiming that it may have been the Wadi Agharr and called this "remarkably plausible." See Chadwick, "Archeologist's View," 73; Wellington and Potter, "Lehi's Trail"; Lindsay, "Shazer on Lehi's Trail"; and Warren P. Aston, "Nephi's 'Shazer': The Fourth Arabian Pillar of the Book of Mormon," *Interpreter: A Journal of Latter-day Saint Faith and Scholarship* 39 (2020), 53–72, <https://journal.interpreterfoundation.org/nephis-shazer-the-fourth-arabian-pillar-of-the-book-of-mormon/>.

105. Aston, "Nephi's Shazer," 69.

106. Ibid., 70.

a break near some water and rest for a bit), was to replenish their water and food supply. When traveling in the more fertile areas, they would slay “food by the way, with our bows and our arrows and our stones and our slings” (16:15), likely for the evening meal. At this longer stop by a water supply, the men could take the time to amass a stockpile of meat, presumably so the women could then butcher it into strips to dry as jerky for later travel. Lindsay notes that the Agharr area “is said to be the best hunting in all of Arabia.”¹⁰⁷ Wellington and Potter agree that “the best hunting in the entire area was in the mountains of Agharr.”¹⁰⁸ How could Joseph Smith have known that?

Confirming that they didn’t stay any longer than a few weeks is that very little text is devoted to that rest stop. The entire stay is summarized in just one sentence. That could not have been a multi-year stay or even a season to grow crops. It seems reasonable that Nephi would have mentioned that. In addition, the oasis and its water-rights would have been owned by someone, and the Lehites’ financial resources were undoubtedly limited for extended water access. There was probably not enough for a long-term stay unless there was a compelling reason to stay that long and there is no indication of that in the text. However, wanting to give the traditional reading of 1 Nephi 17:4–5 as much benefit of the doubt as possible and to be on the generous end, let’s allocate one month of hard hunting and hard work for their stay in Shazer.

Travel to the “Camp of the Broken Bow”

The next viable location for a longish stay is where Nephi broke his bow. The location of that next stopping point, which some have called the “Camp of the Broken Bow,” is not definite, but Wellington and Potter point out that “traditional wood that Arabs used to make their bows ... grows in a very limited range high in the mountains just west of the trail near the halt of Bishah.”¹⁰⁹ That lies about 830 miles to the south (around 425 miles north of Sana’a).

In describing how long it took to get there, Nephi writes only, “after we had traveled for the space of many days, we did pitch our tents” (1 Nephi 16:17). There is little known about Nephi’s “space of many days” or “space of a time.” His wording is curious, at least to modern readers. I might mention that ancient Hebrew thought is believed by many scholars to

107. Lindsay, “Joseph and Dream Map: Part 1,” 214, and Lindsay, “Shazer on Lehi’s Trail.”

108. Wellington and Potter, “Lehi’s Trail,” 30.

109. Ibid, 32.

have been abstract and metaphorical, while modern thought, based on Greek thinking, tends to be highly detailed and concrete. For example, the "space of a home" might be defined by moderns as the square footage of the building. The ancient Hebrews might define the "space of a home" by the emotions and activities that make a house into a home. For them, a home is family; for us, it may be furniture, wall decorations, or square footage. Similarly, time for most moderns is a series of chronological and dated snapshots. For the Hebrews, time is a rhythm of recurring event patterns. Perhaps that is what Alma meant when he said, "all is as one day with God, and time only is measured unto men" (Alma 40:8). What may have been of most importance for Nephi in his "space of many days" or the "space of a time"¹¹⁰ may have been the rhythm of the desert and the rhythm of travel, not the exact number of days in transit.

When the travel was just a few days (three or four), Nephi mentions that specifically (1 Nephi 2:6; 2:13; 18:13, 15). When it was a full year of more, Nephi tells us that, too. However, his "space of many days" or "space of a time" appears to have been a range of months and not an exact number. This perhaps reflects the rhythm of travel rather than the need for accuracy. Fortunately, we can tease out a few hints. Since the distance from Shazer to the Camp of the Broken Bow was approximately 830 miles, the "space of many days" at 13 miles per day meant that they traveled for 60 days or a little over *two months*. This timeframe is close to the next leg of their journey, from the Camp of the Broken Bow to Nahom. This is discussed further below, but it was 425 miles, which works out to be 33 days, or just over one *month*. This estimate of a "space of a time" being around two months is further supported by scripture. When king Mosiah sent out a search party to try to find Zeniff, the wording is scripturally defined: they "wandered *many days* in the wilderness, even *40 days* did they wander" (Mosiah 7:4). Here, the meaning of "many days" is given as "40 days" (or almost two months).¹¹¹ We encounter this Hebraic wording several times as we continue further

110. The "space of many days" or the "space of a time" may not have been synonymous; or the "space of many days" may have referred to travel, and the "space of a time" may have referred to being stationary. There doesn't appear to be a way to resolve that difference.

111. Although the number 40 is often symbolic in the Bible, in the Book of Mormon such symbolism is less likely. Nephi specifically avoided using such symbolism in the Book of Mormon (2 Nephi 25:2–7; see also Jacob 4:14). Even if it were symbolic, metaphorical numbers are almost always at least close to a literal amount as well.

into Nephi's account. Each time, as with this travel time, it appears to be "a couple of months."

So, the travel time from Shazer (the Wadi Agharr) to the Camp of the Broken Bow would have taken around *one month* (the space of a time).

An Estimate of Time Spent in the Camp of the Broken Bow

After having traveled for the "space of many days" from Shazer to the Camp of the Broken Bow, Nephi reports that they stayed in the area for "the space of a time" (1 Nephi 16:17). When they finally stopped to set up their large tents, one can almost hear between the lines that it was a grateful time of rest from the misery of travel. Another Arabian traveler, arriving to just such a welcome oasis, described how "palms grow rich and [there are] sudden round hot springs on the slope. The azure water runs in pools in their shade, delicious to bathe in if modesty allowed."¹¹² Little wonder that Nephi took the time and space to engrave the tidbits that they were able to finally rest after the fatigue of travel and obtain hot and fresh food. They must have been happy to "pitch our tents for the space of a time" (v. 17).

An estimate of how much time was "the space of a time" must still allow for several events, though none of them could have taken all that long, certainly not multiple years and not the time to grow crops. First, the family had to set up the tents; to rest after being "much fatigued." Then the sons set off for game, only to have Nephi's steel bow break and his brothers' bows lose their springs (vv. 18, 21), "almost certainly" due to a change in humidity.¹¹³ The loss of the bows at precisely the spot where there was bow-making wood¹¹⁴ is yet another tender mercy that Joseph Smith could not have known about in frontier American in 1820.

In any case, with no food, the families were soon in crisis and predictably began to "murmur exceedingly" (v. 20). Nephi chose to not join in but, rather, immediately began to build a hunting bow, which was another marvel. As mentioned earlier, Hugh Nibley gives it as his opinion that the finding of bow-wood was "something of a miracle." Then Nibley makes the startling claim that it was "almost as great a feat for Nephi to make a [lethal] bow as it was for him to build a ship."¹¹⁵ The replacement bow obviously could not just be a bent branch with a string

112. Freya Stark, *A Winter in Arabia: A Journey Through Yemen* (New York: Overlook Press, 1940), 295.

113. Aston, *Lehi and Sariah in Arabia*, 48.

114. Wellington and Potter, "Lehi's Trail," 32.

115. Nibley, *Lehi in the Desert*, 61.

of animal gut. That doesn't necessarily mean that it took a long time; Nephi didn't have a long time. The families were in danger of starving. It took, perhaps, as little as one week to find the right branch, cure the green wood, shape the bow, and make arrows to fit that new hunting bow.¹¹⁶

During that week, Nephi "did speak much unto my brethren" (v. 22), and by the time he was ready to hunt, "they had humbled themselves because of my words" (v. 24). This means the repentance process did not take additional time. Lehi, the priesthood authority who had shockingly joined in the murmuring, was sufficiently "chastened because of his murmuring against the Lord" (v. 25) to still be able to receive revelation through the Liahona as to where Nephi should go (v. 30). Again, this didn't need to take a long time; Jehovah is "quick to hear the cries of his people and to answer their prayers" (Alma 9:26). When Nephi returned with "beasts [plural] which I had slain," they did further "humble themselves before the Lord, and did give thanks unto him," probably in the form of another animal sacrifice (1 Nephi 16: 32).

As explained just above, in determining the time spent at the Camp of the Broken Bow, we can look again at the words "the space of a time" (v. 17). If the 830 miles from Shazer to the Camp of the Broken Bow took the "space of many days" (40 to 60 days or around two months), then the "the space of a time" at the Camp of the Broken Bow was likely comparable: a little over two months.

To be fair, when Aston, an expert on the trip through Arabia, speculates to fill in some of the "missing years," he is valiantly trying to resolve the problem of the traditional view. He writes: "As their time in the wilderness occupied eight years, [which was] a distance usually covered by trade caravans in around a hundred travel days, clearly some extended stops must have been made where crops could be grown."¹¹⁷ Therefore, it "seems likely to have been a place where crops could be grown ... and it would be some time before crops could be harvested."¹¹⁸ Unfortunately, for his speculation to fill the time, growing more crops at the Camp of the Broken Bow (or Shazer, or Nahom, or Bountiful) is nowhere indicated by Nephi. Further, it begs the question of where they acquired seeds to grow crops (since all experts, including Aston, agree that they didn't use the seeds they were bringing from Jerusalem).

116. The detail of Nephi having to make new arrows in order to match a lighter, wooden bow was made by Aston, *Lehi and Sariah in Arabia*, 49.

117. *Ibid.*, 51.

118. *Ibid.*, 48.

Finally, it requires that nothing worthy of adding to the Small Plates happened in an entire growing season, and that seems unlikely. This idea of growing crops at the Camp of the Broken Bow is even less likely than the speculation of growing crops in the Valley of Lemuel. They were at someone else's oasis, and in Arabia a water oasis would be "owned by tribes who guarded them closely."¹¹⁹ The Lehiters couldn't just move in and start growing crops. Further, and as also mentioned earlier, there is nothing in the text to support the conjecture that any seeds were grown in any location other than the "land of Jerusalem." Plus, there is no hint that the Lehiters stayed in the Camp of the Broken Bow anywhere near that long. That conjecture is an understandable attempt to support the traditional reading of 1 Nephi 17:45 but is not supported by the text. I estimate that they were at the Camp of the Broken Bow for, at most, two months.

Travel to the Land of Nahom (NHM)

Following those two months, they did "again take our journey, traveling ... for the *space of many days*" (1 Nephi 16: 33), or perhaps a couple more months of travel. This seems reasonable based on the distances involved. The distance from the Camp of the Broken Bow to the Nahom area was approximately another 425 miles. That distance was somewhat less than the two-month travel from Shazer to the Camp of the Broken Bow, which was 830 miles. Assuming the same average speed of 13 miles per day, the "space of many days" from the Camp of the Broken Bow to Nahom (425 miles) would be 33 days, or just over one month.

Time Spent in the Land of Nahom

Nephi records that "We did pitch our tents again, that we might tarry for the space of a time" (1 Nephi 16:33). Now, though, there was a new upset. "And it came to pass that Ishmael died, and *was buried* in the place which was called Nahom" (v. 34). This would have thrown the entire camp into turmoil. Ishmael was Lehi's best friend and possibly a cousin. And it hit everyone hard, especially Ishmael's daughters, and likely his sons. Grief at his death resulted in the daughters rebelling "against my father, and also against me" (vv. 35–36). Although Nephi gives the reason for the rebellion as grief and mourning, more was going on. For one thing, their grief was exacerbating by the fact that "they have suffered much affliction, hunger, thirst, and fatigue" (v. 35). For another, not only was

119. Wellington and Potter, "Lehi's Trail," 27.

their father dead, but they knew that "the one thing expressed most clearly by Israelite burial practices is the ... desire ... [for] burial in one's native land at least, and if possible, with one's ancestors. 'Bury me with my fathers,' Jacob's request (Gen 49:29), was the wish of every ancient Israelite."¹²⁰ Ishmael was going to be denied this custom. Even worse, his body was soon to be left behind as the Lehtes moved on. Perhaps that explains why the daughters of Ishmael "were desirous to return again to Jerusalem" (1 Nephi 16:36). They may have had the vain hope of somehow getting his body, and likely themselves, back to his ancestral home.

There may have been even more than that going on. Elder Jeffrey R. Holland compares this situation with the sin of Lot's wife. It was not just that Lot's wife looked back, but that

in her heart she wanted to *go back*. ... She was already missing what Sodom and Gomorrah had offered her. As Elder Maxwell once said, such people know they should have their primary residence in Zion, but they still hope to keep a summer cottage in Babylon. ... We certainly know that Laman and Lemuel were resentful when Lehi and his family were commanded to leave Jerusalem. So it isn't just that she looked back; she looked back longingly.¹²¹

It was perhaps that the "looking back longingly" was an understandable part of a grief process that allowed the daughters to avoid the same punishment that was given to Lot's wife. The consequence was not salt, but lack of food. "We must perish in the wilderness with hunger" (1 Nephi 16:35).

Whether Laman was a part of the daughters' initial murmuring, or he simply capitalized on it, he was soon on board with them. He had put his hand to the plow; but his own desire to "look back" and return to corrupt Jerusalem marked him as unfit for the kingdom of God (Luke 9:62). Sadly, some of today's Church members are also "looking back" and leaving the Church over exaggerated social issues and the misreadings of historical events. Hopefully, like the Prodigal Son (Luke 15:17–19), many

120. Charles M. Chafer and Cynthia S. Price, s.v. "Burial — in the Bible," Encyclopedia.com, updated, May 21, 2018, <https://www.encyclopedia.com/social-sciences-and-law/anthropology-and-archaeology/customs-and-artifacts/burial>.

121. Jeffrey R. Holland, "Remember Lot's Wife," *BYU Speeches*, January 13, 2009, <https://speeches.byu.edu/talks/jeffrey-r-holland/remember-lots-wife/>.

will come to realize how much better it really is to be close to the Father and return to the Church.¹²²

How long the daughters' resentment festered before it burst out into the open is not clear. What is clear is that Laman took the rebellion a major step forward when he approached Lemuel and the sons of Ishmael and "did ... stir up their hearts to anger" (1 Nephi 16:38). He even suggested a horrendous and impulsive idea: "Behold, let us slay our father, and also our brother Nephi" (v. 37). Whether that idea was related to Deuteronomist claims or not, patricide and fratricide were unforgivable, and Laman was on the brink. This time, Lehi and Nephi could not defuse the situation alone; it wasn't until "the voice of the Lord came and did speak many words unto them" (v. 39) that "they did turn away their anger, and did repent of their sins" (v. 39). We must conclude that their repentance was sincere, since "the Lord did bless us again with food, that we did not perish" (v. 39).

The crisis of food, and its solution, are very important details. The timeframe of the crisis (the "space of a time") appears to be fairly short, if for no other reason than because it was tied to the lack of food. It could not have taken months of rebellion and months of repentance, or the family would have starved to death. It had to have been an intense and impulsive flare-up that quickly dissipated, probably less than a week. The problem was resolved by the Lord, following the repentance. This not to say that the Lehitites didn't stay in Nahom; we can be sure they did. But the question, again, is how long they were there. In another attempt to explain the missing years of the traditional interpretation, we encounter another speculative theory.

Speculation 3: The Lehitites Sold Themselves into Slavery

S. Kent Brown was well aware of the dilemma caused by the traditional reading of 1 Nephi 17:4–5. He notes that "the period [of eight years] is far too long even for a cautious crossing of the Arabian desert."¹²³ To reconcile that problem, he proposes

the possibility, even likelihood, that family members had to come under the domination of desert tribesmen either for protection or for food. ... Scattered clues hint that family members lived in a dependent or servile relationship to desert

122. I am indebted to Dean Bjornstad for the comparisons with Lot's wife and the Prodigal Son.

123. Brown, *From Jerusalem to Zarahemla*, 58.

peoples. ... In sum, it seems reasonable that the years spent by Lehi and his family in crossing the desert were characterized by the not uncommon practice "in times of scarcity" of "the bargaining away of freedom — or part of it — in return for food."¹²⁴

As evidence for this startling suggestion, Brown points to a comment by Alma: "Yea, and he has also brought our fathers out of the land of Jerusalem; and he has also, by his everlasting power, delivered them out of bondage and captivity, from time to time even down to the present day. ... ye also ought to retain in remembrance, as I have done, their captivity" (Alma 36:29).

However, Alma's comment, made hundreds of years later, may have been a reference to the much later bondage of Limhi's people and Alma's people to the Lamanites (Mosiah 27:16; Alma 16:3). It might also be a warning of a recurring pattern ("from time to time even down to the present day" (Alma 36:28) and refer to captivity in *spiritual* bondage. We must all "retain in remembrance" the danger of being "taken captive by the devil" (Alma 12:11), who "flattereth away ... until he grasps them [us] with his awful chains" (2 Nephi 28:22). It is unlikely that Alma is referring here to the Lehiites' time in Nahom, since literal slavery usually meant bondage for a long period of time, if not for a lifetime. Plus, Nephi and later prophets compared the trek through Arabia to the exodus of Moses. If slavery in Nahom, and subsequent deliverance, had occurred, that would seem like low-hanging fruit for such a comparison. If the entire party, including women and children, had been enslaved, why would there be silence from Nephi and only a few "scattered clues" over hundreds of years of prophetic writing? It is telling that Nephi₂, the son of Helaman, envied the times of Nephi₁ as golden years. He writes: "Oh, that I could have had my days in the days when my father Nephi first came out of the land of Jerusalem. ... Yea, if my days could have been in those days, then would my soul have had joy in the righteousness of my brethren. But behold, I am consigned that these are my days" (Helaman 7:7–9).

A second evidence that Brown offers concerns the word *sojourn*, used in 1 Nephi 17:3. Brown writes, "In the Bible, the term *to sojourn* regularly refers to servile relationships."¹²⁵ However, the verb *to sojourn* (לָגַר, *lagur*; Strong's H1481) actually means "to abide, dwell in, dwell with, remain,

124. Ibid, 55–56.

125. Brown, "Refining the Spotlight," 50.

inhabit, be a stranger” and “to turn aside from the road (for a lodging or any other purpose).”¹²⁶ The Lehiters were “sojourners” at all their stops, including in Bountiful. According to Loren Spendlove, *lagur* “is rarely associated with any type of forced servitude.”¹²⁷ In fact, the Hebrew Bible explicitly *excludes* the idea of servitude for sojourners.¹²⁸ The *Torah* instead mandates hospitality to sojourning strangers (for example, Exodus 22:21, 23:9, Leviticus 19:33, Deuteronomy 10:19). Besides, selling oneself into slavery is not a brief process, as Brown acknowledges: “In the worst of cases, one becomes the slave or property of another so that one’s freedom has to be wrested by purchase or by escape.”¹²⁹ If either slavery or deliverance were the case, how is it possible that Nephi missed this golden opportunity to emphasize the testimony-building deliverance by the power of the Lord? Yet there is not a word about it.

Another problem regards the seeds and the camels. If the Lehiters had been taken into bondage, why would those who seized them not also seize their property? Their abundant grain and their camels would be valuable property, right there for the taking, an obvious extension of capturing people. Yet, Nephi’s account in 1 Nephi 18:6 explicitly states that they still had their heavy tents, and “*all* our loading and our seeds” when they boarded the ship for the New World. This is confirmed in the promised land when they “did pitch our tents” and “did put *all* our seeds into the earth” (1 Nephi 18:23). Why did their purported captors fail to seize their valuable property? Further, Nephi is clear that the problem of starvation was resolved by the Lord, not by them. The solution was repentance, not slavery (1 Nephi 16:39). Chadwick writes, “Rather than bondage, the bitterness and suffering that caused Lehi so much sorrow seem in every case directly attributable to the wicked and violent actions of his older sons Laman and Lemuel.”¹³⁰

Even putting aside speculation 3, we are not finished with attempts to fill in the missing years. Warren Aston again raises the possibility that the Lehiters took the time to grow and harvest food in Nahom: “Nephi’s account ... suggests that Lehi’s group intended remaining in

126. *Blue Letter Bible*, <https://www.blueletterbible.org/lexicon/h1481/kjv/wlc/0-1/>.

127. Loren Spendlove, email correspondence to Godfrey Ellis, 23 October 2022.

128. The Encyclopedia of the Bible defines sojourner as, simply, a “stranger,” BibleGateway, *Encyclopedia of the Bible*, s.v. “sojourner,” <https://web.archive.org/web/20201125150729/https://www.biblegateway.com/resources/encyclopedia-of-the-bible/Sojourner>.

129. Brown, “Refining the Spotlight,” 50.

130. Chadwick, “An Archeologist’s View,” 75.

this region long enough to grow and harvest crops.”¹³¹ There is no textual support for that conjecture. I am sympathetic with the need to account for the missing years required by the traditional reading, but this last speculation seems unlikely. For one thing, where did they get the seeds to plant crops at every major stopping point? They certainly didn't use the sacred seeds that were intended for the New World. They would rather starve than use those seeds, as Aston points out: “It is a testament to the faith of Lehi and Sariah that the seeds they were carrying were not used to alleviate their needs.”¹³²

A More Likely Estimate of Time in Nahom

Still, several events occurred in Nahom, and we must consider them. Nephi writes that they were there for the “space of a time” (1 Nephi 16:33), which seems more than a few weeks. The events had to have taken up to a month or two, but no more. I have earlier demonstrated by logic, by scripture, and by mileage calculation that the “space of a time” (1 Nephi 16:33) was only a few months. If they had remained in Nahom for six, seven or eight years, Nephi would have told us that. He didn't. Nephi writes nothing to support the idea that the space of a time was several years. What the text says is that there was a rebellion, and they subsequently suffered loss of food. They did not solve this problem by themselves through slavery or by growing crops; the Lord solved it after their repentance (v. 39). In fact, *in the very next verse*, immediately following their repentance, Nephi announces that “we did again take our journey in the wilderness” (1 Nephi 17:1). Where do years of servitude or years of growing crops fit into that scenario?

Let's put aside the demands to fill in missing time that are created by the traditional reading of “eight years in the wilderness” and rely only on logic and the text. The “space of a time” (1 Nephi 16:33) again suggests several months and, indeed, the events in Nahom sound as if they would have taken that much time. There was the death and burial of Ishmael, the need to replenish provisions for the final leg of the trip, the festering of the rebellion against Lehi and Nephi, an acute flare-up, including the threat of murder, and what must have been speedy repentance that resulted in the restoring of food. Several months sounds accurate; several years does not. We can generously allow *two and a half months* for their “space of a time” in Nahom.

131. Aston, *Lehi and Sariah in Arabia*, 71.

132. *Ibid.*, 49.

Travel to the Entrance to Bountiful (Wadi Sayq)

The final leg of the journey was unquestionably the most difficult and brutal. Nephi makes that point crystal clear. Another traveler in Arabia in 1876 also describes the cruelty of an Arabian desert crossing:

The summer's night at end, the sun stands up as a crown of hostile flames. ... The desert day dawns not little by little, but it is noontide in an hour. The sun, entering as a tyrant upon the waste landscape, darts upon us a torment of fiery beams, not to be remitted till the far-off evening. ... Grave is that giddy heat upon the crown of the head ... in the glassiness of this sun-stricken nature: the hot sand-blink is in the eyes.¹³³

This horrendous part of the trek extended approximately 700 more miserable miles from Nahom past Ma'rib, which is widely accepted as the ancient home of the Queen of Sheba.¹³⁴ Their Liahona-inspired path miraculously skirted the deadliest section of the dreaded Empty Quarter to the north and the Ramlat Saba'tayn desert to the south. This perfect direction, which threads a needle, again shows evidence of divine guidance via the Liahona. In Jeff Lindsay's, words, "Incredibly, following Nephi's directions ... this path will allow you to have a shot at survival."¹³⁵ If they traveled at the "usual" speed of 13 miles per day, that would mean 54 days — or more likely 54 nights. In other words, it may have taken just under *two months* to travel from Nahom to the entrance to Bountiful.

Total Time for the Entire Journey (Jerusalem to Bountiful)

With the estimates given above, it is now possible to calculate the total time of the entire journey to the entrance to Bountiful without the constraints of the traditional interpretation. Table 2 reviews what has been discussed to this point, while balancing realistic estimates and still being as generous as possible.

133. Doughty, *Travels in Arabia Desert*, 102–103.

134. Warren Aston, "Finding the First Verifiable Book of Mormon Site," (Part 1, 2014), <https://ldsmag.com/article-1-14168/>. See, also, Habeeb Salloum, "Ma'rib — A Journey to the Queen of Sheba's City," *Arab America*, October 11, 2022, www.arabamerica.com/marib-a-journey-to-the-queen-of-shebas-city.

135. Lindsay, "Joseph and Dream Map: Part 1," 186.

Table 2. Major Activities/Journeys — Jerusalem to Bountiful.

Activity/Journey	Time Allowance
Time to Get out of Jerusalem	Perhaps half a month
Travel From Jerusalem to the Valley of Lemuel	Half a month
Time in the Valley of Lemuel	Twelve months
Time at the Oasis of Shazer	One month
Travel to the Camp of the Broken Bow at Bisha	Just over two months
Time in the Camp of the Broken Bow	Two months
Travel to the Land of Nahom (NHM)	One and a half months
Time in the Land of Nahom	Two and half months
Travel to the Entrance to Bountiful (Wadi Sayq)	Just under two months

The grand total of the entire journey, from Jerusalem to the entrance to Bountiful, would appear to be two years, not eight years, and that is being quite generous in estimating the time spent at the four stops.

But there is more. In the traditional reading, there has been no clearly marked ending for the group to remain in Bountiful itself. With the alternate reading of Nephi's *wilderness*, including Bountiful, an ending time becomes apparent. It is now plausible that they spent eight years total in the Arabian Peninsula, meaning that they must have been in Bountiful for six years. This is consistent with Jeffrey R. Chadwick's suggestion: "I strongly suspect that as much as six of the eight years in the wilderness was actually time spent at Bountiful."¹³⁶

What is not clear is how much of those six years was spent actually building the ship, compared to other activities that most people fail to take into account. They did not enter the oasis lagoon and immediately begin building a ship. Clearly, it must have taken time for Nephi, having no tools initially and no shipbuilding experience, to even prepare to build a large and seaworthy ocean-going ship. All scholars estimate that the ship-building project would have taken multiple years — but how many of the six years? The full six years could not have been spent just assembling the ship. That would ignore significant preparatory and logistical activities. What else did they do in Bountiful? I am unaware of any other scholar's attempt to account for all their activities, other than the building of the ship. There are other support activities to consider when accounting for their six years in Bountiful.

136. Ibid.

An Estimate of Timing and Activities in Bountiful

The building of the ship was the crown jewel of the time in Bountiful. With the aid of reluctant assistants and the Lord's help "from time to time" (1 Nephi 18:1), Nephi was able to construct a large and seaworthy vessel. This ship was capable of transporting a large group of people and a huge cargo across some 16,000 miles of ocean. There are many competing ideas of what this ship may have been like. Aston suggests that it could even have been an elaborate raft but adds, "I actually favor a mortise and tenon timber ship."¹³⁷ Potter opposes the idea of a raft¹³⁸ and speculates that Nephi could have "learned how" to construct such a ship by observing, and roughly copying, vessels being constructed in Khor Rori. He suggests that "Nephi needed access to the best shipwrights of his day"¹³⁹ and that Khor Rori was the one location "where Nephi could learn how to construct ... his ship ... from master shipwrights."¹⁴⁰ He suggests that the final product, "with the exception of an added deck, was rather conventional for the period."¹⁴¹

Others focus on 1 Nephi 18:2, where Nephi specifically tells us that "I, Nephi, did *not* work the timbers after the manner which was *learned by men* ... [but] did build it after the manner which the Lord had shown unto me" (1 Nephi 18:2). They read that the "workmanship thereof was exceedingly fine" (v. 4) and imagine a ship that was not at all conventional. McConkie and Millet, for example, movingly write, "The sweat and tears shed in the building of the ship were a sacrament, for the building of the ship was a form of worship and an act of faith."¹⁴² Newell Wright shares his opinion that "the ship becomes a symbol of Christ: 'And it came to pass that the Lord spake unto me, saying: Thou shalt construct a ship, after the manner which I shall show thee, that *I may carry* thy people across these waters.' Christ equated the ship with himself."¹⁴³ One sure thing seems to be that this vessel could not have been thrown together in haste. It was a unique and miraculous vessel. Nephi humbly but clearly states that "after I had finished the ship, according to the word of the

137. Aston, "Nephi's Bountiful," 243–44 and Aston, "Across Arabia," 22–23.

138. Potter, "Khor Rori," 256–57.

139. *Ibid.*, 277.

140. *Ibid.*, 284, 268.

141. *Ibid.*, 255.

142. Joseph Fielding McConkie and Robert L. Millet, *Doctrinal Commentary on the Book of Mormon*, vol. 1, First and Second Nephi (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 1987), 140.

143. Newell Wright, email correspondence to Godfrey Ellis, December 27, 2022.

Lord, my brethren beheld that it was good" — so much so that it caused Laman and Lemuel to "humble themselves again before the Lord" (18:4). What a reversal, because Laman and Lemuel were the "brethren" who, at the beginning, began to "Murmur against me, saying: Our brother is a fool, for he thinketh that he can build a ship; yea, and he also thinketh that he can cross these great waters. And thus my brethren ... did not believe that I could build a ship; neither would they believe that I was instructed of the Lord" (1 Nephi 17:17–18).

To build a vessel like that would have required a significant amount of time — but how much time? The length of time the Lehiters spent in Bountiful is not mentioned by Nephi, not even in an account that is otherwise rich with details. However, it would be a gross error to assume that the total time in Bountiful was taken up by just the building (i.e., assembling) of the vessel, no matter how impressive that was. Other significant events and a great deal of preparation are not usually considered. The preparation work included miraculous accomplishments that, without the help of the Lord, would have been impossible. Those other major accomplishments should not be glossed over. For Laman, Lemuel, the sons of Ishmael, and presumably some of the wives, these events constituted stumbling blocks; for Lehi, Sariah, Nephi, Sam, and presumably others of the wives, they were opportunities to trust and lean on the Lord.

Setting up Camp and Securing the Labor of Laman and Lemuel

Let's consider what might have gone into Nephi's incredible accomplishments in the preparation period for the assembling (the actual building) of the vessel. The ship project was not started immediately; that is clear. The voice of the Lord did not come to Nephi for "the space of many days" (1 Nephi 17:7). That timeframe, as discussed earlier, would seem to mean that it was several months before he received the news that he was to build a ship. The Lehiters were not idle during those several months.

First, they had to set up their tents again, most likely on the western bluff or plateau, to avoid any risk of monsoon flash floods or taking up valley space needed for the massive project to come. They likely also had to arrange one or more of the natural caves and hollows at the cliff edges for long-term kitchens, lumber storage/drying areas, and for additional sleeping areas, thus saving at least some of the tent fabrics (modified, of course) to later use as sails for the ship. That all took time.

Second, they had to “stock the cupboards.” They needed to hunt immediately to build up a store of meat as well as fish from the edge of the Indian Ocean. Bountiful fruit and honey gathered naturally around the lagoon were well and good, but the human body also requires protein to supplement that diet. Aston points out that “the plentiful sea life all along the coast likely holds the key to understanding how Lehi’s group with its limited manpower could derive enough protein from their environment. ... Fish not proscribed by Mosaic Law likely formed a large part of the Lehiters’ diet once they lived at Bountiful.”¹⁴⁴ So they needed to hunt for kosher game. Aston tells us definitively that there was bountiful wildlife in Bountiful (discussed below), and one can easily imagine that they had a celebration banquet and offered thanks sacrifices not long after their arrival. How delicious that fresh meat would have been to them! They also continued to make jerky, for Nephi tells us that they had a store of “meat from the wilderness” to take “down into the ship” at their departure (1 Nephi 18:6). The fruit was easy enough to gather, and some of the honeycombs were available in the same trees, though to preserve such stores required a learning curve. Brent Heaton describes how honey could be taken from the trees without being stung, but that was a technique that had to be learned. Other honeycombs were hanging from the cliff walls.¹⁴⁵ They would have either had to climb up¹⁴⁶ or rappel down from the cliff tops,¹⁴⁷ and that would have taken time to learn how to do.

Third, they most likely would have constructed, at a minimum, a stone altar or worship area, just as they had built an altar upon first arriving in the Valley of Lemuel (1 Nephi 2:7). There is credible speculation that they may have constructed a “worship sanctuary” in the same dimensions and with the same features as Solomon’s temple

144. Aston, *Lehi and Sariah in Arabia*, 137.

145. A fascinating description of safely taking honey from the honeycombs in the trees of Khor Kharfot is reported in Brent Heaton, “What Life is Like Today at Nephi’s Bountiful,” *Meridian Magazine* (July 12, 2018), <https://latterdaysaintmag.com/what-life-is-like-today-at-nephis-bountiful/>.

146. See text and photographs for similar activity in “How Nepal’s Cliff Honey Hunters are Risking Their Lives,” *Aljazeera*, www.aljazeera.com/gallery/2021/12/14/in-pictures-nepal-cliff-honey-hunters-mountains.

147. See a fascinating photo-essay by Alan Taylor, “Honey Hunting on the Cliffs of China’s Yunnan Province,” *The Atlantic*, June 6, 2019, <https://www.theatlantic.com/photo/2019/06/honey-hunting-chinas-yunnan-province-photos/591202/>.

in Jerusalem.¹⁴⁸ This would be consistent with the Nephites building a temple "after the manner of the temple of Solomon," in the New World (2 Nephi 5:16). Warren Aston and his son Chad discovered stone ruins that could have been "some kind of ceremonial place."¹⁴⁹ However, Aston has suggested caution regarding dating stone remains.¹⁵⁰ Certainly, though, Lehi and Nephi would have constructed some kind of worship area or at least a relatively permanent stone altar. That would also have taken time.

Fourth, other basic needs would have had to be arranged. Those included at least health and illness needs, sanitation needs, and repairing, or likely replacing, clothing. The only animals large enough for leather garments were either camel hides or the hides of the Arabian leopards and the wolves that occasionally hunted in the lagoon.¹⁵¹ Such animals would have yielded hides, but those hides had to be cleaned and processed. That would have represented another learning curve that took time. The children's spiritual education also had to be arranged.

Time to do such things is rarely considered but could have been considerable. We do not know exactly how much time such activities would have taken. Some items would have been ongoing, but others were immediate needs. All the record says is that "after I, Nephi, had been in the land of Bountiful *for the space of many days*, the voice of the Lord came unto me, saying: Arise, and get thee into the mountain" (1 Nephi 17:7). The question of what "the space of many days" means was addressed earlier in the paper. If the "space of many days" suggests approximately two months, this preparatory work prior to Nephi's receiving the new theophany would have taken somewhere around *two months*.

At Nephi's theophany, the Lord provided the stunning news that Nephi was to build a seaworthy vessel that would be able to carry provisions for a large group of adults and children,¹⁵² plus the new tools,

148. See Scott and Maurine Proctor, "Nephi's Bountiful: Archaeological Dig: Was There a Holy Place of Worship at Nephi's Bountiful?," *Meridian Magazine* (February 29, 2016), <https://ldsmag.com/day-2-was-there-a-holy-place-of-worship-at-nephis-bountiful>.

149. Aston, *Lehi and Sariah in Arabia*, 143.

150. Warren Aston, "A Research Note: Continuing Exploration and Research in Oman," *Interpreter: A Journal of Latter-day Saint Faith and Scholarship* 53 (2022): 261, <https://journal.interpreterfoundation.org/a-research-note-continuing-exploration-and-research-in-oman/>.

151. Aston and Aston, "In the Footsteps of Lehi," 67–68. Also see Aston, *Lehi and Sariah in Arabia*, 153.

152. Wellington and Potter cite other authors who speculate that the number of people was 43, 68, or even 73 people. See Wellington and Potter, "Lehi's Trail," 38.

the large amount of varying seeds, and enough remaining large travel tents to “pitch our tents ... [in the] Promised Land” (1 Nephi 18:23). Keep in mind that this vessel was to be handmade, using homemade tools to fell and mill what would have to have been a very large number of trees. Little wonder that his brothers murmured, “Our brother is a fool” (1 Nephi 17:17) and “did not believe that I could build a ship; neither would they believe that I was instructed of the Lord” (v. 18).

Their skepticism prompted another long admonition by Nephi which compared their situation to that of the children of Israel under Moses. The comparison implied that Nephi was a Moses figure, which could not have gone down well with Laman and Lemuel. Nephi then punctuated the sermon by saying that Laman and Lemuel were “murderers in your hearts” (1 Nephi 17:44) and that he feared “lest ye shall be cast off forever” (v. 47). Laman and Lemuel flew into an instant and murderous rage, which was stopped by the dramatic threat that, if they touched him, they would “wither even as a dried reed” (v. 48).

Although Laman and Lemuel doubted that their younger brother could build a ship, they clearly did not doubt his warning and backed off significantly. It is important to notice that there was a long “cooling off” period for Laman and Lemuel, and presumably the sons of Ishmael as well. We don’t know what was going on during that period of time. We are told in verse 16 that Nephi was already making the tools for building the ship, the activity that had drawn Laman and Lemuel’s mockery. Laman and his followers would have had much to think about as these activities were going on, but what they were doing, we do not know. Nephi does tell us that during this time, 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*” (v. 52). We’ve already seen that when Nephi writes that something took the “space of many days” (v. 52), that appears to mean another two months or so. After these apparently two months, the Lord instructed Nephi to “shock” his brothers, and “the Lord did shake them” (v. 54) into compliance, and Nephi secured their willingness to provide labor, apparently for several years (1 Nephi 18:1).

Those two sets of activities occurred back-to-back. The first time period comprised the time to set up their tents, recuperate, hunt, and settle in before receiving the Lord’s directive to build the ship. The second time period was the calming down of Laman and Lemuel, and the time when they could not touch him.

The "Bountiful Blacksmith Shop"

When the Lord first commanded the construction of the ship (1 Nephi 17:8), a stunned Nephi could only ask the Lord: "Wither shall I go that I may find ore to molten, that I may make tools to construct the ship?" (v. 9). Having received the answer to that question, he then had to gather, or mine, the ore. A casual reading of the text estimates that as a few-days job and trivial detail. Not so. The gathering or mining of the ore and the flint to make fire every day, the hand-construction of a working and reliable bellows made out of animal hides, and the subsequent smelting of the ore (v. 11) meant, in effect, creating a serious, working "blacksmith shop" right there in the inlet. Then Nephi had to hand-forge metal tools. Significantly, his first question was not, "Where can I find *tools*?" but "Whither shall I go that I may find ore to molten, that I may *make* tools" (v. 9). He apparently already knew how to make tools that were capable of standing up to constant use in heavy construction over several years. Nephi had confidence that, given the right raw materials, he would be able to do so. Tvedtnes makes the point that "when the Lord told Nephi ... to build a ship, he had to give detailed instructions on how to do it. ... but there is no record that Nephi had to ask how to prepare the metal tools." This further supports the idea that Nephi had been trained as a metalworker.¹⁵³ This initial accomplishment should not be glossed over, although it usually is.

Consider, also, that making just one set of tools would have been woefully inadequate. There had to be enough tools for Nephi's entire labor force. Though that was small, it still included seven healthy young men: Laman, Lemuel, Sam, Nephi, Zoram, and the two sons of Ishmael. Jacob was too young to be much more than possibly a messenger-boy. If Joseph had been born in the trek from Nahom, he would still be just a toddler. If he had been born in Bountiful, as Chadwick believes, he would have still been a baby. Chadwick supplies evidence for his supposition.¹⁵⁴ The

153. See Tvedtnes, *The Most Correct Book*, 94.

154. Joseph being born in Bountiful could fit the alternative interpretation. Also, Nephi reported that during the tempest at sea, "Jacob and Joseph also, being young, having need of much nourishment, were grieved because of the afflictions of their mother" (1 Nephi 18:19). Chadwick takes this to mean that "at least one of them, logically Joseph, had not yet been weaned by the time the party had set sail and still needed the nourishment of his mother's milk, which Sariah was unable to give because of her illness" (Chadwick, "An Archeologist's View," 75). True, Lehi later tells Joseph, "Thou wast born in the wilderness of mine afflictions; yea, in the days of my greatest sorrow" (2 Nephi 3:1). However, *afflictions* and *sorrow* may refer to chronic, life-threatening ill health, not the physical hardship of a desert.

young wives and Lehi's wife, Sariah, would likely have helped out in any way that they could. However, they may have been fully occupied with childcare, cooking, and taking care of clothing. Near the latter part of the group's stay in Bountiful, the women would have had to modify some of the tent fabrics for use as sails, since the account is clear that the ship moved by wind power, not just by ocean currents (18:8).

There is no mention of Ishmael's wife. Somewhat surprisingly, she was not mentioned as mourning Ishmael's death, so she, like Ishmael, may have died during the trek. As for Lehi, the text does not record his functioning in the role of family patriarch during these years, although he did receive the revelation of when to go down into the ship to depart (1 Nephi 18:5). He would later give final patriarchal blessings on arrival in the New World. There are various reasons for his inactivity, but one possibility is that he may have been severely ill and therefore unavailable. Circumstantial evidence for this speculation is his absence in what most scholars call "Nephi's Bountiful" not "Lehi's Bountiful," his life-threatening illness during the sea voyage (vv. 17–18), Nephi's report that he was "stricken in years" (18:17), and the immediacy of his death in the New World. He appears to have given the blessings soon after arriving, prior to which he stated, "*a few more days* and I go the way of all the earth" (2 Nephi 4:12). Then again, he may have been managing the day-to-day affairs of the camp in the background. In any case, he does not appear to have been available for hard labor.

Nephi, then, had at least six strong and healthy fellow laborers,¹⁵⁵ and undoubtedly some additional help from the women. Even so, Nephi quite appropriately refers to the building of the ship as his achievement. At the completion of that monumental task, he says, "after I [not "we"

Supporting the speculation that the boys were born in Bountiful, not the desert, is that they were not mentioned when Nephi reports their trials between Nahom and Bountiful. The verse in 1 Nephi 17:1 states that "our women did bear children in the wilderness," but it is not clear that that included Sariah. Indeed, one would think Nephi would have mentioned the birth of new brothers when that event took place, not years later. Then too, Laman and Lemuel seem to claim in 1 Nephi 17:20 that the children born back in verse 1 were from "our women" as their own children, not from their mother as their new brothers. Nephi does not introduce Jacob and Joseph until years later at the end of Bountiful after everyone boarded the ship (1 Nephi 18:6). At that time, Nephi adds, "my father begat two sons in the wilderness," but that "wilderness" could well have been the wilderness of Bountiful.

155. Newell Wright suggests that Lehi, and probably Ishmael, could have taken unnamed servants with them from Jerusalem. That may well have been the case, but there is no textual support for that speculation (email correspondence to Godfrey Ellis, December 27, 2022).

but "[I] had finished the ship, according to the word of the Lord, my brethren beheld that it was good" (1 Nephi 18:4). That identification is an accurate description, for he was surely the planner, foreman, manager, and supervisor for the blacksmith projects (as well as the ship project discussed below). The others were simply helpers and laborers.

Still, they all needed tools. Although there could have been a limited amount of sharing among the workers, one set of tools wouldn't have "cut it." The production of all of the sets of tools appears to have been the work of Nephi alone, because only he had metalworking skills. Several scholars have speculated that Nephi was trained as a fine whitesmith (or goldsmith).¹⁵⁶ It comes as somewhat of a surprise that he could also function as a blacksmith. The difference is that whitesmiths manipulate lighter metals, adding finishing touches through filing, carving, and polishing, while blacksmiths use raw iron to make large and sometimes crude products.¹⁵⁷ Nephi apparently could do both, since he was also able to forge scrapers for hides, wood planes, heavy hammers, mauls, axes, and saws.

Nor was this a one-and-done activity. Even if they had used power tools, which they obviously did not have, the vessel may have taken over a year to build. It would at least triple the time to accomplish the same thing using only their homemade hand tools. And making the tools was not the only function of the "Bountiful Blacksmith Shop."¹⁵⁸ Wellington and Potter argue that "Nephi needed hardwood to build a ship strong enough to survive an ocean crossing." As any woodworker knows, there is a major difference between hand-working softwoods and hand-working hardwoods; it is an entirely different proposition. Not only are hardwoods hard — making them difficult to cut, shape, and

156. Tvedtnes, *The Most Correct Book*; Aston, "Across Arabia with Lehi and Sariah"; and Aston, *Lehi and Sariah in Arabia* all make this point and seem to base that speculation on (1) his initial interruption in the narrative in order to admire the "exceedingly fine" metal work of Laban's sword (1 Nephi 4:9), (2) his interest in the "fine brass" of the Liahona (1 Nephi 16:10), (3) his ownership of "my bow, which was made of fine steel" (1 Nephi 16:18), and (4) his ability to fabricate ultra-thin metal plates to engrave his long record (1 Nephi 19:1). He was clearly a connoisseur of fine metal workmanship.

157. For the difference between a whitesmith and a blacksmith, see "Blacksmith vs. Whitesmith — What's the Difference?" *Working the Flame* (December 20, 2019), <https://workingtheflame.com/blacksmith-vs-whitesmith/#:~:text=Whitesmithing%20got%20its%20name%20from,detail%20in%20the%20next%20section.>

158. Wellington and Potter, "Lehi's Trail," 38.

smooth — they also dull the tool-cutting blades very quickly. Therefore, sharpening and even replacing broken tools was an on-going need.

We don't know, of course, how fast Nephi could have set up his "blacksmith shop," mined the ore, built the bellows, smelted the iron, carved and attached the wooden handles for multiple sets of tools. However, it sounds as if it would have taken considerable time. These significant accomplishments and the timing of them should not be glossed over, although readers don't usually consider any of this. It seems as if the time for the blacksmith-related activities had to have been in the order of six months or so.

The "Bountiful Sawmill and Lumber Yard"

After that came the lumber problem. Here, the other workers could help Nephi, at least to some degree. The question of timber and the resulting lumber has been, and continues to be, a sticking point among the various scholars. They are conflicted as to whether there were appropriate trees in sufficient quantities in either Khor Kharfot or Khor Rori to build a ship. Potter makes a startling claim: "If good shipbuilding timber never grew in Oman, then Nephi must have used, like the Arab shipwrights, imported materials from India and the islands thereabout."¹⁵⁹ Wellington and Potter quote an Omani expert to say that "most, if not all, planking timber had to be imported."¹⁶⁰

Warren Aston strongly disagrees with Potter's theory of Nephi importing already milled lumber from India; and indeed, the finances and logistics of that seem overwhelming. Aston believes that sufficient timber grew in Khor Kharfot to build a ship, using just existing trees. Judith Grimes, a botanist who visited the inlet with Aston, notes on Aston's video "Lehi in Arabia" that "most of the trees here are from 1.5 to 3 meters [5 to 10 feet] in girth and have 2 to 4 meters [6.5 to 13 feet] of solid trunk, which means there's quite a bit of harvestable wood if it was ever required for building." Then, showing the viewers one very large tree, she added, "This Tamarind tree is the largest tree in this wadi that we have found so far. It has a girth of 7 meters [23 feet]."¹⁶¹

Felling many dozens of such trees using homemade axes and primitive saws would already have been a major undertaking. But they also had to limb the branches off, which was another significant amount of work. Once stripped, the trunks and larger branches had to be

159. Potter, "Khor Rori," 274.

160. Wellington and Potter, "Lehi's Trail," 38.

161. Aston, "Lehi in Arabia," timestamp 58.

dragged back to the building location, possibly with the help of camels. That still would be a time-consuming activity. Then imagine scraping off the bark, splitting the length of the trunk multiple times to create planks and beams, and then milling the "timber" into "lumber" to yield beams or rough boards, all of which would be needed in abundance for a more traditional ship, but also in smaller quantities even for a sophisticated raft.

It seems clear that, in addition to creating a serious, working "blacksmith shop" in the inlet, Nephi also had to create a serious, working "sawmill and lumber yard" in order to harvest and process lumber out of native trees. Plus, the men could not have even started the assembly and joining of the planking until they had an impressive supply of lumber already collected and right there on hand, ready to use. The building of the ship, once underway, could not have been stopped if one type of lumber ran out and the men had to go and chop down and process another tree. What might have been the time required for the logging and milling? Even at full speed and with enthusiastic workers, that had to have taken a minimum of another *six months*.

The Curing of the Green Wood

But that's not the end of the story. It is not as simple as merely cutting down the trees and splitting the trunks to create usable lumber. As one website explains:

When a tree is first cut down and the logs are sectioned into lumber, the resulting wood is considered "green" because it still has a considerable moisture content. ... Green lumber can contain upwards of 130 percent [of the moisture expected for that kind of wood]; cured lumber can have between 7 and 20 percent moisture. ... It's important to realize that curing green lumber can *take years* if the curing practice isn't expedited using a [very large] wood-kiln or an alternative method of drying. Air-drying lumber typically takes *one year per inch* of wood thickness. The first step in curing green lumber... is identifying an appropriate location for the process. ... Otherwise it may reabsorb the moisture it is trying to release. Aside from being dry, the area should also have circulating air to help the drying process along. To avoid distortion, a few pieces of dunnage or stickers (small pieces of wood) can

be placed between layers of lumber. ... Let the wood sit for as many years as its thickness indicates.¹⁶²

Given tenuous family relationships and the ever-aging of the seeds, this would be a particularly serious problem — especially if one interprets Nephi’s comment in 1 Nephi 17:4–5 in the traditional fashion. Eight years would already have been used up just getting to Bountiful. In addition to settling in, making metal tools, cutting down many dozen trees, all of which would have taken considerable time, we now must add another one to two years to properly stack the timbers for drying, probably into the indentations in the cliffs to protect from the rain and fog, and then curing the green timber. And that cannot be rushed. Unless timber is cured correctly, the wood will shrink, twist, or even worse, split. One cannot build a water-tight ship with wood that contains warps and splits. Perhaps they sped up the curing of the green wood using bonfires and laboriously hand-fanned the heat into the woodpile. But ... caution! The website continues: “Care must be taken not to heat the lumber too quickly, as this can cause uneven curing or create potential flaws, such as splitting.”¹⁶³

Of course, some of the boards (for example, those used for the housing areas, railings, masts, or the storage bins) didn’t require fully cured timber, because they wouldn’t be in contact with the ocean water, and a twist or split wouldn’t be as serious. The many planks that made up the hull are a different story. The wood had to be planed with a homemade wood plane, not only to make them smooth, but also thin enough to facilitate the drying process. If the Lehighites used mortise and tenon joints, as in the Church’s *Book of Mormon Videos*, they would have had to be chiseled with great accuracy. In that same Church video, the boards of the ship appear to be 8- to 10-inch-thick beams. There might have been some beams, but the hull planks would have had to be much thinner than that to have them air dry as quickly as possible, given no kiln. It’s hard to imagine the planks averaging as thin as an inch and a half in thickness. If the rule-of-thumb given above is correct and it takes one year per inch of wood thickness, at 1½ inches thick, it would require at least *18 months*.

162. “Curing Lumber,” *Thomas* (website), www.thomasnet.com/articles/plant-facility-equipment/curing-lumber/, emphasis added.

163. *Ibid.*

The Time Required to Assemble the Ship

Table 2 reviewed the time estimates for the trek through the arid areas of Western Arabia. Table 3 reviews the estimates for the time spent in activities in Bountiful. The earlier calculated estimate for the total trek through Western Arabia, all the way from Jerusalem to Bountiful, was approximately two years, not eight years. That left roughly six years for the time in Bountiful. Of those six years in Bountiful, I have allowed a reasonable year and a half for settling in, hunting, building an altar, constructing tools, preparing a first stockpile of milled lumber, and then another 18 months for the green lumber to fire cure. That equals 34 months or just short of *three years* — and that is before even *beginning* the actual assembly of the ship. Two years getting to Bountiful and almost three years in the preparation of the materials would make almost five full years from leaving Jerusalem before the assembly of the ship could even begin. Logically, though, this still needs to be modified. Some of those activities would have overlapped. For example, Nephi could have been forging additional tools while Ishmael's sons were felling trees, or Laman and Zoram could have been splitting trunks while Sam and Lemuel milled and stacked the timber and stoked and fanned the fires to cure the green wood. That kind of overlapping would cut the time taken up in *preparation* for the building by, say, ten months, making two years of preparation for the assembly of the ship.

Adding those two more years to the two years for the trek to Bountiful would make four years before assembling the ship. Those four years would then be subtracted from Nephi's total of eight years *in Arabia*. The result is *four years* for an estimate of the time it would have taken to assemble the vessel.

Table 3. Preparation and Assembly of the Ship.

Activity	Time Allowance
Setting up Camp and arranging for needs of the group	Two months
Securing the Labor of Laman and his followers	Two months
The "Bountiful Blacksmith Shop"	Six months
The "Bountiful Sawmill and Lumber Yard"	Six months
The Curing of the Green Wood	18 months (1½ years)
Sub Total	34 months (< 3 years)
Reduced Time for Overlap of some Activities	Subtract ten months
Revised Sub Total	24 months (2 years)
Assembly of the Ship	48 months (4 years)
Total Time in Bountiful	72 months (6 years)

It is interesting to compare my figure of four years for the building (assembly) of the ship with estimates that other commentators have advanced. The lowest estimate comes from Matthew Bowen, who notes that “the Vikings, for example, could build their ships in a mere matter of months. The fact that Nephi had to press his brothers into service suggests that building the ship was a matter of urgency. They did not linger in Bountiful any longer than it took to build the ship — a process that probably would have taken *a year or less*.”¹⁶⁴ To arrive at that low estimate, Bowen must be overlooking the other preparatory activities that had to take place in Bountiful, and that the ship had to be much larger and much more sophisticated than a Viking boat. A slightly higher estimate comes from Warren Aston, who asserts, “With the limited manpower available to Lehi’s group and the need to also attend to domestic concerns at Bountiful, a likely *minimum* period required for constructing the ship is two years. It may well have taken longer.”¹⁶⁵ David Lefevre talks about “the two or more years it took to build the ship.”¹⁶⁶ George Potter’s estimate is higher; he asserts that “the building of the ship was an enormous undertaking that spanned many years.”¹⁶⁷ The highest, though, is that of Jeffrey Chadwick, who opines, “I strongly suspect that as much as six of the eight years in the wilderness was actually time spent at Bountiful building Nephi’s ship.”¹⁶⁸ Note, though, that Chadwick may be including the preparatory activities in Bountiful in addition to the assembly of the vessel; it logically could not have been all six of the years. In fact, I am not aware of any of the ancillary preparations being seriously considered in the extant literature, but they seem obvious enough when pointed out. The scholarly range, then, is one to six years. To that, I offer my own compromise figure of *four years*.

Conclusions — Does it Matter?

A fair question to ask of this or any article looking into scripture is whether the commentary makes any difference. I think it does. More specifically, the possible alternative interpretation of Nephi’s “eight years in the wilderness” provides bookends that Book of Mormon readers haven’t heretofore had. With the traditional (sequential) reading, there

164. Matthew Bowen, email correspondence to Godfrey Ellis, January 18, 2023.

165. Aston, “Across Arabia,” 22.

166. David A. Lefevre, “We Did Again Take Our Journey,” *Journal of Book of Mormon Studies* 15, no. 2, (2006): 65.

167. Wellington and Potter, “Lehi’s Trail,” 37.

168. Chadwick, “An Archeologist’s View, 75.

was only a beginning date. There was no ending date for when the Lehiters pushed off into the Indian Ocean. If Nephi meant to say that the eight years ended as they *entered* Bountiful (the traditional reading), that leaves no closing time for Bountiful and no estimate of the time to build the ship. With the alternative reading, there is now a closing bookend: eight total years from Jerusalem to the launch into the Indian Ocean.¹⁶⁹ It seems plausible, and perhaps even likely, that the desert portion and the Bountiful portion, combined, made up the literal “eight years in the wilderness.” With a fixed total of eight years for the entire trip, it now becomes possible to estimate more closely the timing of key events. It allows for the desert crossing to be made in a more credible two years, rather than having to lean on such unlikely speculations as alleged sluggishness, growing crops at every stop, or years spent in bondage to Arabian overlords. And it allows a more solid estimate for the otherwise unspecified ship building period in Bountiful. We can tentatively estimate that it took approximately two years of preparation and four years of assembly to build the ship.

Please don't misread this article. The take-away is not that my estimate, and that of Jeffrey Chadwick, is correct and that others are wrong and should be dismissed. Previous speculations have been offered in a valiant attempt to make the illogical seem logical. The point is that those speculations may not even have been necessary. Nephi's statement in 1 Nephi 17:4–5 may have been an appreciative aside or colophon to proclaim his gratitude to the Lord's granting them “means” such as Bountiful and to amplify his description of the entire trip. It could have been a testimony of awe, an aside that “interrupted” his narrative, similar to many other asides he offers in several other places in First Nephi. If that is correct and that “eight years in the wilderness” includes the undeveloped wilderness of Bountiful, it is no longer necessary to generate speculative apologetic theories to account for the traditional but unlikely reading of those two verses. Eight years of desert travel and the glossing over of details about the ship's construction is what has been presented in talks, books, scholarly articles, firesides, classes, videos, and casual conversations. With the clearly plausible new reading of the verses, it becomes possible to draw better estimates of the time spent at various locations and the time spent building the ship. Best of all, those conclusions no longer strain credulity.

169. As mentioned earlier, some scholars count the years as including the Valley of Lemuel, while some from the end of their stay in the Valley — although both of those arguably contradict Nephi's account.

As stated earlier, well into this project I found that Jeffrey R. Chadwick had come to the same conclusion that I had. He had written, “It seems to me that ... the entire trip [to the Bountiful area] ... lasted no more than two years. ... Nephi’s summary statement about eight years in the wilderness seems to me to include ... Bountiful.”¹⁷⁰ I was obviously thrilled to find that conclusion made by such an eminent scholar in the Church. Although I obviously agreed with and accepted Chadwick’s opinion, it was unfortunate that he provided no justification for re-interpreting or glossing over Nephi’s specific declaration in 1 Nephi 17:4–5. I hope I have filled that gap based on logic and reasoning. I readily admit the possibility that my estimates of the specific timing of the various parts of the trip and the construction of the ship may be incorrect and may be refined by experts in the various fields. However, that is not the point. The point is that we can now come closer to an understanding of the actual trek and its message of emerging from corruption and chaos, traveling through a period of trial and testing, to eventually arrive in our promised land, than has been offered to date. I hope that this article will initiate and encourage new commentary and further discussion regarding Lehi’s and Nephi’s trip through Arabia.

Appendix A: The Viability and Lifetime of Seeds

There can be some debate about the shelf-life of seeds. Some may conclude, as I have, that it would have made a difference for Nephi and his people whether the seeds were 13 to 14 years old (traditional reading) or 8 to 9 years old (alternative reading). Others contend that even old seeds can retain at least a degree of viability over long periods of time. Everyone can agree, however, that all seeds, like any living entity, increasingly lose their viability over time and eventually die. The deciding factor is how quickly that process happens.¹⁷¹

Those who believe that 13 or 14 years would not have been a problem often point to anecdotal accounts of seeds germinating after hundreds, even thousands of years. Date palm seeds were found, they point out, in Herod the Great’s summer palace at Masada. In fact, several of those seeds were successfully sprouted. One, and only one, grew into an 11-foot

170. Chadwick, “An Archeologist’s View,” 75.

171. There is no question that divine intervention could explain how old seeds could “grown exceedingly ... in abundance.” The Lord could cause beach sand to germinate into fruits and vegetables if that matched His purposes, but that is not how He usually intervenes in mortal processes. That the first planting was so successful is already something of a “tender mercy.”

palm tree that was nicknamed "Methuselah."¹⁷² Others believe that 13 or 14 years could have been a serious problem and that anecdotal accounts of ancient seeds sprouting represent a rare exception. "Methuselah" was an anomaly. Generally, old seeds do not germinate. As the USDA asserts,

There was no authenticated evidence that wheat taken from undisturbed Egyptian tombs will germinate. ... [Even] the printed word does not seem to dispel the story of life in mummy seeds as such stories appear in the popular press from time to time. ... The so-called mummy seeds have retained the shape of barley and wheat, but the structure is similar to that of charcoal. There is no possibility of these structures producing seedlings.¹⁷³

True, Nephi's account is not talking about ancient, mummified seeds, but only seeds either transported for 13 to 14 years or 8 to 9 years. Still, most scientific studies of seed longevity have found that, under "ambient" or "normal" storage, seeds begin to lose viability within just two years, and the percentage that are viable for germination decreases after that. A recent literature review of multiple studies concluded that "under ambient or more natural soil conditions, viability drops considerably within a few years."¹⁷⁴ According to the University of Minnesota, the average longevity of most vegetable seeds is approximately 4–5 years.¹⁷⁵

Several factors determine how long seeds can remain viable: temperature, moisture content, and length of storage in darkness. In the literature review above, the seeds had been in dark and cold storage below 18°C (64°F) — some as low as -18°C (-4°F).¹⁷⁶ The USDA asserts, "Unless crop seeds are kept under favorable storage conditions, they lose

172. *Wikipedia*, s.v. "Judean Date Palm," last modified 21 June 2023, 16:28, https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Judean_date_palm#Germination_of_2000-year-old_seed.

173. Owen L. Justice and Louis N. Bass, "Principles and Practices of Seed Storage," United States Department of Agriculture (Science and Education Administration, Number 506, 1978), 216–17, <https://naldc.nal.usda.gov/download/CAT87208646/PDF>.

174. Svein Solberg et al., "Long-Term Storage and Longevity of Orthodox Seeds: A Systematic Review," *Frontiers in Plant Science* (3 July 2020), <https://www.frontiersin.org/articles/10.3389/fpls.2020.01007/full>.

175. Arvo Kallio, "Vegetable Gardening Hints," Agricultural Extension Service, University of Minnesota (1979), https://conservancy.umn.edu/bitstream/handle/11299/169297/mnext_misc_065.pdf.

176. "Some seeds will remain viable in storage for several years if stored under optimal conditions, namely low humidity and low temperature (42°F or 5.6°C)"; see "Seed Storage Guide," *Johnny's Selected Seeds* (2021): 1.

viability within a few years.”¹⁷⁷ It appears factual that hot and moist seeds die within a few years; cold and dry seeds remain dormant, hence viable, for much longer. Now consider the circumstances of the seeds that were transported in the Lehites’ camel train. As it turns out, the conditions couldn’t have been worse:

- The seeds were not in cool temperatures of 70°F down to 0°F but in the desert heat of Arabia, where “summer heat is intense, reaching temperatures as high as 130°F (55°C) in places.”¹⁷⁸ Winter temperatures are cooler, of course, but still “ranges between 8°C to 20°C [68°F to 46°F] in the interior parts while higher temperatures (19°C – 29°C [66°F – 84°F]) have been recorded in the coastal areas of Red Sea.”¹⁷⁹
- The seeds were probably strapped to the sides of the camels in shape-conforming burlap-like cloth bags. If so, that would have meant that they were separated from the bright Arabian sun only by simple cloth. Of course, the seeds could have been carried in huge clay pots, but this seems unlikely, given the large tents, provisions, and other goods the Lehites were also transporting.
- The seeds may have been dry as they crossed the arid desert, but they were likely moist, even damp, otherwise. In a discussion of climate in Arabia, *Britannica* reports that coastal regions “are subject to high summer humidity, with dew and fog at night or early morning.”¹⁸⁰ The Dhofar area (both Khor Kharfot and Khor Rori) are known for early morning fog. Aston reports that “from May to September, there is a steady stream of cloud cover and fog that blankets the mountains, and moist air.”¹⁸¹ Consider, also, that the monsoon season can produce up to six inches of rain at a time. The average *annual* rainfall “is between 400–600 mm

177. Justice and Bass, “Principles and Practices of Seed Storage,” 202.

178. *Britannica*, s.v. “Climate of the Arabian Desert,” last updated April 7, 2021, <https://www.britannica.com/place/Arabian-Desert/Climate>.

179. “Saudi Arabia,” *Climate Change Knowledge Portal* (website), <https://climateknowledgeportal.worldbank.org/country/saudi-arabia/climate-data-historical>.

180. *Britannica*, s.v. “Climate of the Arabian Desert.”

181. Aston, “Lehi in Arabia,” (video), timestamp 53.

[15–24 inches].”¹⁸² “In the southern coastal range of the Dhofar region, ... in summer, the rains are usually light, but they occur almost *daily*.”¹⁸³ So, humidity in Bountiful would have been very high, typical of the tropics and also high while crossing the ocean near the equator where the relatively small ship was close to sea-level. Finally, although the cargo and seeds may have been well protected, one has to wonder how they fared during the multi-day tropical storm described in 1 Nephi 18:13–21.

The traditional reading of 1 Nephi 17:4 (up to 14 years to planting) must be considered in interpreting Nephi's timeframe for the trek and Nephi's assertion that the crop “did grow exceedingly; wherefore, we were blessed in abundance” (1 Nephi 18:24). Admittedly, nothing said so far “proves” that the alternative reading is correct, and the traditional reading is wrong. The point is only that the difference between 8–9 years and 13–14 years might have been the difference between an abundant crop and barely enough to feed the people and generate new seeds for the next growing season. It seems obvious that “the older the seed, the less energy it has left in storage.”¹⁸⁴ In sum, the seed question provides support that favors a shorter rather than a longer journey.

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182. “Saudi Arabia,” *Climate Change Knowledge Portal*.

183. “Climate — Oman,” *Climates to Travel: World Climate Guide*, https://www.climatestotravel.com/climate/oman#southern_mountains.

184. Cody J. Garrett Tait, “Got Old Seeds? Help Them Sprout with These Tips and Tricks,” *Garden Culture* (March 15, 2021), <https://gardenculturemagazine.com/got-old-seeds-help-them-sprout-with-these-tips-and-tricks/>.

well as lecturing at state and local family history fairs. He has published in the Ensign magazine (now Liahona), BYU Studies, and Interpreter. He currently serves as the teacher of a two-stake institute program. He also paints acrylic portraits of friends, missionaries, and family (see GodfreyEllisArt.com). He and his wife are blessed with three living sons, four daughters-in-law, thirteen living grandchildren, and three great-grandchildren.